Journal of Roman Archaeology (2025), page 1 of 15
doi:10.1017/S1047759425000030

Centering Cyprus in Late Antiquity

Laura Nasrallah

Yale University <laura.nasrallah@yale.edu>

PANAYIDES, P., and I. JACOBS, eds. 2023. *Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity: History and Archaeology between the Sixth and Eighth Centuries*. Oxford: Oxbow Books.

DELIGIANNAKIS, G. 2022. *A Cultural History of Late Roman Cyprus*. Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre.

Late Antique Cyprus – autocephalous in relation to the Christian ecclesial systems of organization, with island ports accepting the traffic of continental Mediterranean cities, replete with beautiful mosaics, still echoing with the powerful voice of heresiologist-bishop Epiphanius – deserves even more attention than it has received of late. The two volumes under review attend to the island and inspire future directions for research. The collected papers in *Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity: History and Archaeology between the Sixth and Eighth Centuries* (2023), edited by P. Panayides and I. Jacobs, and G. Deligiannakis's *A Cultural History of Late Roman Cyprus* (2022) come at a moment when academic inquiry into this region and period is actively raising new questions with new data, while also reevaluating points long considered.

To give some examples of the Cyprus *Zeitgeist*: D. M. Metcalf's *Byzantine Cyprus 491–1191* was published in 2009 and L. Zavagno's *Cyprus between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages: An Island in Transition* in 2017.[1] The proceedings of a conference organized by the Cyprus American Archaeological Research Institute, *Cyprus and the Balance of Empires: Art and Archaeology from Justinian I to the Coeur de Lion*, emerged in 2014.[2] Focusing on an earlier period, roughly the 1st–6th c. CE, the conference proceedings *From Roman to Early Christian Cyprus: Studies in Archaeology and Religion* appeared in 2020.[3] S. Efthymiadis, building on his important work in Byzantine hagiography, has offered a study of Cypriot saints and other writers in *Η Βυζαντινή αγιολογία της Κύπρου: Οι άγιοι, οι συγγραφείς και τα κείμενα (4ος - 13ος αιώνας)*.[4] A volume that appeared after the publication of the books under review, *Earthquakes and Gardens: Saint Hilarion's Cyprus*, by historian of ancient Christianity V. Burrus, offers a subtle reading that treats Jerome, Hilarion, and ecology, weaving them together with ancient poetry, art and archaeology, and the island's geography. *Earthquakes and Gardens* is a meditation on texts, affects, and environment in Cyprus. Burrus's book agrees with the volumes under review in expressing the idea of Cyprus as "betwixt and between": "in the midst of, influenced by, and sometimes competing with other religious traditions, not least the worship of Aphrodite."[5]

---

1 Metcalf 2009; Zavagno 2017.

2 Stewart et al. 2014.

3 Nasrallah et al. 2020.

4 Efthymiadis 2020.

5 Burrus 2023, 152.

Scholars in recent years have focused on not only Cyprus but also its famed, irascible bishop Epiphanius, fully embedding his writings in the world of Late Antique knowledge production, literary conventions, and religiosity. Texts like Epiphanius's *Panarion* engage in the arts of persuasion, seeking to convince their readers, ancient and modern, of the rightness of their arguments about heresy and orthodoxy, the wicked pagan and the pious saint. Several recent books model how to approach Epiphanius's complex corpus: T. Berzon's *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity,* A. Jacobs's *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity,* and Y. R. Kim's *Epiphanius of Cyprus: Imagining an Orthodox World* re-center this figure. Kim's English translation of the *Ancoratus* brings more of the bishop's texts into easy use.[6] Epiphanius's voluminous writings (he provides "remedies" for heresies, which he often characterizes as poisonous, stinging, dangerous bugs and reptiles) have been marginal to the study of ancient Christianity, even as Epiphanius himself has been central to the identity of a Christian Cyprus. Berzon, a scholar of ancient Mediterranean religions, sees Epiphanius's *Panarion* as managing and creating Christian diversity in Late Antiquity through its taxonomizing of heresies in the broader context of ancient writers who sought to organize peoples, ethnicities, norms, and practices, from Herodotus onwards. Jacobs and Kim, as translators and scholars of ancient Christianity influenced by the Classics, contextualize Epiphanius within the broader culture of his time, whether in his library or in his "antiquarian" method of engaging the Bible.

This is the recent past and present historiographical context into which the volumes under review arrive. There is, of course, also a longer historical context, punctuated by a few crucial moments, to keep in mind about the island in Late Antiquity. Over the 5th c. CE, Cypriot ecclesiastical leaders claimed independence, especially from Antioch's chaotic theological oversight, and Cyprus was granted autocephaly. In 649 and 650, Arabs raided or invaded Cyprus. The difference between these two terms, the one implying economic interest, the other implying sustained destruction and occupation, and the question of which is the best representation of these events, is reflected throughout the volumes under review. (Spoiler alert: Most chapters and approaches in these books see "raids" as the correct historical interpretation.) In 685, a lasting peace treaty was established, which involved Cyprus paying tribute to both the caliphate and the Byzantine emperor. To understand the historiography and the archaeology of the island – that is, to understand where we are today – it is crucial also to recall a few moments from the 20th c. In 1960, Cyprus gained independence from British protectorate, and the political upheavals of 1974 left the northern part of the island occupied by Turkey. These key moments affect the historiography of Cyprus and delimit the possibilities of past and present scholarship. All these incidents – how to define them, how they impacted religion and politics in Cyprus, how they impacted nucleation and population dispersals on the island, how they impacted and continue to impact historiography – thread like dendrites through these two volumes.

Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity

The essays in this volume range from very technical and rigorous to wide-angle-lens surveys. The book emerged from a conference held in January 2021 in Oxford under the auspices of the High Commission of Cyprus in the UK. Beautiful figures and color images

[6] Berzon 2016; Jacobs 2021; Kim 2015; *Anactorus*, transl. Kim 2014.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

on a high-quality glossy paper grace the 17 chapters, which are divided into sections titled "Cyprus in between empires," "Urban and rural perspectives," and "Production and objects in use." A general index follows. As with many edited volumes, the section divisions feel a bit arbitrary and there are insufficient through-lines within each section. Some essays in the volume can be used as an introduction to some aspect of Cypriot archaeology; others are quite specialized and would be appropriate for a graduate seminar or intensive research. This variation in possible audiences does not detract from the interest of each chapter. (The reader may profit from encountering this invaluable collection backward. The last chapter, by J. M. Gordon, seems to me to be the book's first review, discussing and assessing the various contributions in the volume.)

Four chapters ground readers in the research exigencies that produced the problems and the challenges of the study of Cyprus in Late Antiquity. Panayides and Jacobs's introduction, "Cyprus between the sixth and eighth centuries," justifies the terminology of "Long Late Antiquity" and the concomitant avoidance of phrases like the "Byzantine Dark Ages," typically applied to the late 7th to mid-9th c. The very temporal boundaries of the volume intentionally transgress the usual stopping points of the 6th and the mid-7th c., and more specifically 536–649. The year 536 is when Cyprus was made part of a new administrative district of the *quaestura exercitus*, connected with other Aegean islands and with Caria for the purpose of supplying Roman troops on the Thracian frontier. The year 649 saw the Arab invasions or raids, depending on interpretation; scholars usually posit or assume a sharp Cypriot decline after this year. The editors argue that the greater temporal breadth of the volume allows for an investigation of both continuity and rupture, and also captures a wealth of current research conducted on the island and its material culture.

M. Rautman's "Archaeology and the making of a Cypriot Late Antiquity" first narrates some of the causes of Cyprus's relative neglect in the study of Late Antiquity, providing a history of excavations and explaining the focus on Bronze and Iron Age Cyprus. It recounts the problems of modern antiquities trade and trafficking, which leave our understanding of Cypriot material culture full of lacunae. Second, the chapter addresses the need for an internal, Cypriot perspective on Late Antiquity; historiography has been dominated instead by the early 20th-c. British historians who emphasized the remoteness of the island or were driven by romantic philhellenism or ideas of institutional Christianity. The Cyprus Museum in Nicosia itself, the chapter argues, was produced by "British appointees who saw Cyprus as Greek, European, and western, on the one hand, and exotic, oriental, and malleable, on the other" (17). R.'s historical overview of Cypriot archaeology helps the reader to understand its uneven state and is tutelary for those who have encountered Cyprus through its literary sources but know they need an understanding of material culture to ground their work. Multiple nation-states from Poland to the United States to Canada to Sweden have been involved in Cypriot archaeology, and this archaeology has ranged from survey to intensive digs in a particular location. The chapter concludes by reviewing archaeology in Cyprus over the last 20 years, following on from previous publications on the same topic by A. H. S. Megaw and A. Papageorghiou.[7] R. emphasizes the need for multiple studies of Cyprus: ones that focus on the natural environment, for instance, correlating Ammianus Marcellinus's account of the 365 CE earthquake and

[7] Megaw 1986; Papageorghiou 1993.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tsunami with material evidence; studies of how particular city excavations in Cyprus relate to larger conversations regarding urbanism; the publication of already-excavated Christian sites; investigations of domestic archaeology; and continued field-walking or surveys of the southern coastline and its networks of farms, villages, and small towns. This chapter also implies the need for legacy archaeology – for deep archival dives in order to better understand the evidence from archaeological digs of the past – as well as for systematic volumes on different periods in Cypriot archaeology.

While Y. R. Kim's "Cypriot hagiography and the Long Late Antiquity" is placed within the subtopic of "Cyprus in between empires" in the table of contents, it is better read as another programmatic essay belonging to the introductory section. It follows on from K.'s award-winning book on Epiphanius and models how to read sensitively the rhetoric of literary texts. That is, for those whose primary interest might be in reconstructing Cypriot history from material culture, K.'s essay demonstrates how to use literary sources in a way that is neither positivistic – assuming that their accounts are journalistic – nor dismissive – assuming that a miracle story has nothing to tell us about what happened in Late Antiquity. As K. writes, "while it would be easy to dismiss such works as fantasies of religious devotion, we should remember that they were written by real people, living in a real world but writing with particular liturgical, devotional, rhetorical, and political goals. Ultimately hagiographies offer clues about what their composers thought was possible" (27). These clues lead to evidence of the social, the economic, and the political. The writings of Jerome show the ease of circulation of documents and ideas around the Mediterranean world. Reading beyond the miracles in the *Life of Epiphanius*, K. leads the reader to see how such stories also depict the ease of circulation of people: "the writers described how Epiphanius travelled easily from the Roman to the Persian Empire, and back again, which suggests an imagined world in which these discrete political entities existed within an established 'border'" (29). Leontius of Neapolis's story of John the Almsgiver "offers hints of the monetary, commercial, and imperial context" of disputes regarding church money, and this rhetorically crafted narrative gives a glimpse of a world in which one could imagine that "grain ships could travel from Alexandria to Britain and back again" (30). K.'s summary of some key hagiographies and vitae associated with Cyprus models how to interpret sensitively these complex texts to obtain as much data as possible regarding travel and economics, while also being aware of their rhetoricity.

