

LATE ANTIQUITY

Elizabeth Rees, *Archaeology and the Early Church in Southern Greece*. Pp. 216, 95 figures (b&w), 24 colour plates. Oxford: Oxbow, 2020. ISBN: 978-1-78925-575-1 (paperback), 978-1-78925-576-8 (ebook), paperback \$82.86.

This book is a useful starting point for anyone interested in the early steps of Christianity in the Northeastern Peloponnese and Athens, seen primarily through Apostolic sources and secondarily through archaeology. The author, Elizabeth Rees, has published eleven books on early Christianity; among them 'Early Christianity in South-West Britain: Wessex, Somerset, Devon, Cornwall and the Channel Islands' presents a similar regional focus as the present one, while seven other books present saints of the Celtic religion and culture.

The main value of the book is the inclusion of selected textual, topographic and archaeological information, organized by geographic region. Thus, the reader can easily follow an itinerary around the most important archaeological sites of the Northeastern Peloponnese, and Athens. While the aim of the book is to be lauded, the archaeological evidence included has been presented very selectively, and through a rather uncritical lens. The significant and on-going academic discussions around regional chronology, archaeological methodology, and factors which may have influenced the spread of early Christianity in Greece are absent in this work.⁶

The book contains eight (8) chapters. The first and the last chapters are dedicated to religious figures (Paul's Phoebe in the first chapter, and Asclepius and Christ in the eighth chapter), while the six intermediate chapters are dedicated to specific important sites: Kenchreai, Isthmia, Corinth, Lechaion, Nemea and Sikyon, and Athens. Already from this structure it becomes clear that the book discusses the Northeastern Peloponnese and Athens – an area much smaller than the region of 'Southern Greece' that is specified in the title. Important textual, archaeological and epigraphic testimonies have been published from other sites in southern

Greece, such as Messene,⁷ Patras,⁸ Delphi⁹ to name a few. Therefore, a presentation of the subject which would correspond to the book title would include a wider range of sites.

The first chapter is dedicated to Phoebe, a woman who is referred to as a 'deacon' residing in Kenchreai in Paul's letter *To the Romans* 16.1-3. The phrasing of *Romans* 16.1-3 demonstrates that Phoebe was the carrier of Paul's letter. Rees argues that, judging from its content and context, precise excerpt 16.1-3, which mentions Phoebe, would actually fit better to his letter *To the Ephesians*, and that therefore Phoebe travelled from Kenchreai to Ephesus, not Rome. In the chapter, the roles of Phoebe as a deacon, a patron and a benefactor are analyzed and paralleled with other figures which appear in the New Testament. The chapter is useful as it brings into the picture and contextualizes a historical figure, safely connected with the site of Kenchreai through Paul's letter, even though Phoebe's social and religious role cannot be more closely defined than that.

Kenchreai itself is presented in the second chapter. The site, the harbour and the northern cemetery of Kenchreai are described comprehensively and illustrated in a site plan and photos. The key role of the excavations of the American School of Classical Studies (ASCSA herein) in Athens in this area is justifiably highlighted. Excavation results are annotated in a rather generic way, but still direct the reader to the main bibliographic sources. The hypothesis that the 6th-century basilica of Kenchreai was dedicated to Phoebe does not rely on any evidence.

The third chapter is dedicated to Isthmia. While Isthmia is a fascinating archaeological site, its relevance in a book about the early history of Christianity is not clear. On p. 39, the author presents a theory that Paul visited Isthmia, however, no sound evidence is presented to support this claim. The following description of the Isthmus canal and the *Diolkos*, the Archaic-era paved road which connected the Saronic and the Corinthian gulfs on either side of the Isthmus, is useful as they are for a reader who is not accustomed with the region. These descriptions, however, give the impression that the book has been researched and written almost as a site guide to Northeast Peloponnese, with a clear emphasis on the sites that have been excavated by the ASCSA. This impression is further enhanced by the description, which follows immediately, of Isthmia's feasting caves, the stadium, and the Games.

⁶ See as examples published prior to 2020: Gwynn and Bangert (eds) 2010; Saradi 2011. See now also: Saradi 2023; Breytenbach and Tzavella 2023.

⁷ Themelis 2002; Tsivikis 2018. See now Tsivikis 2022.

