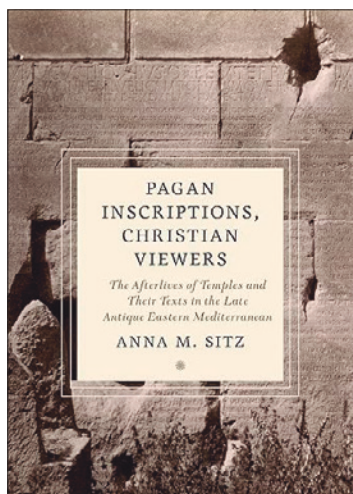


PAGAN INSCRIPTIONS, CHRISTIAN VIEWERS



SITZ, ANNA M. (2023). *Pagan Inscriptions, Christian Viewers. The Afterlives of Temples and Their Texts in the Late Antique Eastern Mediterranean. Cultures of Reading in the Ancient Mediterranean*. Oxford & New York: Oxford University Press. XXV, 321 pp., 71.00 £ [ISBN 978-0-19-766643-2]

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In the last couple of decades, much has been written on the fate of temples and statues in Late Antiquity. Scholars have now decidedly moved away from the traditional paradigm, based on (mostly) Christian literary sources, of widespread violence against them in this period and tend to emphasize more the pragmatism involved, opening up a scala of responses to them, from continued use to reuse (in many different forms) to destruction.¹ The present book, going back on a disser-

1. *E.g.*, Hahn, Emmel & Gotter, 2008; Lavan & Mulryan, 2011; Myrup Kristensen, 2013. See now also Dijkstra, 2021, with pp. 14-19 on temples.

tation defended at the University of Pennsylvania in 2017, continues this line of research but breaches a new topic, as it for the first time systematically studies how the inscriptions dating back to pre-Christian times that were still frequently found in and around temples were viewed in Late Antiquity.²

In the Introduction, Anna M. Sitz starts with two inscriptions from Megara (*IG* VII 53 and 52), the first a copy made in the 4th-5th century CE of an epigram ascribed to Simonides for the city's fallen in the Persian War, the second a 5th-century CE copy of a memorial for Orsippus, the local Olympic winner. Thus, she demonstrates that people did engage with older inscriptions in Late Antiquity and, as she maintains throughout the book, they did so in manifold ways. She divides these modalities of response in three categories, preservation, reuse and obliteration, which are treated in Chapters 3-5, while Chapter 2 surveys the engagement with earlier inscriptions in Late Antique literature. The study inserts itself squarely in the "material turn" in epigraphy, treating inscriptions as material objects, taking into account their immediate surroundings and what effect(s) they had on viewers.³ It mostly concerns inscriptions in Greek, though those in other languages/scripts are also considered, and focuses in particular on Asia Minor, but with examples coming from the entire Eastern Mediterranean. Further discussed are some relevant topics, such as the "temple to church" debate, the omnipresence of inscriptions in temples and the question of literacy.

Although temples and statues frequently occur as objects of hatred and violence in Late Antique literature, the same cannot be said of temple inscriptions. Nevertheless, treatment of ancient inscriptions is encountered in several Late Antique authors, the topic of Chapter 2, confirming Sitz's main point that ancient inscriptions were actively engaged with in this period and setting the scene for the following chapters. She starts with the employment of inscriptions in Graeco-Roman literature, and thus helpfully points to the continuity of the practice into Late Antiquity. She then goes over several well-known cases, such as the inscription of Ptolemy III from Adulis preserved in Cosmas Indicopleustes (II 58-59 = *OGIS* I 54) and the epitaph of Abercius pastiched from earlier inscriptions in the homonymous *Life*, in order to show how authors appropriated inscriptions in different ways to fit the purposes of their narrative.

With Chapter 3, we move on to the actual inscriptions, *in casu* those that remained on display in still standing temples in Late Antiquity ("preservation"). To those who have frequently travelled to the area under study, this may seem like an

2. Cf. already Sitz, 2019a.

3. See now, e.g., Angliker & Bultrighini, 2023.

evident point but it is good to see it demonstrated, as well as the further point that Late Antique viewers must have occasionally interacted with them. There follows a series of case studies, in which Sitz does well in describing what we know of the Late Antique phase of the building and what happened to the inscriptions. For instance, the dedicatory inscription on the façade of the temple of Hadrian in Ephesus (*I.Eph.* II 429) remained on view but for a repair of its beginning in the 4th century CE. Graffiti indicate that Christians continued to visit the temple of Athena *Polias* in Priene with an array of inscriptions, including the dedications of Alexander the Great and to Augustus (*I.Priene B – M* 149, 153), and statues still in place until the temple collapsed at some point in Late Antiquity (Sitz speaks here of a “museumification”). The most famous case discussed is the temple of Augustus and Rome at Ankara. Even if it is not clear how (or if) the building was reused in Late Antiquity, Sitz argues that the presence of the Latin and Greek versions of the *Res Gestae* on its walls (*I.Ancyra* I 1) was beneficial to the preservation of the building.