E. Chrysos's "The Arab invasions of Cyprus in the middle of the seventh century: The chronographical and epigraphic evidence revisited" plunges the reader into a familiar if challenging scholarly problem: how does one use the uneven data offered in a source like Theophanes the Confessor's *Chronicle*? It seeks a method for reading a complex historical source and avoiding historically positivistic uses of Theophanes and *his* sources. The evidence of the *Chronicle* is put into conversation with 9th-c. Arab sources reflecting upon earlier events, as well as the famous inscription from the basilica of Soloi, referred to in many subsequent chapters. C. offers the Greek transcription and an English translation of the inscription and emphasizes its importance for modern scholarly reconstruction of the events of 649 and the following years. The chapter closely analyzes the inscription and other accounts to make a larger historical intervention: questioning the idea of Cypriot agency in the mid-6th c. CE and challenging the idea of a "condominium." The latter is the term used to describe the double involvement of the Byzantine empire and the caliphate in Cyprus, an idea, C. asserts, forged in 19th-c. colonialist historiographies. Finally, C. thinks that the Arab incursions into Cyprus in the mid-7th c. CE should be

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

understood as raids, not invasions: plunder was the goal. The essay convinced me of the desideratum that early Islamic historians engage with Byzantine Cyprus, as well as the importance of the Soloi inscription to investigating prisoners, their deportation, and theological-philosophical ideas, since the inscription sees the Arab raids as due to "sins."

This chapter is productively read alongside the next, G. Deligiannakis's "Contextualising the tax tribute paid by Cypriots during the treaty centuries." The chapter engages two recent monographs, Metcalf's *Byzantine Cyprus 491–1191* and Zavagno's *Cyprus between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages*.[8] While others argue for a "fuzziness," or continuity, within Cyprus before and after the Arab raids, and while Metcalf and Zavagno would argue for Cypriot prosperity into the mid-7th c., Deligiannakis argues for rupture. Taxes and tribute tell the story: looking at evidence for Cyprus's payment of tribute for nearly 300 years, both to the caliphate and to the Byzantine emperors, D. paints a gloomy picture: "I would therefore like to suggest that the neutralisation of Cyprus actually meant that the Arabs who settled in the South of the island or who made use of the Cypriot harbours took hold of maritime trade. They replaced the deprived local Christians, who were now being placed under surveillance on board their ships or, alternatively, went on to serve on Arab vessels" (50).

O. Karagiorgou's "The prosopography of the Cypriot archbishops during the Long Late Antiquity: A reappraisal from the evidence presented in *Byzantine Lead Seals from Cyprus*" uses lead seals to develop a "proposed chronological sequence and … secure identification" (66), insofar as this is possible, of the archbishops of Cyprus from 600 to 800. There are significant challenges to studying lead seals, including the unprovenanced nature of many seals, seals that remain unpublished and inaccessible, and limits to the data that can be extracted from Metcalf's existing two-volume study. This highly technical article is rich in data and provides a useful map that reconstructs networks of archbishops based on known findspots of seals, a table that details sigillographic finds from sites in Cyprus, and, most significantly, full charts of Cypriot archbishops from 600 to 800. This material is based upon detailed analysis of sigillographic and related contextual evidence. From it, K. is able to extract useful historical data, such as the likely high volume of correspondence from the archbishops, hinted at by the existence of "84 seals struck by at least 34 boulloteria" (65–66). The chapter moves from carefully reconstructed technical information to the larger historical implications of the study of seals.

While islands are sometimes characterized as mere outposts, Zavagno focuses on the significance of insulae in military, economic, and cultural exchange, situating Cyprus in relation to other large Mediterranean islands (Sardinia, Sicily, Crete) from the 6th to the 9th c., in his "Cyprus and its sisters: Reassessing the role of large islands at the end of the Long Late Antiquity (ca. 600–ca. 800)." After Deligiannakis's view of rupture and decline, Z. offers something different: an image of "islands. . . eternally 'dancing' between integration, isolation, and connectivity" (81), with Cyprus "at the intersection of three interlocking inter-, intra-, and sub-regional trade and shipping networks," namely, the Syrian-Palestinian, Egyptian, and southern Anatolian. Ceramics, coins, and globular amphorae tell a story of "the economic vitality, commercial importance, and the appurtenance of Cyprus to a shared culture of the Byzantine insular and coastal *koine*" (82). This included its importance as a staging post between Egypt and Constantinople. Beginning

[8] Metcalf 2009; Zavagno 2017.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

in the 5th c., Cyprus saw changing settlement patterns, but even in the 7th c., it was still important as a stopover on the way to the Holy Land. Z. rejects the idea of complete Cypriot decline in the 7th c. upon the arrival of the Arabs, since coin and seal finds on Cyprus indicate "trans-regional and trans-cultural acceptance of different monetary units" (84). Z. optimistically emphasizes "the pivotal role of islands in the creation of a modality of interactions in a shared Mediterranean space and of the management of both exchange and conflicts allowing the recreation of a unity lost after the fall of the Roman Empire" (84–85).

Panayides, too, in his "Cypriot cities at the end of Antiquity," does not see evidence of rupture or decline after the Arab raids. Despite a lack of archaeological research into the evolution of cities in the 7th and 8th c., he attempts to survey what changes can be seen in this period in Salamis (the provincial capital and metropolitan see), Nea Paphos, Amathous, and Kourion. This excellent introduction to four cities offers helpful plans and photographs and concludes that the archaeological evidence does not sustain a story of irreparable destruction and abandonment. Instead, P. paints a picture of "deliberate restructuring – rather than decay – of the urban fabric" (111) and a targeting of specific buildings by Arab invaders, presumably because these buildings had military functions. P.'s chapter also shows how much more needs to be recovered from new and legacy archaeological projects.

