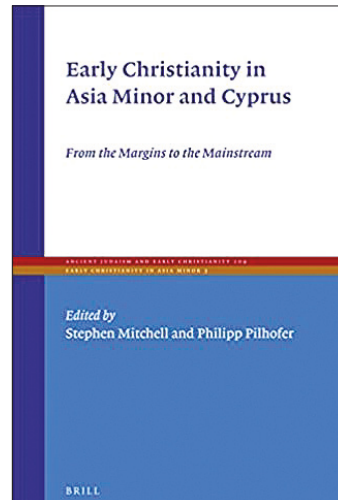
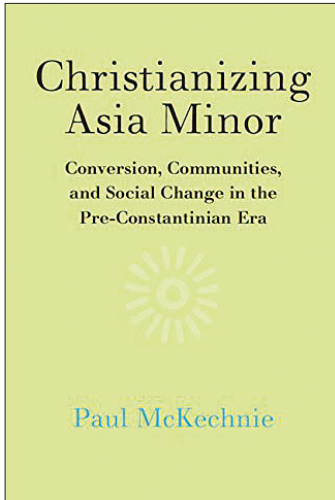


## CHRISTIANIZING ASIA MINOR & EARLY CHRISTIANITY IN ASIA MINOR




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MCKECHNIE, PAUL (2019). *Christianizing Asia Minor. Conversion, Communities, and Social Change in the Pre-Constantinian Era*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 340 pp., 91,03 € [ISBN: 978-1-1084-8146-5].

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MITCHELL, STEPHEN & PILHOFER, PHILIPP (eds.) (2019). *Early Christianity in Asia Minor and Cyprus. From the Margins to the Mainstream. Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity 109*. Leiden & Boston: Brill, 280 pp., 110 € [ISBN: 978-9-0044-1079-4].

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THE KEY POSITION OF ASIA MINOR IN THE HISTORY of the successful spread of a message based on the speeches, miracle-working and death of a Jewish sect leader in Palestine has long been established in research. The large peninsula with a net-

work of well over 600 cities, Greek spoken almost everywhere, offered the best infrastructure to serve as a “bridge” to the Mediterranean culture of the Roman Empire. The topic is currently booming, apart from the volumes discussed here, four others have been published in 2018-2020, which are close to these in content.<sup>1</sup> The two present ones complement each other in that McKechnie (McK), with Phrygia, and Mitchell-Pilhofer (M-P), especially with Cappadocia, focus on large landscapes of Anatolia that are exceptionally rich in early Christian evidence. While McK focuses on the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> centuries, most of the contributions in M-P are chronologically later, from the 4<sup>th</sup> century to the Middle Ages.

As for Phrygia (and the neighboring areas of Bithynia, Paphlagonia, Mysia, Lydia, Pisidia, and Lycaonia), McK takes on epigraphic documentation, a significant portion of which comes from rural areas, from villages located on polis territory or extensive domains. This immediately raises the question of an “urban character of early Christianity” and an “up-country development of Asian Christianity” discussed in the Introduction here as well as in the volume edited by M-P (see below at the conclusion of this review). A topic only touched upon by McK is the complex diachronic perspective of specifically Anatolian religious history with regard to its confluence with Christianity.<sup>2</sup> For the so-called confessional inscriptions of Lydia, which occur in temporal and spatial proximity to the early Christian inscriptions, reference has been made to Hittite evidence, but similar things are also found in ancient South Arabia, so that a continuity into the Christian era cannot be assumed without further ado. Persian, Greek, Syrian, Egyptian, Jewish layers of religiosity are to be added to the Anatolian substrate from a two-thousand-year-old past. For the mushrooming of Christian circles and communities in rural Phrygia undoubtedly the most important historical stage is that of the Jewish diaspora in Hellenism, which McK rightly addresses repeatedly.