⁸ Moutzali 1991.

⁹ Petrides 1997; idem 2010; idem 2011.

The sub-chapter dedicated to the Jewish attitude towards the Games (p. 50-51) is useful and relies on 2 Maccabees and Luke 4. Finally, the inclusion of the Hexamilion wall and fortress to the chapter, useful from the aspect of completeness of the site guide, lacks any references to the basic publication of the wall by Gregory (1993),¹ or to the study of the burials by Rife (2012).² The latter volume, which publishes graves of the 4th-6th centuries excavated in the Isthmia fortress, is actually the only directly relevant archaeological evidence that Isthmia could offer to the topic of the book, as it documents burial habits of the period and the transformation they underwent with the adoption of Christianity.

Corinth, the most important settlement of the period discussed in the book, follows in the fourth chapter. Pages 57 to 70 are dedicated to a discussion of excerpts from Apostolic letters, a description of religious communities, and other textual sources which deal with the topic of ceremonially shared food. Archaeological data start on p. 71 and are illustrated adequately with site plans, ground plans and photos of the Early Christian basilicas. The archaeological descriptions of these early churches are clear and easy to follow. The basilica dedicated to the Corinthian martyr Kodratos³ has recently been the subject of renewed interest with regard to his regional cult, thanks to the recently interpreted calendar on IG IV² 1825, found at the Christian basilica in the Agora of Sikyon and dated to the 5th century AD,⁴ which informs us that Kodratos and his companions Anektos, Paulos, Dionysios, Kyprianos, and Kriskos, martyrs of Corinth (AD 249-260), were worshipped officially in Sikyon.

The ecclesiastical history of Corinth is extended to the next (fifth) chapter through the discussion of its most significant early church building, the basilica at the port of Lechaion. The author describes some of the recent findings by the underwater exploration project of the University of Copenhagen. Consequently, she describes the architecture of the Lechaion basilica, including the baptistery and the graves, in comprehensive detail. Caution should be drawn towards the correct name of the saint, namely Leonides (instead of 'Leonidas', who was a king of ancient Sparta). The author, through a useful survey in relevant sources, correctly points out the fact that the martyr Leonides (3rd c.) is a different historical person from the bishop of Athens Leonides (5th c.), even though regional tradition (starting with the

12th-c. metropolitan of Athens, Michael Choniates) has conflated these two personalities.

The sixth chapter of the book concentrates on Nemea and Sikyon, two important neighbouring cities of Corinth, located at a distance of 27 km from each other. Using the smaller town of Kleonai (east of Nemea) as her outset, the author presents the ancient cult of Hercules, and the use of his image as a prefiguration of Christ in early Christian times. Consequently, she briefly presents the excavations at Nemea, historical information from the *Synekdemos*, archaeological information regarding the settlement, and illustrates the narration with selected artefacts from the excavations. A description of the basilica and its baptistery follows.

The second part of the chapter, which presents Sikyon, highlights the early Christian church which was built on the ruins of the temple that stood in the Agora and was dedicated to Apollo (rather than Aphrodite),⁵ as well as the large early Christian basilica excavated in Kiato by Orlandos. Reference is made also to a piece of textual information deriving from the 10th-century *Life of Hosios Loukas*, about an ascetic (called 'stylite' in the medieval text) who lived in 'Ζημένας', which is interpreted as 'Zemeno' (near Patras).

In Athens, which occupies the seventh chapter, the author presents textual evidence about early martyrs and bishops, starting with Dionysios the Areopagite. The assumption that the *Agoranomeion* was an early church is doubtful, as safe evidence is missing, and the early hypothesis that the Tower of the Winds was converted to a baptistery or a church in the Early Christian period is considered as relying on insufficient evidence by recent archaeological and architectural research.⁶ Descriptions of the Tetraconch church building in Hadrian's Library, as well as the church on the islet of the Ilissos river follow. The interpretation that the large Roman bath in the precinct of the Temple of Zeus was used as a baptistery, because it lies near an Early Christian basilica, cannot be supported. Baptisteries of this region/period had specific (and much smaller) architectural forms, which were closely connected with the liturgy. It is also doubtful that the Roman bath lying below the so-called Russian church (Soteira Lykodemou) functioned as an Early Christian baptistery. Finally, short descriptions of the basilicas founded in the Asklepieion, the Hephaisteion, the Parthenon and the Erechtheion,

¹ Gregory 1993.