P. Armstrong and G. Sanders offer a technical study of Late Roman tablewares, with the purpose of establishing new dating chronologies, in their "Kourion in the Long Late Antiquity: A reassessment." The chapter also promises to reassess accepted chronologies for coin evidence as used to establish events in Cyprus in the 7th and 8th c. and focuses on the basilica/episcopal structure in Kourion. A helpful table establishes the principal events at Kourion and across Cyprus after 365 CE. Evidence from the Athenian Agora is adduced to demonstrate the use and abuse of coin evidence in relation to ceramic evidence. The authors use all these data to assert continued occupation of the episcopal site at Kourion into the 8th c. CE, then decline in the mid-8th c., possibly due to the earthquakes of 746–749. This idea of continued activity stands in contrast to scholarship that uses the inscription at Soloi to reconstruct a mid-7th c. decline.

We return to ecclesiastical structures in R. Maguire's "Cypriot church architecture of the Long Late Antiquity," which offers a specialist analysis of architectural change in churches. The chapter addresses the question of why there were shifts from the use of columns to the use of piers, and from the use of vaults to the use of timber roofs. Contrary to earlier scholars who sought a single cause for such architectural innovations, M. argues that the changes are not simply due to Arab incursions nor limited to the mid-7th c. CE.

W. Caraher and R. S. Moore's "Long Late Antiquity in the Chrysochou Valley" focuses on evidence from two areas at Arsinoe (Polis tis Chrysochou) that are part of the Princeton Cyprus expedition. Along with other essays in the volume, they "inject a sense of fuzziness to historical narratives that prioritised abrupt breaks in the history and material culture of Antiquity" (158) by focusing on these two limited areas. The chapter contributes to a better understanding of the phases of the South Basilica and of a small multi-phase structure whose remains – for example, ceramics and a drain – may aid comprehension of water management and urbanism writ large.

A. K. Vionis's "A boom-bust cycle in Cyprus at the end of Antiquity: Landscape perspectives for settlement transformation" aims "to examine and understand the passage

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from the 'late antique' to the 'Byzantine' world of the early Middle Ages, alongside issues of continuity and break in settlement formation, population growth, and rural economy in Cyprus, through a landscape approach" (161). To this end, V. uses survey data and interprets the meaning of surface ceramic scatters in the Xeros River Valley on the south coast of Cyprus. Like Zavagno in the same volume, V. emphasizes Cyprus's island status as a kind of miniature continent, connected in various ways to other regions. With the island organized under 15 bishoprics by the 5th c., "we may assume that thriving cities/bishoprics were the administrative and economic centres of different regions" (163). The chapter provides maps of Cyprus's bishoprics/cities, towns, rural settlements with basilicas, rural basilicas, etc., as well as of pottery distributions. V. moves past the 8th c., arguing that there was settlement contraction in the 8th to the 10th c., yet perhaps previous regional centers may also have survived in altered forms, with shifts from wheel-made to hand-made pottery and a gradual dispersal of population centers associated with market villages.

Sculpture, particularly chancel screens carved in soft, yellowish limestone, are the focus of D. Nicolaou's "Local sculptural production in Cyprus at the end of Antiquity: A challenging dating?" The chapter gathers published and unpublished material and attempts a chronological reassessment, using stylistic and iconographic criteria to fill in the little that is known about 7th- to 8th-c. Cypriot sculptural production. Fine photographic examples of the geometrical design of these chancel screens are given. Because guidelines are still visible on the slabs, scholars can discern the process of carving and appreciate the good understanding of geometry that was brought to it. N.'s findings lead to the conclusion that "a local workshop producing stone church furniture can be attested at 13 sites on the island" (184), with the majority of sites in the Mesaoria plain.

P. Nowakowski, in "Fighting the demons and invoking the Saints: Prolegomenon to a study of Christian ritual texts in Late Antique Cyprus," is well aware of recent frameworks for the study of so-called magical materials: one person's magic is another person's religion, and magic is usually a polemical term dragged out to differentiate one group from another, even as some rituals engage with secrecy and alterity. N. focuses on ritual experts, examining their activities from the 4th to the 12th c. in Cyprus, based upon the objects they produced. Of course, magic was a kind of brand for Cyprus. Pliny the Elder and Josephus mention a peculiar kind of Jewish magic there, and more than 200 curse tablets in lead and selenite were found at Amathous, to give only two examples. N.'s study begins with lead leaves from Trikomo which include the story of a holy figure conquering a demon who is believed to haunt women in childbirth and newborn children. N. then moves to a stone shard from Lythrodontas and a ceramic tablet from Pathos, suggesting the affordances of each: ritual experts seem to favor small, palm-sized objects for Christian charms. The chapter offers new readings of these materials in an appendix. It then proceeds to analyze amulets from Salamis and Amathous. These objects do not suggest a lack of evidence for the 7th to 9th c., as has been argued previously, but active ritual work in these periods. Contrary to literary evidence that suggests that no Christian would use magic, these objects "can be interpreted as testimonies to the Christianisation of non-Christian beliefs and rituals" (196–97).[9] The findspots of Cypriot amulets are loosely associated with churches; their writers were familiar with *nomina sacra* (abbreviations of

[9] See, e.g., the careful analysis in Luijendijk 2014 of Christian ritual experts crafting and using divinatory texts. On ritual expertise in antiquity and its transcendence of what we might think of as the traditional boundaries between Jews, "pagans," and Christians, see, e.g., Wendt 2016.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

key words) employed in Christian texts and engaged with biblical and religious texts: these materials are part of the Christian practices of Late Antiquity. N. rightly argues that such small finds have potential to help us understand "lived religious experience" and calls for a new checklist of relevant objects.