McK begins his analyses with the Letter to the Colossians and the Epistle to Laodicea, linking Pauline NT texts to a text from the Johannine group. Hierapolis, the home of Johannine disciple Papias and working place of evangelist Philippos – his confusion with the apostle is discussed – and apologist and bishop Claudius Apollinaris is given an extensive chapter, focusing on intellectual-historical contexts and the social networks of leading Christians in the region. It continues with an equally detailed study of the famous funerary inscription of Bishop Aberkios of Hierapolis (Chapter 6) and the vita of the well-traveled man (Chapter 7), which

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1. Fairchild, 2018; Alkier and Leppin, 2018; Hengel and Schwemer, 2019; Chia, 2020.

2. See now Chia, 2018; Marek, 2016, pp. 508-509.

survives from the late 4th or early 5th century and is translated into English by the author in an Appendix 1. The textual understanding of the inscription is improved (according to Thonemann) mainly in that lines 7f. do not speak of an encounter with the empress and her daughter, as has been assumed from the comparison with the Vita, but simply of the bishop's arrival in "imperial" Rome. The "idea that Rome is the Queen city" (p. 152) is not isolated in the epigraphy of Anatolia: A funerary epigram from Hadrianopolis in Paphlagonia speaks of Ῥώμη πατρίς, γαίης ἀπάσης βασιλῆς.<sup>3</sup> "Teachers of Asia" (chapter 3) is devoted to the person and teaching of Ignatius, led as a convict through Asia Minor to Rome for execution, the bishop of Smyrna and martyr Polycarp, as the spiritual authority of his time and "a fixed star in the firmament of Asian Christianity" (p. 94), the reasons for his martyrdom, and the invention of the Paul-Thecla legend. It is primarily through these personalities that the trail leads to an asserting orthodoxy and early church hierarchy. Chapters 4 and 5 deal with the chronology, the localities, the leading personalities, and the peculiarity of Montanism, which emerged in Phrygia in the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, spread worldwide, and was not called Montanism until the 4<sup>th</sup> century, when it was opposed and marginalized by mainstream preachers. Closely related to the occurrence of this "New Prophecy", the numerous, clearly Christian formulas and symbols in the funerary inscriptions of the near and far vicinity are discussed (Chapters 9 and 10, Appendix 2), including the remarkable Diagas inscription with the testimony of a female functionary in the early church. Chapter 8: Apollonia (Uluborlu): *Curiales* and their Families again traces the interconnectedness of Christian families. Chapter 11 has in mind the conditions in Phrygia under the Diocletianic persecutions and the turn under Constantine the Great.

McK is not an easy read. He maintains a labyrinthine argumentation, in parts completely overloaded with references to secondary literature, which makes any clear and precise disposition of the evidence vanish behind cascades of opinions – often only hinted at. A significant example of this:

"As Markus Bockmuehl argues (agreeing with Ernst Dassmann) in his review of S. Heid's 2010 volume of studies interrogating Zwierlein's conclusions about Peter in Rome and related matters, both Zwierlein and his interlocutors are engaging in a scholarly debate which, over the past 150 years, has come to appear as a draw" (p. 71).

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3. Marek, 1993, p. 195: Kat. Kaisareia n° 25.

With another quote from Bockmuehl, commenting on Rainer Riesner's argument for accepting the tradition "that Peter traveled to Rome", McK professes his "view adopted in this book": Ignatius is historical, not fictive.

Many of McK's considerations are hypothetical. He is too generous with the attribution of Roman citizenship when he takes Latin names like Montanus, Quintilla, Maximilla as sufficient criteria. Even the testimony that the Montanist prophetesses were rich and noble women does not make them Romans. One is surprised to read p. 13: "In the 250 years or so during which Christianity was illegal in the Roman Empire". Even Pliny the Younger was not sure of that. The theory (pp. 74-75 with references) that Lucian's *Peregrinus* is a parody of Ignatius of Antiocheia is absurd. The alleged parallels of chapter 41 with the Epistles of Ignatius are baseless and have no connection at all with the "Christian episode" of *Peregrinus*. The editor of Lucian in Loeb Classical Library 302, A.M. Harmon, rightly remarks that the knowledge of Ignatius' letters could at best be assumed in *Peregrinus*, but not in Lucian. That the journey of Aberkios "was acted out as part of a campaign of controversy against the Montanist church" lacks a basis of evidence. The *Vita* only says (69) that the orthodox churches in Syria were troubled by Marcionism.

