
ARABELLA CORTESE, *Cilicia as Sacred Landscape in Late Antiquity. A Journey on the Trail of Apostles, Martyrs and Local Saints* (Spätantike, frühes Christentum, Byzanz, Reihe B, Studien und Perspektiven 53). Wiesbaden: Reichert 2022. 480 pp. 43 Ill. 301 Ill. – ISBN 978-3-7520-0637-7 (€ 198.00 DE)

- JON C. CUBAS DÍAZ, Universität Göttingen
(jon.cubasdiaz@uni-goettingen.de)
- PHILIPP PILHOFER, Universität Rostock
(philipp.pilhofer@uni-rostock.de)

Cilicia has been long neglected in two ways: On the one hand, many studies on Asia Minor put it aside, as it is a border zone to Syria. On the other hand, the most interesting remains in Cilicia stem from Late Antiquity, a period not very highly valued for long. Both fortunately changed for the better in the last decades. The book under review investigates this region in Late Antiquity. The author of this book, ARABELLA CORTESE, is a very active and valued member of the academic community working on Cilicia. Since starting her PhD, she has organized several academic events, most importantly a conference on Cilicia which led to the publication of a volume consisting of a small group of papers on this region. She has contributed to the academic exchange as well as to the visibility of this region in scholarly discourse.

This book is a revised version of ARABELLA CORTESE's PhD-dissertation, which she defended in 2020. The main goal of the volume is to combine literary, epigraphic and archaeological sources to improve our understanding of the sacred landscapes of Cilicia – a region that is certainly most suitable for this endeavor. In doing so, C. has engaged with many colleagues from Turkey and abroad and worked through a great number of recent publications (e.g. Ayatekla). Furthermore, the book offers a large number of figures to illustrate its content.

However, C.'s novelistic approach (see below) impacts the whole work. C. is, in many ways, too optimistic. That begins in her prolegomena (Part I), where she claims there are “no studies on the hagiographical sources” (p. 28) from Cilicia – for Thecla alone there is a bookshelf of studies. Her aim is “to fill this lacuna, investigating all the traces left in the literary sources and all the archaeological material related to the cult of a saint,

martyr, or apostle in Cilicia”. Dealing with a huge load of hagiographical texts, she aims to answer the questions “when, why and by whom the *vitae* and *passiones* were written; to whom they are directed” (p. 28). However, she addresses these questions only in few cases systematically. Reaching the mentioned aims is in any case extremely ambitious, and hardly possible. The central Part II of the book is organized along a fictitious pilgrim’s travel. Each chapter begins with a novelistic introduction from that fictitious pilgrim’s diary. This approach relieves the author of the obligation to disclose her selection criteria. At least it is highly problematic that C.’s fictitious pilgrimage route in her conclusion is declared as a network of “real” ancient pilgrimage routes. As an example: The road from Seleucia to Diocaesarea in the hinterland certainly was not an actual pilgrimage route, although some churches were standing along it (vs. p. 270). Although the Cilician Aphrodisias is mapped as one of the pilgrim’s stations (fig. 4), the site is only mentioned in a few lines (p. 58). That is rather puzzling as the church is one of the very few Cilician examples that is both securely connected to a saint’s name, Pantelemon, and was properly excavated and publicized in detail.¹ For other sites, as the Korykion Antron (chapter 12: pp. 119–126), the classical sources are quoted at length and 19th-century travelers’ diaries as well. But there is no connection to any local saint, Mary being the only saint who was venerated we know of. Certain places are announced to be discussed, but never are. In her prolegomena, C. explicitly writes “I have decided to include ... the city of Isaura (including the surrounding region, called Isaurike ...)” (p. 32) but neither does she mention any of the cities’ buildings (including several churches) nor does she discuss its hagiology (in a sub-chapter of Korykos, she discusses a saint from that region). As the only larger octagonal church structure in the region is attested in Isaura (probably connected to a local saint), this gap is surprising.