Chapter 4 concerns inscriptions on architectural elements (and stelae) reused in new buildings in Late Antiquity, a phenomenon often referred to as “spoliation”. Sitz rightly points out that the term is loaded and that the reuse was as a rule more practical than ideological. Yet, as she proposes, this does not mean that inscriptions on reused building material were routinely disregarded, both during the construction process and once incorporated into the new context. A case in point is the so-called “Cliff-top Temple” at the Corycian Cave (the one in Cilicia). It was dismantled, its blocks refashioned into a church built on the spot in the late 5th century CE. Only the blocks in the north-east corner were kept in their original disposition, precisely where a long inscription, presumably a list of priests, is found on three wall faces (*I.Westkilikien Rep.*, Korykion antron 1). One of the faces (A) became hidden behind a new wall, whereas two blocks were turned upside down to create a smooth, exterior surface of the church. Thus we see a willingness to keep the blocks with the text together, while at the same time adapting them to the new building design. Another example is a dedicatory inscription to Apollo *Klarios* (*I.Sagallassos* 20) that was, in parts it seems, incorporated in Basilica E built from the homonymous temple in the second half of the 5th-early 6th century CE. Ancient inscriptions are also found in various places in the well-known temple-turned-church at Aphrodisias (ca. 500 CE), some in quite conspicuous locations, such as a dedication to Augustus on a door lintel (*I.Aphrodisias* 2007, 1.102).⁴

4. On Aphrodisias, see also Sitz, 2019b.

Chapter 5, finally, deals with temple inscriptions that were deliberately destroyed (“erasure”). Such instances may be the most tangible illustration of viewers actively engaging with ancient inscriptions in Late Antiquity, yet at the same time they are also the rarest. Rather than falling into the trap of viewing them in a context of religious violence, Sitz approaches the matter in a more nuanced way, as again illustrated by the following case studies. The text on the blocks turned around in the above-mentioned church at the Corycian Cave was effaced to effect a smooth exterior surface, showing that erasure could have practical motivations. The erasures on the interior wall seem haphazard and indicate another issue with epigraphic destruction: that these erasures could just as well have taken place after Late Antiquity. S. mostly focuses, however, on what she calls “unnaming”, that is, the selective removal of the names of deities from earlier inscriptions. To return to the church at Aphrodisias, the name “Aphrodite” (twice), as well as some other parts, were removed – to a greater or lesser degree – from a dedicatory inscription on a door lintel (*I.Aphrodisias* 2007, 1.102). On the other hand, the same name of the goddess was left untouched on the church’s columns (*I.Aphrodisias* 2007, 1,4-8). At Aizanoi, when the façade of the temple of Artemis was reused in a porticoed street in ca. 400 CE, the first part of a dedicatory inscription including the name of the goddess was removed (*SEG XLV* 1708). But in an inscription across the street, the name of Zeus was left in place (*SEG XLV* 1711). Sitz interprets such – selective – erasures of divine names, in particular when displayed in prominent places, not in a context of religious frenzy but as a deliberate way of removing the connection with the religious tradition of the past.

In the Conclusion, Sitz goes over the results of her study and highlights once more her point that Late Antique viewers responded in diverse ways to the ancient inscriptions that were still all around them. She emphasizes that their continued display – sometimes with slight modifications – can often be seen as expressions of civic pride and/or aesthetics, thus significantly widening the field of interpretation, and ends by passionately pleading for a material-text approach in epigraphy, which includes due attention to the *Nachleben* of inscriptions in later periods.

The book is a pleasure to read and succeeds overall in providing a complex picture of how ancient inscriptions were perceived in Late Antiquity, in which the attention paid to the archaeological context and epigraphical detail is particularly appreciated. In some cases, one would have liked to see more literature included – for instance, one would have expected at least some mention of Luke Lavan’s

magnum opus on the Late Antique city.⁵ Readers will also not always agree with every interpretation proposed. This one remained unconvinced that in one of the two dedicatory inscriptions of Epruius Agatheinos (*I.Mus.Burdur* 184), the name was deliberately removed to leave – with interspaces – the letters Gaeios (Gaius; pp. 221-222),⁶ the damage to the text rather seems accidental.

These minor quibbles, however, should not detract from this well documented and innovative study, which provides a major contribution to the field of epigraphy and will serve as an eyeopener – for this reviewer, at least – to take into account the afterlives of ancient inscriptions and how they could have been viewed in Late Antique contexts.

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5. Lavan, 2020.

6. Cf. also Sitz, 2019a, pp. 648-652.