In the broad discussions of secondary literature (the bibliography contains 470 titles), one misses some topics of recent research, especially regarding the phenomenon of hybrid formulas and images on tombstones and dedications. Closely related to themes "at the heart of this book" (p. 2) is Stephen Mitchell's thesis on the numerous *Theos Hypsistos* inscriptions, which are especially common in the Lydian-Phrygian area.<sup>4</sup> A sharp demarcation of Jewish, Christian, or Pagan makes no sense where obviously religious communities meeting in a syncretistic heno- or monothesis easily exchange formulas and elements of all three traditions.

Overall: McK presents an erudite, source-based work with detailed and often incisive analysis that any historian of early Christianity will have to grapple with. With this book, he succeeds in steering the gaze away from the Pauline journeys, which are often discussed in detail, and opens doors into the world of interior Asia Minor, where other prominent figures and kinship networks shaped the beginnings of the church. This world of small towns and villages, large agricultural domains and many a prosperous manufacturing center (such as Hierapolis), myriad native god cults and the Jewish diaspora, itinerant prophets and religious fanatics whose work is still tied to fanciful legends many decades later, is made more colorful, vivid, and

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4. Mitchell, 1999, is briefly referred to p. 30, n. 95. Cf. Marek, 2000; Bowersock, 2002; Marek, 2018.

lucid by McK's book. Source citations with translations, sketch maps, illustrations and an index provide the user with an exemplary apparatus.

The anthology edited by Mitchell and Pilhofer is the third in an *Early Christianity in Asia Minor* (ECAM) series, this in turn part of an *Ancient Judaism and Early Christianity* (AJEC) series. ECAM editors Breytenbach and Goodman intend to situate the series in the tradition of Adolf von Harnack's epochal work, *Die Mission und Ausbreitung des Christentums in den ersten drei Jahrhunderten* (Leipzig 1924).<sup>4</sup> The two preceding volumes by U. Huttner and Ch. Zimmermann have limited regions as their subject matter, the former the Lycus Valley, the latter Lycaonia and adjacent Areas, while a volume published by Pilhofer in 2018 on the Christians of the Kalykadnos region in Rough Cilicia, closely related, belongs to another series: *Texte und Untersuchungen zur Geschichte der altchristlichen Literatur* 184. The category of monographs – another on Greece and the southern Balkans “is imminent” (p. 2) – complements the fundamental database of sources *Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae* (ICG).<sup>5</sup> A third category will house volumes on additional series of international conferences and workshops. One of these is the volume discussed here, which covers Asia Minor and Cyprus in its title and thus, as is unfortunately usual with anthologies, promises more than it actually contains. In fact, of the nine contributions to the conference held in Berlin in June 2018, preceded by an Introduction by the Editors, four deal with Cappadocia (plus one more on Armenia Minor). They are supplemented by excursions to Constantinople, Sagalassos, Caria, and Cyprus. Thematically, there is a colorful bouquet: Hagiography, episcopal elections, martyrs, monks and heretics, early Christian poetry, Christian epigraphy. Each contribution has its own bibliography, the complete work is preceded by a list of abbreviations and a list of illustrations, followed by a list of sources and indexes of names, places and subjects.

The introduction of M-P, to which we will return in our conclusion, deals with basic problems of the Christianization of Asia Minor and gives a short thematic classification for each of the following contributions.