V. Kassianidou's "Mining and smelting copper in Cyprus in Late Antiquity" corrects an earlier argument that copper mining in Cyprus stopped either in the 2nd or in the early 5th c. CE. Radiocarbon dating of slag heaps indicates later production, and further tests indicate an efficient and industrial process. The chapter uses a variety of sources to build a picture of copper mining: reports of small finds like Late Antique pottery, baskets, and wooden scaffolding, and literary evidence in Pliny's *Natural History*, Galen, and Eusebius regarding the Palestinian martyrs condemned to the mines. So, too, K. establishes a useful context with information about European and US prospectors at the beginning of the 20th c. The chapter argues that copper mining reached industrial levels in the 5th c., and ended in the 7th or the beginning of the 8th c. The cause of the demise of the copper industry is unclear: perhaps Arab invasions, or depopulation, or plague, or deforestation. The tantalizing and incomplete remains, such as slag heaps that cover older sanctuaries, are difficult to interpret, but the chapter argues that "the frequent presence of churches in the direct vicinity of slag heaps may … be explained by the fact that so many Christians were condemned to the mines and martyred there but also by Christian miners and metalsmiths requiring their own places of worship" (218). Especially given debates about the larger history of martyrdom and the rhetorical nature of martyrdom texts,[10] this idea would work best as a question, suggestive of new research in the future.

E. Zachariou-Kaila brings us back to metal in "The material culture of daily living in Late Antique Cyprus: A view from the metal collections of the Department of Antiquities." Past studies of Late Antique Cypriot material culture have focused on the monumental, mainly ecclesiastical architecture, and this chapter turns to balancing the equation through attention to small finds from the 6th and 7th c. in the collection of the Cyprus Department of Antiquities. Such objects often lack provenance, and they range broadly: jugs and bowls with long handles, lighting devices, weights and other equipment, objects for personal adornment, and ritual utensils and church objects, including a beautiful reliquary casket from Lambousa. Z-K.'s findings resonate with those of Kassianidou and suggest an intensification of the copper industry in the 5th to early 7th c. CE.

The final chapter, "The 'fuzzy' world of Cypriot Long Late Antiquity: Continuity and disruption betwixt the global and local," is both a review of the edited volume and its own intellectual contribution. In it, Gordon counters the story of Cyprus as a prosperous 6th- to 7th-c. Christian island, replete with silver plates and monumental basilicas with mosaics, plunged into misery after 649 and the Arab invasion. G. helps the reader to understand that part of the problem lies in the historiography of Late Antique Cyprus and its production under the British protectorate (with its particular fascination with Greek classicism) and the Turkish invasion of Cyprus (and the ensuing stories of conflict between Muslim and Christian). Playing throughout the essay with the idea of Epiphanius's *Panarion*, or medicine chest against all heresies, G. sees the volume as offering "curative antidotes" (244) to historiographical misconceptions.

[10] Moss 2014; Rebillard 2021.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The fuzziness of the chapter title refers to a principle in mathematics and points to G.'s own goals: to explain that it is impossible to fully clarify the history of Cyprus and to eschew simplistic binaries. Engaging with Braudel and Zavagno, G. notes the significance of Cyprus's "permanent spatial values" (247) of natural resources, a strategic location, and its island identity. Throughout the chapter, G. seeks to correct what he terms "factoids" – assertions that have evolved into something like facts about Cyprus. Unlike some authors in the volume, and in contrast to Zavagno's optimism, the author sees limited connectivity and increased de-globalization in Cyprus in 600–800. Yet G. also insists that the idea of the devastation of separate life after the Arab raids of 649 is not tenable. There was no Byzantine Dark Age, but 150 years of local cultural continuity, and while the 7th c. brought changes to Cyprus, there were multiple reasons for local decline. G. calls for rejection of "factoids and biases" (256) and for scrutiny of the Arab evidence, nuanced analysis of hagiographies, attention to epigraphic evidence (including on seals), more sophisticated use of numismatic evidence, and further archaeological surveys to deepen our understanding of this period. He ends with suggestions for future research, including studying Late Antique Cyprus at the intersection of the humanities and social sciences, as a case study in the benefits and consequences of globalization. In a fitting conclusion to this richly detailed volume and its many suggestions for future research, G. offers his own vision: Cyprus in Long Late Antiquity provides lessons about living in a buffer zone and along an ethnic and cultural divide; the history of Arab and Byzantine interactions might model positive possibilities for present-day Greek and Turkish Cypriots; the story of ancient migrations could give insights into Cyprus's present role as a transition point for those fleeing poverty and violence; the island's archaeology and its present might teach us about economic and environmental sustainability.

A Cultural History of Late Roman Cyprus

This volume, a 2022 monograph by G. Deligiannakis (also author of a chapter in *Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity*), focuses on what excavated remains can teach us about Cyprus from 284 to 431, roughly the time from the reign of Diocletian to the church of Cyprus's autocephaly. The "Roman" of D.'s title emphasizes the Roman past and the lingering "pluralism" of Cyprus in this period. Indeed, the question of god(s) haunts several chapters in this book.

Chapter one, "Cypriot identities," offers a historical survey of Cyprus from the time of its annexation to Rome in 58 BCE and argues against the idea of Cyprus as a historical backwater. The chapter combines information about the imperial visits of Titus and Trajan, the diaspora Jewish or Kitos revolt of 115–117, and the first dispatch of Roman troops from Syria to Cyprus with material evidence of the integration of imperial cult into the local and the lavish mosaics of Nea Paphos. It paints a picture of Cyprus within "the spread of a globalized Graeco-Roman provincial culture" (9).[11] Increasing prosperity, the formation of 15 ecclesiastical sees, and the Cypriot presence in theological debates such as those of the Council of Ephesos (431) all contribute to the argument that Cyprus was increasingly robust and important from the 2nd c. on, and, by the 6th c., part of a "vast exchange nexus that by this time linked the Levant to Constantinople along the major Annona sea routes" (22).

