

Ancient Christianity on Stone

Edited by
CHRISTIANE ZIMMERMANN
and CILLIERS BREYTENBACH

Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris
ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia
XLVIII

Mohr Siebeck

SAPERE

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ad Ethicam RELigionemque pertinentia

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zu ethischen und religiösen Fragen

Herausgegeben von
Markus Hafner und Rainer Hirsch-Luipold

Band XLVIII



Ancient Christianity on Stone

Greek Inscriptions and the Early Church

Introduction, Texts, Translations, and
Interpretative Essays by

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In memory of Stephen Mitchell

SAPERE

The increasing globalization of the ancient world in Hellenistic and Roman times resulted in exchanges across linguistic and cultural boundaries which gave rise to a wealth of literature on philosophical, ethical, and religious questions, the relevance of which continues to be rediscovered time and again. The *SAPERE* series (*Scripta Antiquitatis Posterioris ad Ethicam Religionemque pertinentia*, “Writings of Later Antiquity on Ethical and Religious Issues”), established in 2001, pursues the task of making such Greek and Latin – as well as Hebrew, Aramaic, Syriac, Coptic, and Arabic – texts accessible through an innovative combination of critical edition, translation, and interdisciplinary commentary in essay form.

The name *SAPERE* deliberately draws on the various connotations of the Latin verb. In addition to the intellectual dimension (which Kant underscored when he made *sapere aude*, ‘Have the courage to use your own reason’, the motto of the Enlightenment), the sensory dimension of “tasting” is also given its due: Source texts are prepared for scholarly discourse across various disciplines (philosophy and religious studies, philology and theology, history and archaeology, medicine and music ...), while at the same time introducing readers – who may be encountering them for the first time through *SAPERE* – to the “flavor” of these ancient texts.

SAPERE views the careful interdisciplinary analysis of the texts through essays from various scholarly perspectives as a contribution to the preservation of cultural heritage and seeks to highlight the ancient authors as interlocutors in contemporary debates.

Preface

In mid-December 2024, an unusual report appeared in leading German media outlets. *Der Spiegel* (11.12.24) announced that archaeologists had uncovered what is now considered the earliest Christian testimony north of the Alps. The find was an amulet, unearthed in 2018 during excavations near Frankfurt am Main. Discovered in the grave of a man aged between 35 and 45, the amulet contained a rolled-up inscription on a strip of silver foil. Yet it was only six years later that scholars were able to decipher the text.

The inscription began with an invocation to Titus and included a quotation from Philippians 2:10. On the basis of the archaeological context, the amulet has been dated to the third century AD. This makes it the earliest known evidence for the presence of Christianity north of the Alps in so early a period. The inscription thus represents a significant contribution to scholarship on the early spread of Christianity.

Since the foundation of the series *Early Christianity in Asia Minor* (ECAM) by Cilliers Breytenbach, the importance of inscriptions for the study of early Christianity has been increasingly recognised. This approach was subsequently extended with the establishment of *Early Christianity in Greece* (ECG). Both series re-examine the history of early Christianity at a regional level, paying particular attention to inscriptions that have hitherto received little or no scholarly notice.

When Rainer Hirsch-Luipold invited us to contribute to the SAPERE series, drawing on our work on early Christian inscriptions and the database *Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae* (ICG¹), it was immediately clear that a volume could not be based on the analysis of a single text alone. We therefore decided to involve the entire team that had contributed to the monograph series based on ICG, i.e. ECAM and ECG. Each team member selected inscriptions of particular interest. Together with Stephen Mitchell, we chose from this pool the inscriptions included in the present volume, and discussed with him and Klaus Hallof both the plan for the individual essays and the overarching concept of the book.

Contributors from different academic disciplines delivered their essays in time to be discussed at a workshop held on 29–30 April 2024 at the *Berlin-Brandenburgische Akademie der Wissenschaften*. All contributions benefited

¹ <https://icg.uni-kiel.de>

greatly from detailed group discussion and the editorial feedback of SAPERE. We are grateful to all who participated, either in person or digitally, and especially to Klaus Hallof (IG) and Rainer Hirsch-Luipold (SAPERE) for their hospitality.

We owe particular thanks to the church historian Andreas Merkt, the epigraphist Sylvain Destephen, the classicist Heinz-Günther Nesselrath, and the ancient historian Hartmut Leppin, who responded to the wish expressed at the workshop and agreed to reflect on the significance of this florilegium of early Christian inscriptions from the perspectives of their respective disciplines.