² Rife 2012.

³ The dedication derives from the inscription IGIV² 1267, which was found next to the basilica: Stikas 1966; Rothaus 2000, 97-98.

⁴ Hallof 2016; Billias 2024.

⁵ Lolos 2011, 379-382.

⁶ For a review of the evidence see now Tsoniotis and Karamberidi 2021, 267-268.

as well as selected Middle Byzantine churches of Athens are provided.

The eighth and final chapter deals with a comparison between the cults of Asclepius and Christ in Late Antiquity. It starts with the presentation of the cult site of Asclepius at Bethesda, Jerusalem, and goes on with a comparison of the religious figure of Asclepius vs. Christ as they appear in selected textual sources and imagery. The chapter continues with a detailed description of the archaeological site of Asclepius at Epidauros, healing practices, and the Christian church at the site. The monastery of St Martin at Whithorn in Galloway is presented as a parallel with Epidauros, as a shrine which employed similar elements of healing methods. The author chooses the 10th-century monastery of Hosios Loukas in Phocis, mainland Greece, as another parallel and also places this saint in the sequence of healing saints in the tradition of Asclepius.

Archaeology and the Early Church in Southern Greece is undoubtedly a useful introduction to early Christianity in the region. Even though the book title entails 'archaeology' as its first word, the book is, however, not an archaeological one. It does not contain a systematic archaeological investigation of excavation and/or field survey results in relation to any of the sites presented. Nor does it delve into any on-going archaeological debates around the interpretations of these sites. The book is rather a selection of what the author regards as the most important and relevant information to her topic. It is a well-structured book and is a comprehensible site guide of the main excavated sites of Northeastern Peloponnese, for readers that are interested in the early history of Christianity. It certainly serves the purpose to acquaint the reader with the sites themselves, under the light of selected early ecclesiastical sources, especially Apostolic texts. The illustrations, particularly the site and ground plans, have been selected carefully among the primary publications and thus offer an accurate image of excavation results, and the photographic material is inviting. In those regards, the book by Elizabeth Rees may be seen as an introductory one for readers generally interested in parts of Southern Greece, in archaeology, and inclined to bear a positive view towards a prism formed by Christian belief.

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BYZANTINE

Yannis Stouraitis (ed.) *Identities and Ideologies in the Medieval East Roman World*. pp. 432, 27 black and white ills, 1 table. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022. ISBN: 9781474493628, hardback £115.00.

Identity and ideology are currently attracting a fast-growing enthusiasm in academic research and debate, and Byzantine studies are benefitting especially strongly from this trend. That is why Yannis Stouraitis' new edited book will be a welcome and advantageous addition to the Byzantinist's library. With great diligence and creativity, Stouraitis brings together seventeen scholars to expose the multifaceted and conflicting constructions of ideology and identity in Byzantium and her peripheries.

The aim of this book, as stated in its introduction, co-written by Stouraitis and John Haldon, is to broaden the perspectives with which different groups in Byzantium perceived themselves and each other, and the forms by which these identities were articulated.⁷ It also aims to draw together varying definitions of 'identity' and 'ideology' and how the two dynamics interacted with one another in Byzantine culture. What differences appear in scholarly definitions, and can they be reconciled?⁸ It succeeds excellently in both these aims.

The book is formally divided into two halves, each containing eight of its sixteen main body chapters, but these are subdivided further into broadly defined themes: Ideas and beliefs, practices of identification, the relationship between central and rural identity, and the influence of Byzantine identity and ideology outside imperial borders.⁹ Each chapter adopts a commendably individual approach, displaying a wide breadth of scholarly definitions of 'identity' and 'ideology' through which the corresponding arguments are justified. Simultaneously it promotes critical thinking and debate in cases where two or more authors challenge each other's definitions. This appears to have been a conscious choice by Stouraitis, who argues that the two terms must be applied in the vaguest sense,

⁷ John Haldon and Yannis Stouraitis, 'The ideology of identities and the identity of ideologies', pp.1-19 at p.1.

⁸ Ibid, p.2.

⁹ See Ibid, pp.10-13, for further detail.