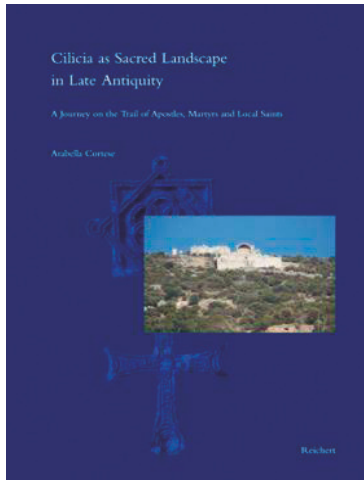


CILICIA AS SACRED LANDSCAPE IN LATE ANTIQUITY



CORTESE, ARABELLA (2022). *Cilicia as Sacred Landscape in Late Antiquity. A Journey on the Trail of Apostles, Martyrs and Local Saints*. Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag. 480 pp., 198,00 € [ISBN 978-3-7520-0637-7].

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ARABELLA CORTESE'S MONUMENTAL WORK on the Late Antique sacred landscapes of Cilicia in modern southern Anatolia provides a vivid and comprehensive exploration of the region's rich archaeology and hagiography. The large-format volume is based on Cortese's doctoral dissertation from the Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in 2020. It contains an impressive collection of 159 colour plates, including her own photographs and maps.

While the traditional study of Late Antique Cilicia often focuses on well-known sites, Cortese draws attention to the importance of exploring lesser-known sites that provide essential local context. The book's focus on the region's natural landscape, including caves, sinkholes and rivers with ritual significance, contributes to a holistic understanding of Cilicia's sacred spaces. Cortese's ambitious

agenda aims to reconstruct the region's sacred landscape by integrating hagiography, epigraphy and material culture, offering a new perspective on the transformation of local centres of worship into pilgrimage sites that influenced the prestige, economic benefits and growth of nearby cities (pp. 28-31).

Part I of the book (chapters 1-3) lays the groundwork with concise overviews of the historical, historiographical and methodological framework. In Part II (chapters 4-23), the core of the book, the narrative follows a pilgrim who, after consulting Egeria's itinerary, explores 27 sites in Isauria and Cilicia, culminating in a journey to Jerusalem. Each chapter follows a consistent structure, beginning with the traveller's introspective thoughts, presented in italicised text, followed by an examination of the church architecture and an exploration of the Christian saints associated with the site. The perspective of a late 5th-century pilgrim offers a unique storytelling approach. These chapters (4-23) draw connections between venerated religious figures and their literary works, linking them to their respective sites and to the wider influence of their cults outside Cilicia. However, they highlight the challenges of relating local hagiography to specific structures, especially when some sites are well documented archaeologically but lack textual references, such as Alahan (pp. 94-107) and Sebaste (pp. 158-171), while others have textual evidence but lack archaeological confirmation, such as Mopsuestia (pp. 239-246) and Aigai (pp. 247-266). These challenges could have been addressed by applying theoretical aspects of how sacred landscapes emerge. Part III (chapters 24-27) intricately weaves together the various strands and presents the book's overarching conclusions, which address key issues such as sacred infrastructure, the presence or absence of relics, the importance of the natural environment, and the role of saints in shaping the identity of particular cities. These discussions emphasise the importance of examining the built and natural elements holistically, urging scholars to move beyond the isolation of monumental features and exceptional aspects. Cortese raises pertinent questions in these dialogues, but the evidence often remains fragmented or inconclusive, making it difficult to provide definitive answers. However, it is obvious that Cilicia, especially in the 5th and 6th century, did not fall behind in terms of culture and architecture. It was a vibrant region with unique perceptions of the landscape and ritual practices that deserve to be explored in greater depth.

While some methodological challenges remain, particularly the lack of theoretical depth to provide broader insights where evidence is lacking or conflicting, Cortese effectively combines hagiography and archaeology, drawing attention to interesting concepts like the multifaceted nature of the pilgrim, the visibility of the sites, rivalry between towns, and the continued presence of pre-Christian influences in the area.

Overall, the work undoubtedly provides a valuable resource and a starting point for future research on Late Antiquity Cilicia.