[11] Regarding the integration of imperial into local cults, see Fujii 2013.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Chapter two, "The last pagans of Cyprus," seeks to deepen the study of transitions from traditional cults to Christianity, even as it recognizes that the terms "late paganism" and "Christianization" are inadequate to describe the complexities of religious practices and affiliations. The author discusses evidence for so-called pagan sanctuaries and challenges the assumption that major sanctuaries were abandoned because of earthquakes in the mid- or late 4th c. or, earlier, in the 3rd c. In the late 4th c., Ammianus Marcellinus was still referring to the temples of Zeus in Salamis and Venus in Paphos as among the island's celebrated landmarks. It was especially here that I wished that Burrus's *Earthquakes and Gardens: Saint Hilarion's Cyprus* had been available for D., and that more of D.'s recent work had been available to Burrus.

The heart of the chapter is a study of inscriptions that include *heis theos* and *theos hypsistos*. What do these references to "one god" and "highest god" tell us about philosophy-theology and about social life on the island?[12] Are they evidence of Judaism, of a cult of Helios, or of Christian acclamations or Samaritan ones? Here, a fuller engagement with P. van Nuffelen's analysis of the "pagan monotheism" conversation of the 1990s and after would have been helpful.[13] So too, evidence from Maximus of Tyre, writing from nearby in the 2nd c. CE, would have allowed for a bigger picture of what has sometimes been called pagan monotheism; Maximus in his second oration exclaims: "What point is there in my continuing to enquire into this topic of images and to lay down the law about it? Let people know the race of the gods, let them only know it! If it is the art of Phidias that arouses recollections of God for the Greeks, while for the Egyptians it is the worship of animals, and a river or fire for others, I have no objection to such diversity. Let them only know God, love him, and recollect him!"[14]

D.'s insight into the significance of these inscriptions could also be enriched by contextualizing them within a wider ritual world, as evidenced, for example, by the "recipes" for spells and amulets that indicate that people called upon gods by any means possible to effect what they needed, from Isis to IAŌ to Sabaoth to Hades. Such ritual objects often display an ecumenism in ritual mechanisms.[15] Such a context might deepen the chapter's conclusion "that the Hysistarians of Cyprus were probably a Judaizing pagan group who worshipped the Highest God" (38). We simply do not yet have enough data, or the right methods, to come to such a conclusion. Nonetheless, D. advances our conversations in important ways because he points to unity in the larger theological-philosophical ideas shared between cults, not just an "evolution" of pagan to Christian, and because he warns against the facile use of hagiographical texts written centuries after the events they describe. This question of classical connections to Christianity has been studied more broadly, from W. Jaeger through C. M. Chin; understanding Cypriot evidence more fully within this long sweep is a desideratum, and a path D. has helped to place us upon.[16]

D. warns the reader that chapter three is exceedingly long, and it is. It felt to this reader like the beginning of an exciting future book project. "Elite values and urban histories" focuses on the mosaics of Cyprus, particularly in three locations: the domestic space of

[12] On the inseparability of the theological and philosophical, see Nasrallah 2024, 5–7, 236–39.

[13] van Nuffelen 2021; see also Versnel 2011, 239–308.

[14] Maximus of Tyre, *Or.* 2.10, transl. in Trapp 1997, 24.

[15] Nasrallah 2024, 36–38.

[16] Jaeger 1961; Chin 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the so-called House of Aion and the so-called Palace of Theseus, and the newly discovered (and yet unpublished) hippodrome mosaic at Akaki. The aim of the chapter is to understand the theological and cultural worldviews of local elites and, in particular, to figure out the possible registers of meaning attached to mythological mosaics associated with triclinia in these three spaces. Are the mosaics to be interpreted allegorically? Are they evidence of so-called pagan-Christian rivalry in the first half of the 4th c.? The chapter wrestles with major voices in the historiography – the excavator W. A. Daszewski, the interpreters of nearby mosaics (Palmyra, Apamea, Antioch) Jean-Charles and Janine Balty – and with questions regarding the extent to which the nearby mosaics and their Cypriot counterparts partake in a peculiar Syro-Phoenician and Semitic theological discourse. Are certain labelled figures, like the Aion in the House of Aion, part of a larger cosmogonic message and ready for allegorical interpretation? Or might this merely represent, as D. suggests, the name of the house's owner?

What is clear is that these figures and their inscriptions deserve still more attention. The representations of figures like Planē, Hermes, and Theogonia, while "said to recall the iconography of the magi approaching the Christ Child" (56), also to my eye might resonate with the interpretations of Plato's *Timaeus* found, for instance, in the perhaps 2nd- to 4th-c. CE retellings of the origins of the cosmos within the Nag Hammadi Codices. These mythological scenes and personifications develop in (and perhaps are evidence of) the context of the philosophical-theological practices and thoughts of Late Antiquity, including Neoplatonism (which D. mentions). That is, D.'s work can be situated within and could also profit from a larger conversation on Greek theology, amid the so-called theological turn among historians, reviving some of the spirit of W. Jaeger, E. R. Dodds, and F. Cumont.

And these are questions that arise merely from the first case study of the chapter! After the House of Aion, we turn to the Palace of Theseus, and finally to the yet-unpublished hippodrome mosaic of Akaki. With these studies of mosaics from three "domestic" contexts, D. succeeds at tantalizing the reader about "various aspects of the social and religious life of Roman Cyprus" (103). The chapter also indicates that there is still much work to be done in understanding these mosaics in the context of theology broadly understood – festivals, mythologies, and allegorical interpretations of stories of the gods – in Late Antiquity. It also suggests the continued need for discussion of the mosaics of Cyprus in relation to those of other relatively nearby locales, particularly Apamea, Palmyra, and certainly Antioch.

Chapter four, "Cypriot Christianity from Barnabas to Epiphanios," is designed to complement the previous chapters by telling the story of Christianity in Cyprus from the time of the apostle Paul (as mentioned in the probably early 2nd-c. Acts of the Apostles) until the late 4th c. This survey of literature that mentions Cyprus is useful, yet less promising than the themes of the previous chapter. The utility of some of the terms employed in this chapter, such as Judeo-Christian and Jewish-Christian, have been questioned in the scholarship of the past decades as we have come to understand the often-fluid boundaries between cultic affiliations and practices. D. here and in the brief appendix 1 ("The Jews") helpfully recalls for the reader the fact of Jews in Cyprus, even if material evidence of Judaism is hard to find.