C. is also over-optimistic in her reading and handling of sources and research literature: She way too often is very speculative or only gathers what she needs for her argument, ignoring evidence that tends against it. We will provide one source-related and one literature-related example. Egeria mentions that she read the acts of Thecla on-site (It. Eg. 23,5). Although Egeria states nothing more than that (something that Egeria asserts for nearly any place she visited), according to C. Egeria states reading Thecla-related texts

1. LUDWIG BUDDE, St. Pantaleon von Aphrodisias in Kilikien (Beiträge zur Kunst des christlichen Ostens 9). Recklinghausen 1987.

is “one of the activities most frequently carried out on the site”. C. even suggests there were *scriptoria* existing and their copies were sold “in the shops at Meryemlik” (87). Adding Nazianzen’s sole presence at the shrine to Egeria’s reading, C. concludes “one of the facilities of the site [...] was almost certainly a well-equipped library” (81, the last words in bold face). There is no positive evidence for a library, *scriptoria* or copies of the acts of Thecla being sold on-site. This is mere speculation, but in bold face. Regarding literature, C. just leaves out what is not fitting her argument. C. tries to connect the silver box from Çırğa with Tarasis from Alahan (p. 101). To do so, C. only quotes old literature from the days when this box appeared first, when the hypothesis was set up that the box is a reliquary and the name “Tarasis dis” (“Tarasis, son of Tarasis”) was written on it. This hypothesis has been refuted long ago when the epigrapher HERBERT HUNGER read “Tarasikodissa” in the 1970ies, which is the widely accepted reading for meanwhile 50 years. C. does neither mention this, nor any of the more recent literature accepting this solution (e.g. BUSCHHAUSEN or KALINOWSKI) or any publication doubting that the box is a reliquary, but instead originates from a marital context (VIKAN, KALINOWSKI).²

Out of the dozen Corycian churches, of which some were monumental and are conserved to a remarkable extent, she focuses on the church in the Yörük cemetery and especially on the so-called Grave Church (pp. 150–157), while the other churches are only very briefly described. Contrary to C.’s explanations, GUYER and HERZFELD did not unearth two sarcophagi (p. 153) in the ‘Grave Church’. They found substructions which they interpreted as those of two sarcophagi (MAMA II, pp. 129–130 incl. ill. 130). While it cannot be ruled out that sarcophagi were placed there, other options such as reconstructing liturgical furnishing are certainly not less likely, as both fragments of substructions were found in the central axis of the building. We just do not know. GUYER and HERZFELD’s carefully drawn excavation plan shows the stones of the substructure they found and dashed lines for the possible positioning of the two sarcophagi they propose. However, C. places the two parallel sarcophagi in her sketch with continuous

2. HELMUT BUSCHHAUSEN, *Die spätrömischen Metallscriinia und frühchristlichen Reliquiare*. I. Teil: Katalog. Mit 709 Abbildungen auf 199 Tafeln und mit 70 Textabbildungen (Wiener byzantinistische Studien IX). Vienna 1971; ANJA KALINOWSKI, *Frühchristliche Reliquiare im Kontext von Kultstrategien, Heilserwartung und sozialer Selbstdarstellung* (Spätantike, frühes Christentum, Byzanz, Reihe B, Studien und Perspektiven 32). Wiesbaden 2011; GARY VIKAN, *Art and Marriage in Early Byzantium*, DOP 44 (1990), pp. 145–163.

lines (fig. 185), where no substructions were found.³ The visualization of the cemetery road (fig. 150) is also misleading. It suggests that many funerary monuments were placed around the ‘Grave Church’, but in fact only two single sarcophagi were placed in the area surrounding the church (see below). This sketch could very well have been replaced with a more accurate plan from MAMA III or A. MACHATSCHEK.⁴