1) *Early Christianity in Cappadocia* (M. Cassia) analyzes complementary roles of pagan cults and Judaism. The author first gives an overview of von Harnack's evidence (pp. 15-23) with additions (pp. 24-26) and evidence for Jewish presence in Cappadocia. Her goal is to understand the changing styles of relationship between the gospel and the pre-existing pagan and Jewish religions. In contrast to McK, C. recognizes in this context the importance of the *Theos Hypsistos* inscriptions as a phenomenon of “hybridization” or “a fluid, ‘liquid’ religion” (p. 38). However, this

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5. <http://www.epigraph.topoi.org>.

very theme belongs to the landscapes of Asia Minor on this side of the Halys: in Cappadocia we find only one record from Hanisa.

2) *Hagiography and the great persecution in Armenia Minor* (S. Mitchell) begins with a magisterial overview of the mountainous region and its strategic importance. Several passion legends are analyzed: the *Passio XL martyrum* (Greek) with testimonies of the homilies of Basil, of Gregory of Nyssa, and others (in Latin, Syriac, Coptic, Armenian, Slavic); the Testament of the Forty Martyrs, the *Passio* of S. Athenogenes. The *Passio* of Eustratius of Arauraka (PG 116.469). M. tries to extract from parts of the respective texts that contain precise topographical information and references to authentic interrogation protocols a historical core that goes back to the persecution under Diocletian in 303 CE.

3) *Martyrs, Monks, and Heretics in Rocky Cappadocia* (G. Arena) first notes the significant gap between the literary sources of the 4<sup>th</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> centuries and the rock period of the churches, 9<sup>th</sup>-13<sup>th</sup> centuries (cave dwelling – extraurban dimension of primitive Cappadocian Christianity). A. analyzes in detail the *Passio S. Hieronis* from the beginning of the 6<sup>th</sup> century, which is usually dismissed as completely fictitious. Here, too, with reference to topographical facts, but above all with the help of archaeological testimonia (images of this saint are preserved in the rock churches of Cappadocia), an attempt is made to identify a historical core of the legend. The rocky settlements and caves in Cappadocia offered refuge for persecuted Christians, but also retreat for monks, both anchorites and cenobites.

4) *Origins and Development of the Cults of Saint Gordius and Saint Mamas* (A. Busine). Both saints from Caesarea in Cappadocia are treated in writings of Basil. The legends constitute a sacred topography of early Christian Caesarea. The inscription on an altar of Caesarea: *Zeus Gordios* should not be associated with this cult of saints.

5) *Gregory of Nazianzus and Early Christian Village Poetry* (C. Zimmermann) deals like few scholars before (cf. p. 127, n. 14) with the poems of the Cappadocian father, otherwise famous for his letters, sermons, theological treatises. They still lack a critical textual edition. They are funerary epigrams whose language is compared to that in metrical inscriptions, both Christian and pagan. The analysis reveals that the Christian poetry is well in the tradition of the Homeric language of pagan verse inscriptions.

6) *Constantinople and Asia Minor: Ecclesiastical Jurisdiction* (T. Kaçar) evaluates council records and church historians to analyze the influence of Constantinople's bishops on episcopal elections across Asia Minor in the 4<sup>th</sup> century. As Constantinople's dominance as a political power center increased, so did its religious eminence as ecclesiastical center. Imperial preferences, party politics and nepotism played a role.

7) *Rise of Christianity at Sagalassos* (P. Talloen): After Paul's traversing Pisidia evidence for Christianity is scarce and late (scarcely discernible before the fourth century) – contrary to e.g., Hierapolis in Phrygia not far west. In the first three centuries in the area only 10 funerary monuments are known. T. gives an overview of the archaeology and epigraphy of the pagan cults in Sagalassos. In the 4<sup>th</sup> century traces of transformations and destructions of pagan sanctuaries are visible. In 381 CE the first bishop is known, and the first church building within the *bouleuterion* did not appear until the 6<sup>th</sup> century.

