

history of some of the major religious buildings, spaces and objects in the city, at times with broader implications for Graeco-Roman civilisation, and stimulates fresh questions.

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doi:10.1017/S0075435822000417

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LAURA NASRALLAH, ANNEMARIE LUIJENDIJK and CHARALAMBOS BAKIRTZIS (EDS), *FROM ROMAN TO EARLY CHRISTIAN CYPRUS* (Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 437). Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2020. Pp. xi + 326. ISBN 9783161568732. €144.00.

The religious history of Cyprus in the Late Antique period has always attracted considerable attention. This not simply because Cyprus was located astride the main shipping routes that linked Palestine with the eastern Mediterranean and the Aegean, making it a major stopover for the first (apostolic) Christian preachers, but rather for its wealth of architectural, archaeological, artistic, literary and hagiographical evidence witnessing to the central role the island played in the spread of Christianity across the Late Roman Empire. In this sense, the volume under review offers a remarkable interdisciplinary window onto the complex nexus of religious, theological, political and material relationships characterising the social and cultural life of Cyprus in the Late Antique period.

The volume collects a set of thirteen essays stemming from papers presented at a conference held in Cyprus and representing only the last stage of a long collaborative effort that brought together the Harvard Divinity School and different scholars based in the eastern Mediterranean. This project had a remarkable interdisciplinary approach in both producing important publications centred on the role of single cities (e.g. Thessaloniki) in the spread of Christianity and creating opportunities for students and academics to highlight ‘the importance of archaeology for the study of religion and the importance for archaeologists of understanding recent discussions in religion and theology as they interpret their sites and findings’ (23).

This collection of contributions written by some of most important scholars in their respective research fields is framed by an introductory chapter by Laura Nasrallah. As well as surveying the main themes of the volume, she also offers an original analysis of continuity between pagan and Christian Cyprus based on two disparate types of evidence: pagan magical inscriptions on selenite tablets (also the focus of Andrew T. Wilburn’s contribution) and the mosaics of the so-called Annex of Eustolius in Kourion. The latter allow her to elaborate upon the role of buildings as cultural agents in expressing patrons’ cultural and artistic ideas as well as moulding viewers’ identity. More importantly, she interprets the mosaic decoration less as a simple juxtaposition (or mingling) of paganism and Christianity, but rather in terms of the adoption by early Christian iconographic and literary narratives of larger theological and philosophical trends (the so-called *paideia*).

The interdisciplinary approach adopted by Nasrallah reverberates in all the contributions as they explore the religious and cultural complexity of Cypriot society in the period between the first and the seventh centuries A.D. For instance, Charalambos Bakirtzis focuses on the trajectories of a small settlement (Cape Drepanon) on the island’s western coast. He examines the economic importance of the site in the *longue durée*, from the Hellenistic through the Byzantine eras. He underscores the central role it played along the trade routes linking the island with Egypt: first as a quarry and later as a stopover for the Annona fleet linking Alexandria with Constantinople.

Archaeology also figures prominently in the contribution by Nikolas Bakirtzis and Athanasios Papageorgiou. They stress the contradictions between material culture and literary evidence, particularly regarding the transition from paganism to Christianity. This transition was, they argue, smoother than the Cypriot hagiographies led us to believe. They encourage us to frame it in a broader perspective which includes factors and events like natural disasters, Roman imperial support, the role of the Jewish population and (once again) connectivity as one of the ontological

characters of an island (the other being a closed system with a strong and persistent local cultural identity).

The dialogue (and the tensions) between archaeology, material culture and textual evidence figures prominently in other chapters of the book. For instance, Andrew Wilburn presents us with a collection of Hellenistic ritual tablets found in Amathus. He contextualises them within ritual and ‘magical’ practices common to much of the ancient Mediterranean. Produced by specialists, they were regarded as powerful complements to textual formularies in the performance of rituals. The performative power of objects is also the subject of Ioli Kalavrezou’s chapter, although centred on a later period and through a secular lens. Kalavrezou reassesses the history and interpretation of the so-called treasures of Lambousa, including the famous David’s plates. Kalavrezou’s comparative approach and iconographic study convincingly show that the collection of jewels, medallions, coins and the set of silver plates belonged to a wealthy Cypriot household, including one Theodore, who was governor in the late sixth and early seventh centuries.

Finally, AnneMarie Lujendijk examines the *Gospel of Matthew* in the *Acts of Barnabas*. As well as showing how literary motifs were harnessed to political and religious goals (the autocephalic status of Cyprus), she encourages us to see how the actual books are powerful tools used in healing and burial practice attested archaeologically in Cyprus and Egypt. ‘[B]ooks are ... also objects, for a text cannot exist without a material carrier. It is the combination of words and materiality that makes books so effective’ (193). This is further stressed by Andrew Jacobs as he examines the library of Epiphanius — the well-known bishop of Salamis and author of several theological treatises — to conclude that ‘his physical and intellectual library produce a social and cultural space of empire: past and present, orthodox and heretic, Christian, Jewish and Pagan all into a single order of books’ (152).

The syncretism that characterised Cyprus’s smooth transition from paganism to Christianity is a recurring theme. James Carlton Paget’s chapter examines the (scarce) literary and archaeological evidence for the earliest Christianity in Cyprus and discusses the issue of Jews in Cyprus in the first century C.E., analysing the background to their so-called conversion. He focuses on the first missionary activities by Paul and Barnabas and their role in highlighting intra-Jewish conflicts and the correspondent changes in the reception of the first Christian preaching on the island. Henry Maguire and Demetris Michaelides ponder the relationship between Hellenistic and Christian iconography in secular and religious mosaics. Maguire focuses on the absence of Christian figural images from the floor mosaics of both secular and religious buildings, linking it with similar practices with Roman imperial images. While pagan portrayals of deities had both allegorical and decorative functions, Christian representations — like secular depictions of the emperor — were revered and could not be dishonoured by trampling on them. Cypriot mosaics also lie at the heart of Michaelides’ contribution. He uses fourth- to seventh-century panels to investigate the social organisation of workmanship, decorative practices and the movement of artisans (in particular from Antioch). Indeed, Antioch also resurfaces in Young Richard Kim’s chapter as the Patriarchal seat repeatedly (in 431 and 488) disputed claims to autocephalic status by the Cypriot Church, which actively promoted the figures of Epiphanius and Barnabas to bolster its newly acquired status.

Stephen Efthymiades shows how other hagiographic texts, over a period from the fifth to the seventh century, not only actively promoted the autocephalic status of the insular capital (Salamis-Constantia) but also reflected the local competition between individual bishoprics, which harked back to the many independent *poleis* of pre-Christian Cyprus. Efthymiades’ contribution resonates with Marina Solomidou-Ieronymidou and Giorgos Philotheou’s catalogue of representations of the main saints of the Cypriot tradition on wall paintings.

The last two contributions well embody the essence of this excellent volume where archaeologists, historians and art historians are in an actual or ideal conversation with each other. The editors have assembled a commendably interdisciplinary analysis of the diverse religious developments in Cyprus in the passage from Roman to the Late Antique period.

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 doi:10.1017/S0075435821000794

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