C. mentions commemorative practices and processions and proposes a central role of the Grave Church. In doing so, she names four central categories for proving her hypothesis: topography, architecture, water and inscriptions (pp. 155–156). However, the selection of categories lacks justification, and there is no clear definition of what characteristics would delineate a *martyrion* within these categories. The reader will also wonder which specific attributes within these categories make a complex “a Late Antique martyrion”, as it remains undefined. C. claims the Grave Church is “on the top of a hill” (p. 155) and suggests it was especially visible from the sea, yet fails to acknowledge that the Transept Church, located at an even higher elevation, commands greater prominence – the ‘Transept Church’ moreover is located at the end of this road. Notably, the hill’s peak rises significantly further to the north. On the other hand, the architecture of the Grave Church and especially the central structure is certainly remarkable. Thus, the architectural concept speaks for a special function and it is conceivable to attribute one to building. But getting back to the alleged existence of two sarcophagi and speaking about “burials” that kept “the relics of one or more saints” is speculation. There is also no evidence to – among other things – claim that it’s atrium was “the gathering place and transitional space between everyday life and the ‘house’ of holiness” (p. 155). C. then refers to the role of water and is right to point out the presence of a cistern. She states that the existence of a fountain in the narthex “confirms its use for ablution purposes”. The interpretation is based on the finding of a fragment of a marble basin, which might have been used for this pur-

3. She claims to update the excavator’s “obsolete map” (p. 153 n. 209), but the six plan versions she offers include less information than the original one. E.g. she mentions “a continuous curved wall” (p. 153) in the east side of the so-called *martyrion* but does not depict it (fig. 173). The genesis and visualization of the three-phase-reconstruction of the Grave Church (fig. 180) remain puzzling.

4. JOSEF KEIL – ADOLF WILHELM, *Denkmäler aus dem Rauhen Kilikien*, MAMA III, Manchester 1931; ALOIS MACHATSCHEK, *Die Nekropolen und Grabmäler im Gebiet von Elaiussa Sebaste und Korykos im Rauhen Kilikien*. Mit 56 Tafeln und 74 Abbildungen (Österreichische Akademie der Wissenschaften, Philosophisch-Historische Klasse, Denkschriften 96 = *Tituli Asiae minoris*, Ergänzungsbände 2). Vienna 1967.

pose. However, C. does not point out the baptismal font she has already mentioned also would have needed water (p. 154). Nor do the conclusions mention that other churches, such as the ‘Transept Church’, also provide evidence of the use of water and baptism. There is nothing extraordinary about the use of water here. As her last argument, she cites inscriptions found in the ‘Necropolis C’, which mention the name of saints. This is in many ways problematic. First, C.’s description and the maps offered (fig. 150–151) suggest that the necropoleis A, B and C were clearly separated. This is not the case. The division in three parts, which was first supposed by KEIL and WILHELM and later adopted by Machatschek and others, is intended to help us to structure and analyse the evidence. Second, all of these inscriptions are anything but close to the Grave Church; they are much closer to other church buildings. As pointed out before, the Grave Church is not surrounded by funerary monuments. Only two sarcophagi were placed at this section of the ‘Cemetery road’. The part of the road that is flanked by numerous sarcophagi ends further to the west of the church. In contrast, many funerary monuments were placed not only alongside the road in front of the church, but also around the ‘Monastery Church’ – even within the walls that delimit that complex; and it is only here that inscriptions mentioning saints are found in a church’s proximity! This would have offered enough reasons to make a case for this church as one of the (several) important places of this sacred landscape, but this church is neither depicted in this context (fig. 151) nor discussed. Thus, out of the four categories mentioned, only the architectural setting is to a certain extent extraordinary. The existence of the two sarcophagi within the so-called *martyrion* is a mostly latent – but central – argument for her hypothesis – but it is based on a supposition.

Still, C. concludes that the ‘Grave Church’ “must have been the focal point of the city and the main attraction for both the local inhabitants and those coming from abroad” (pp. 156–157). The analysis of Corycus seems like a missed opportunity. The funerary inscriptions prove that churches and other complexes were dedicated to a number of different saints. Provided that specific markers and categories were defined, the characteristics and positioning of the different churches could have allowed for an analysis of their features. Thus, it would have been possible to attempt to draw a much more dynamic sacred landscape, with several points of interest – and without such a rigid and artificial hierarchy not fitting the evidence.