8) *Perseverance of Epigraphic Traditions in Late Antiquity* (A.M. Sitz) examines inscriptions on temples of the pre-Christian era followed by traces of Christian erasure and graffiti in Late Antiquity. The result is somewhat meager: erasures and additions of Christian symbols “showed the dominance of the new god, while also assuring the late antique viewer that the space was still actively used” (p. 218).

9) *Christian epigraphy of Cyprus* (D. Summa) gives an overview of the 3<sup>rd</sup>-7<sup>th</sup> centuries including funerary, votive, honorific, building inscriptions, biblical or gospel quotations, acclamations, invocations, prayers, carved on stone or on amulets. Among the building inscriptions, fine mosaics in the floors of churches stand out.

M-P's volume offers excerpts of Christianity in Asia Minor from the mainstream rather than the margins. From lack of evidence, the Cappadocian beginnings remain obscure. The flourishing Christian literature from the 4<sup>th</sup> century onward contains something that seems to permit inferences about historical realities of earlier periods. What is striking about the numerous figures of Cappadocian martyrs venerated as saints is that most of them are soldiers. Cappadocia and the neighboring Pontus and Lesser Armenia were border provinces with strong military occupation. The upholding of *disciplina militaris* may have played a role in the persecutions of the 3<sup>rd</sup> and early 4<sup>th</sup> centuries. That early hagiography here for its holiest heroes was concerned with records of Roman legionaries rather than the paradigm of orthodox bishops, as in Smyrna or Hierapolis, is remarkable.

A recurrently discussed problem important to both works discussed here is the role of city and country in the spread of the new religion. The modernly constructed urban/rural dichotomy easily misleads, since the underlying notion of two separate spheres, like differently set clocks describing civilization here, life in archaic, fundamentally different traditions there, is erroneous. The ancient *poleis* of imperial Asia Minor were cantons, some with extensive territories (*chorai*). Communal supervision and subdivisions of civic organization extended to the level of villages. It is not true that in the countryside city institutions were less influential. Villagers of the *chora* participated in the polis institutions, and the polis elites, councillors and office holders, were by no means all city residents. Certainly, the province of Cappadocia cannot



be compared to a province of over 380 cities like Asia. But how does Mitchell know that “most of Cappadocia and Pontus was divided into large estates and seignorial domains?” We do not have a precise knowledge of the proportions and boundaries of city territories and domains there. Developed polis institutions are attested, for example, even in a small city like Hanisa already in the Hellenistic period.

Anyhow, the everyday life of the vast majority of inhabitants in the Roman imperial period took place predominantly in the countryside. The urban centers of the provinces, even the *metropoleis* and *capita provinciarum*, were small. By far the most important of Asia Minor, Ephesus, of 2.8 km<sup>2</sup> extent, you can walk from the harbour via the state market to the East Gymnasium in 15-20 minutes. Nikaia in Bithynia had an area of half a square kilometer within the city walls. A nest on the steep shore of the Black Sea, Amastris, offered even less space for population of “urban culture” and yet is admired by the Roman Pliny the Younger as *elegans et ornata*. The astonishing splendor of the city center of Aphrodisias in Caria, which has only recently been fully uncovered, is limited to a manageable area. But “urban culture” of the ancient city in Asia Minor is not a question of the extent and quality of stone architecture, but of the political, economic, social, legal and cultic organization of community life. The concentration of early Christian inscriptions in the rural areas of Lydia and Phrygia has nothing to do with a greater receptivity of backward rural inhabitants to Christianity but is rather due to the different epigraphic habit in the *chora* from that in the urban centers. The former is more private in character. The latter provide for display areas that are controlled by cult officials and civic magistracy. Christians gathered there as well, and Christian philosophers preached and argued. However, the fact that the *museia*, marketplaces, halls and synagogues in the centers attracted much more attention from different publics than a formula “Christians for Christians” on a gravestone in Eumeneia/Phrygia and thus harbored a permanent potential for conflict, does not yet make early Christianity an “urban religion” or a “primarily urban phenomenon”.

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