D. introduces us to the challenge of identifying Christianity in Cyprus in the 3rd c. and the Tetrarchic period, when literary evidence is thin and the archaeological record hard to

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

read: given the complexity of developing criteria for determining what is Christian in iconography or architecture, especially in the 4th c., it is no surprise that we cannot find strong material evidence of the varieties of Christianity. We know of the Jewish revolts of 115–117; there is mention of Cyprus in Eusebius, who says that in 309/10 Christians condemned to work in copper mines were dispersed across Palestine, Lebanon, and Cyprus. By the late 4th c., evidence of Christianity in Cyprus emerges in basilicas, including in mosaics. D. analyzes the evidence and the lacunae of 4th-c. Cypriot Christianity in the context of other cities of the Levant, including Antioch, Beirut, Tyre, and Heliopolis/Baalbek. As D. shows, the evidence suggests that Cyprus lagged one to two generations behind the lavish earliest imperial foundations slightly to the east. By the time of the Council of Serdica in 343, 12 Cypriot bishops (including Bishop Auxibios) are named; with the writing of the *Life of Spyridon* by Triphyllios, we have evidence of an educated author and audiences, and the power of stories about the wonderworking shepherd bishop Spyridon. One main point of this chapter is to overturn the idea of Cyprus's "historical invisibility" (129) and to give evidence of its emerging significance in Late Antique Christianity; another is to indicate the long-lasting nature of Hellenic myth and culture as evidenced in iconography and the late renovations of a bath complex, after the time of Epiphanius. This chapter could have been enriched by more conversations with other scholars of religion. D. finds it "surprising how little information we find about heretical groups in Cyprus. Only three groups can be securely named: the Ebionites, the Valentinians and the Marcionites" (149). Yet this is not surprising: the definitions and nomenclature of these groups were forged in the polemics of orthodoxy and heresy.[17] A group that called itself Christian would be libeled by other Christians as heretical, and renamed after one prominent male leader, in the swirl of invective against the intimate other. D.'s attempt "to trace Epiphanius's footprint as an active metropolitan in Cypriot society" (148) is inevitably "only partly rewarding" given the kind of writing Epiphanius produced and the limitations of archaeological study on Cyprus, for which the varieties of finds have not yet been synoptically gathered.

Throughout the volume D. provides a rich set of inquiries into religion(s) in Cyprus, engaging with a strong scholarly voice in longstanding debates about allegory and meaning, and offering important avenues for future research.

Future directions

The chapters in *Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity* and D.'s *Cultural History of Late Roman Cyprus*, taken together, suggest rich insights into future research – and indeed this is part of the purpose of both volumes: to teach what can be known at present and to inspire further research. They encouraged me to think about several directions in the study of Late Antique Cyprus.

The first direction for further study, which several authors mention, involves embedding the study of Cyprus not only within the Byzantine Empire but also among evidence usually considered to be the purview of early Islam, whether epigraphic (the Arabic graffiti in churches that some authors mention) or longer chronographies. The study of ancient Christianity and Judaism in their relation to the origins of Islam is one of the most interesting and active areas of research today. Cyprus should enter into that story as fully as possible.

[17] See, e.g., King 2008.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Second, environmental studies. Several chapters point to the importance of copper mining; several hint at agriculture and market towns; all are aware of the significance of Cyprus for maritime trade. As Gordon suggests and Zavagno embodies, Cyprus could form a kind of model for other insular studies. And, more broadly, is there a particular "island hermeneutics" to be developed? I think of Braudel (mentioned rarely in the volumes under review) and of *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*, written by P. Horden and N. Purcell and published in 2000. I think, too, of Concannon and Mazurek's edited volume, *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*. Newer methods in the study of islands are emerging from Caribbean scholars, as represented, for example, in *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible: RumInations*.[18] How should the history of Cyprus – from its peoples and religious controversies to its copper, creamy limestone, and artisanal work of mosaic-laying that echoes cities in Syria – how should all these fit within larger theoretical models and conversations in or applicable to the study of environment and geography in antiquity?

Third, Deligiannakis and some of the chapters in *Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity* point to fascinating questions about religion broadly construed. What should we make of the philosophical-theological contexts out of which mythological and (possibly) allegorical mosaics were produced? What about the power of narrative in religious cults in Cyprus – as indicated by the David plates, and by mosaics in the House of Aion and elsewhere? These hints of religious discourse and practices suggest connections to broader ideas not only of so-called pagan monotheism, but also of cosmogonies.

Fourth, and related, so-called magic. Only one chapter in *Cyprus in the Long Late Antiquity* treats this topic. The evidence from the more than 200 lead and selenite curse tablets at Amathous, admittedly well discussed by A. Wilburn,[19] deserves more study and contextualization within the life of Late Antique Cyprus. These *defixiones* reveal larger ideas about divine participation in legal concerns. These data may provide a new lens through which to understand other literary materials associated with Cyprus, from hagiographies to the *Panarion*.

Fifth, legacy archaeologies. How can we create rigorous and supportive networks of scholars treating legacy archaeological materials? I think of Anne Hunnell Chen's work on Dura-Europos, Rubina Raja and her collaborators' work on Gerasa and Palmyra, and the project to digitize the Antioch archive, shepherded by Julia Gearhart of Princeton University.[20] New archaeological work is, of course, welcome as well. But legacy archaeology is an unusually "clean energy" approach, not requiring the inevitable destruction produced by new excavation. It allows us to gather the fragments – often admittedly lacunose – of ideologically fraught materials to study not only antiquity but also the conditions of power that produced those digs, the fraught tensions of colonialisms and emerging nation-states. This work could be engaged with more robustly in Cyprus and put into conversation with other emerging scholarship that uses legacy archaeology.