While much of this is speculation, the main problem of this book is the huge number of factual errors. These errors span from mixing up names (p. 37:

Athanasius instead of emperor Anastasius) to topographical (p. 283: Ayatekla being “only 9 km” from Seleukeia – it is actually less than two!), historical and philological mistakes. Deficiencies even occur on C.’s own (archaeological) grounds, when she obviously does not know that a ‘temenos’ is the (sometimes walled) area of a holy precinct; she seems to think that it is a wall only (very often latently, but explicitly on 79 and 181). As it is not reasonable to compile a full list of errors,⁵ Chapter 6 on Zenonopolis shall be taken as a sample (pp. 54–57). C. writes that the findings of T.B. Mitford were „confirmed“ by F. HILD and H. HELLENKEMPER “some years later”: In fact, HILD and HELLENKEMPER never were at that site, and they do not claim to have been. This area in the center of the Middle Taurus mountain range is located by C. in the “pre-Tauros Mountains” (p. 55), whatever that may be. While Zenonopolis actually was part of the region called Ketis, C. writes it bordered Ketis to the south “and Lamotis, and its capital was Antiocheia Lamotis”.⁶ This does not make sense at all.⁷ While in her book several cities of the name Antioch appear, in the index she only mentions “Antiocheia e epi Orontou” (usually called Syrian Antioch). Germanikopolis, the next town mentioned by her, does not lie to the “north-west” (p. 55), but to the south-east of Zenonopolis.

After mis-spelling the bishop’s name (“Firmianos” instead of Firminianos) and wrongly stating that he “donated an aqueduct” (both p. 55), she moves on to the discussion of the main inscription from that site. Here, even most basic information is wrong: The inscription was not broken in two (p. 56), but in three pieces – however it was restored long ago. As C. does in many cases, she reproduces outdated debates that were in question when the stone was first discovered more than a century ago, but are settled for long. The author of an important article on the inscription is JADWIGA KUBIŃSKA, not “Kublinska” (p. 56). The inscription’s text is given with erratic spaces within words as well as missing accents. Ignoring the fact that the euerget’s name, bishop Firminianos, is the very first word of the inscription, C. speculates that the “patrons of the inscription are not cited but they must

5. See also HUGH ELTON’s recent review in *sehepunkte* 23 (2023), nr. 11

6. In the attached footnote C. refers to Ptolemy 5.8.6 and Strabo “14.5.6–7”. Contradicting C.’s sentence, Ptolemy localises the Ketis around Olba. Regarding Strabo, C. probably meant 14.5–7, where he describes the coastline between the rivers Calycadnus and Lamos. Unlike the impression given, Strabo there neither mentions Zenonopolis nor the regions Ketis or Lamotis nor any of the cities called Antioch.

7. She mentions an Antiochia Lamotis only one more time (not given in the index), where she alleges this Antioch lay at the mouth of the Limonlu river (p. 180). She obviously confused the river Limonlu/Lamos in the east with the region Lamotis in the west.

have been ... appointed to pray for the well-being of the aqueduct” (p. 57). While she asserts that it was “uncommon” dedicating civic buildings to saints, she herself cites two further aqueducts of about the same age dedicated to saints.⁸

She then gives a lengthy report about saints named Socrates, starting in Britain. After narrating the main story of five martyr legends, she concludes that none of them is the one venerated in Zenonopolis. By doing so she misses that the martyr Socrates of Tiberiopolis (BHG 1199) which she identifies with Strumica⁹ could instead be connected with Pappa/Tiberiopolis in Pisidia, which is very close to Zenonopolis. She instead concludes that Socrates was a local saint, and then speculates that he was the patron of the town and that “regular pilgrimages” were conducted “as a daily act of veneration” (p. 57). The water of the aqueduct was according to C. “holy water”, that was put in *ampullae* and sold to the pilgrims. C. thinks the cult of Socrates “must have been of some importance ... as it drew the attention of a bishop” (who of course was the local bishop!) and that pilgrims “benefited from his holy water”. Socrates in turn becomes someone “who performed miracles in connection with water, a precious commodity in an arid region such as Cilicia“. Neither is Cilicia arid, nor is there any source for any miracle by Socrates, all this is mere speculation. These speculations become facts in the chapter’s concluding remarks, when C. states without any supporting evidence that “caves, water and mountains were an essential and characteristic feature of his [i.e. Socrates’] cult” (p. 57).

In this chapter’s last paragraph, C. writes that the “exact date of restoration ... suggest[s]” that Zeno financed it after his victory against the usurper Illous in 488 (p. 57). This is not possible, for two reasons. First, Emperor Zeno would have been mentioned in the inscription if he had paid for it. Second and most importantly, the inscription dates the flowing of water, i.e. the end of the restoration works, to February 488, while Zeno’s victory happened later.

Part III collects “General conclusions” in four subchapters like “Saints and cities in late antique Cilicia: A matter of Metropolises?” While this chapter might make sense in the context of the graduate school “Metropolität in

8. One of those aqueducts C. erroneously locates in Cyprus, while she knows better in note 73 p. 133 (where she gives an incorrect text and an incorrect source reference). An aqueduct in Ankyra could be added (IAnkara II, no. 334), making it at least four aqueducts (!) dedicated to saints in late antique Asia Minor.

9. C. wrongly locates Strumica in today’s Bulgaria. In fact it lies in the Republic of North Macedonia.

der Vormoderne” (where the book was written), it is a bit misplaced looking at a sacred landscape consisting of “komopoleis” in Cilicia, especially when not even discussing both the late antique and the Christian meaning of “metropolis” (and thus claiming the status of metropolis for Corycus: p. 285).

This book includes a vast number of figures that offers the reader an impression of the sacred landscapes of the region. The big number of photographs illustrates the book in detail and is an asset of this book. However, the exact execution of many drawings and maps remains puzzling. The map printed as fig. 27 claims to show “cities mentioned in the Miracles of Thekla (black)”. Diocaesarea, Holmoi, Philadelphia and the Lamotis are printed on the map in black but are not at all mentioned in Thekla’s miracles. Further examples include the alleged “late antique road network around Seleukeia” (fig. 46) and the map “showing the pilgrim’s route from Alahan to Hasanaliler” (fig. 96), which are in the first case physically impossible (crossing straightly through roughest terrain) and in the second case just repainted modern roads. There is no evidence for the peculiar reconstruction of Diocaesarea’s ‘Cemetery Church’ in the three main phases depicted in fig. 103. The imagined “rural area under control of Elaioussa during Late Antiquity” (fig. 190) absorbs much of Olba’s territory which is highly unlikely.

C. brings together descriptions of many Cilician sites as well as summaries of many literary sources and an extensive set of figures. Reading the central part of this book will offer readers a first impression of many of the main Late Antique cities in Cilicia. C. has not only engaged with a large number of literary sources but also worked through an impressive amount of secondary literature. C. invests a lot of effort to provide novel interpretations and answers for her main questions, but she tends to go too far. Her efforts to offer detailed interpretations out from scarce evidence are laudable and speculation is sometimes the only remaining option. However, her descriptions include far too many inaccuracies and mistakes, which quickly start to undermine their trustworthiness. Too often C. does not engage with research and sources that do not support – or even disprove – her claims, excluding them from her often lengthy descriptions and surveys. It is unfortunate that interpretations are presented as facts even when there is no evidence to support the claims at all. Crafting a precise description of a sacred landscape proves challenging when the basic topography is often inaccurate or incorrect. In summary, while C.’s work provides valuable insights into Late Antique Cilicia and showcases the author’s dedication to

the region, the abundance of inaccuracies and the presentation of interpretations as facts without ample evidence diminish the overall reliability of her study.

Keywords

Cilicia; church architecture; hagiography; historical geography; Isauria