---

[18] Horden and Purcell 2000; Concannon and Mazurek 2016; Havea et al. 2015.

[19] Wilburn 2012; see also Megaw 2007.

[20] Dura-Europos: https://campuspress.yale.edu/yaleduralod/; Gerasa: https://projects.au.dk/internationaljerashexcavation/publications-presentations-and-press/publications; Antioch: https://ochre.lib.uchicago.edu/antioch/.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Finally, how can we continue to bring together specialists from various fields? The technical data regarding the dating of coins and late Roman ceramics need to meet the hermeneutical complexities of how to read against the grain of hagiographies or texts like the *Panarion*. The rigorous scientific work of archaeologists needs help from the rigorous interpretive work of humanists – and vice versa. Thanks to these authors and editors, both books under review have helped to plot these paths forward.

References

Berzon, Todd. 2016. *Classifying Christians: Ethnography, Heresiology, and the Limits of Knowledge in Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Burrus, Virginia. 2023. *Earthquakes and Gardens: Saint Hilarion's Cyprus*. Class 200. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Chin, C. Michael. 2008. *Grammar and Christianity in the Late Roman World*. Divinations: Rereading Late Ancient Religion. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Concannon, Cavan, and Lindsey A. Mazurek, eds. 2016. *Across the Corrupting Sea: Post-Braudelian Approaches to the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean*. Abingdon: Routledge.

Efthymiadis, Stephanos. 2020. *Η Βυζαντινή αγιολογία της Κύπρου: Οι άγιοι, οι συγγραφείς και τα κείμενα (4ος - 13ος αιώνας)*. Lefkosia: Center for Scientific Research, Sources, and Studies of Cypriot History.

Epiphanius. 2014. *Ancoratus*. Translated by Young Richard Kim. Fathers of the Church Patristic Series. Washington, DC: Catholic University of America.

Fujii, Takashi. 2013. *Imperial Cult and Imperial Representation in Roman Cyprus*. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag.

Havea, Jione, Margaret Aymer, and Steed V. Davidson, eds. 2015. *Islands, Islanders, and the Bible: RumInations*. Atlanta, GA: SBL Press.

Horden, Peregrine, and Nicholas Purcell. 2000. *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History*. Oxford/Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Jacobs, Andrew S. 2021. *Epiphanius of Cyprus: A Cultural Biography of Late Antiquity*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

Jaeger, Werner. 1961. *Early Christianity and Greek Paideia*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press.

Kim, Young Richard. 2015. *Epiphanius of Cyprus: Imagining an Orthodox World*. Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press.

King, Karen L. 2008. "Which Early Christianity?" In *The Oxford Handbook of Early Christian Studies*, ed. Susan Ashbrook Harvey and David G. Hunter, 66–84. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Luijendijk, AnneMarie. 2014. *Forbidden Oracles? The Gospel of the Lots of Mary*. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Maximus of Tyre. 1997. *The Philosophical Orations*. Translated by Michael B. Trapp. Oxford: Clarendon.

Megaw, A. H. S. 1986. "Betwixt Greeks and Saracens." In *Acts of the International Archaeological Symposium "Cyprus Between the Orient and the Occident," Nicosia, 8–14 September 1985*, ed. Vassos Karageorghis, 505–19. Nicosia: Department of Antiquities.

Megaw, A. H. S. 2007. *Kourion: Excavations in the Episcopal Precinct*. Washington, DC: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection.

Metcalf, D. M. 2009. *Byzantine Cyprus 491–1191*. Nicosia: Cyprus Research Center.

Moss, Candida R. 2014. *The Myth of Persecution: How Early Christians Invented a Story of Martyrdom*. New York: HarperOne.

Nasrallah, Laura Salah. 2024. *Ancient Christians and the Power of Curses: Magic, Aesthetics, and Justice*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Nasrallah, Laura Salah, Charalambos Bakirtzis, and AnneMarie Luijendijk. 2020. *From Roman to Early Christian Cyprus: Studies in Religion and Archaeology*. Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen zum Neuen Testament 437. Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck.

Papageorghiou, Athanasios. 1993. "Cities and countryside at the end of Antiquity and the beginning of the Middle Ages in Cyprus." In *"The Sweet Land of Cyprus": Papers Given at the Twenty-Fifth Jubilee Spring Symposium of Byzantine Studies, Birmingham, March 1991*, ed. Anthony Bryer and G. S. Georghallides, 27–51. Nicosia: Cyprus Research Centre.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Rebillard, Éric. 2021. *Early Martyr Narratives: Neither Authentic Accounts nor Forgeries*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.

Stewart, Charles Anthony, Thomas W. Davis, and Annemarie Weyl Carr, eds. 2014. *Cyprus and the Balance of Empires: Art and Archaeology from Justinian I to the Coeur de Lion*, Vol. 20. The American Schools of Oriental Research archaeological reports 20.5. Boston: American Schools of Oriental Research.

van Nuffelen, Peter. 2012. "Beyond categorization: 'Pagan monotheism' and the study of ancient religion." *Common Knowledge* 18: 451–63.

Wendt, Heidi. 2016. *At the Temple Gates: The Religion of Freelance Experts in the Early Roman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press.

Wilburn, Andrew. 2012. *Material Magica: The Archaeology of Magic in Roman Egypt, Cyprus, and Spain*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.

Versnel, H. S. 2011. *Coping with the Gods: Wayward Readings in Greek Theology.* Leiden: Brill.

Zavagno, Luca. 2017. *Cyprus between Late Antiquity and the Early Middle Ages (ca. 600–800): An Island in Transition*. London: Routledge.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S1047759425000030 Published online by Cambridge University Press