We are also indebted to Kristin Schlegel (Kiel), who meticulously adapted the manuscript to conform as far as possible with SAPERE's formal requirements for abbreviations, notes and bibliography, and to Travis Niles (Bern), who refined the English of Summa's contributions and translated the essays by Leppin and Merkt. We further thank Julius Furthmüller (Tübingen) for keeping us in line with SAPERE's formal standards.

The publication of this book was supported by a grant from the Deutsche Forschungsgemeinschaft (project 518257140).

Yet the person whose work, advice, steady support, and tireless involvement were essential in establishing ICG, ECAM, ECG, and ultimately this volume, was absent from the workshop. On 30 January 2024, Stephen Mitchell passed away. With deep sorrow and immense gratitude, we dedicate these essays to the memory of our dear friend.

June 2026

*Cilliers Breytenbach
Christiane Zimmermann*

Table of Contents

SAPERE	VII
Preface	IX
List of Figures	XV

A. Introduction

Introduction (<i>Cilliers Breytenbach, Christiane Zimmermann</i>)	3
1. Introducing Inscriptions by Christians	3
2. Basic Characteristics of Inscriptions, their Edition, and Presentation in this Volume	4
3. Identifying Inscriptions as Christian	6
4. Dating Christian Inscriptions	9
5. The Contribution of Inscriptions in Depicting the Local Histories of Early Christianities	12
5.1 Names	13
5.2 Family Structures, Virtues, and Christian Ideals of Conduct	16
5.3 Occupation and Social Status	18
5.4 Preservation and Transformation of Traditions	21
5.5 The Clergy	25
5.6 Asceticism and Other Christian Ways of Life	31
5.7 Theology	34
5.8 Persecution	37
5.9 Churches, Liturgy, and Rituals	38
5.10 Conclusion	41
6. A Short Description of the Essays in this Volume	41

B. Christian Inscriptions from Greece and Asia Minor (2nd–6th c. AD)/ Christliche Inschriften aus Griechenland und Kleinasien (2.–6. Jh. n. Chr.)

1. The Resurrected Jesus, Jonah, and the Big Fish (<i>Cilliers Breytenbach</i>)	51
2. Epitaphs from the Cemetery of the Seven Sleepers (<i>Paul Trebilco</i>)	59
3. The Lawyer, the Preacher, and a Guardian Angel: A Tale from Eumeneia in Phrygia (<i>Stephen Mitchell</i> †)	75

4. Himmlischer Lohn für tugendhaftes Leben. Das Gedenken an Regulus und seine Töchter Olympion und Aquilina (<i>Markus Öhler</i>)	97
5. Zwei Inschriften – eine Person? Ein Bischof und ein „Sackträger“ (<i>Christiane Zimmermann</i>)	105
6. Grabinschrift der Palladion. Eine Jungfrau auf dem Weg in den Himmel (<i>Ulrich Huttner</i>)	119
7. The Mosaic Inscription of Bishop Spyridon in Tremithus/ Tremithousa (<i>Daniela Summa</i>)	133
8. The Epigraphic Dossier of the Complex of ‘Eustolios’ (<i>Daniela Summa</i>)	139
9. Das „Testament“ des Philomenes (<i>Timo Christian</i>)	155
10. Bischof Firminianus und der reparierte Aquädukt des Sokrates (<i>Philipp Pilhofer</i>)	175
11. Puzzeln für Heilige. Ein christlicher Steckkalender aus Sikyon (<i>Klaus Hallof</i>)	189
12. Maria auf Ikaria. Ein christliches Pseudo-Orakel auf dem Weg durch die Ägäis (<i>Klaus Hallof</i>)	205
13. The Clerical Career of the Presbyter Daniel at Philippi (<i>Julien Ogereau</i>)	215
14. The Protocols of Honour at Ephesus: Justinian and Bishop Hypatios (<i>James R. Harrison</i>)	221
15. Heavenly Laughter in a Funerary Poem (<i>Georgios Deligiannakis and Philipp Pilhofer</i>)	241

C. Essays

Plurality and Transformation: The Epigram Selection in the Light of Two Paradigms for Conceptualizing the “Early Church” and “Ancient Christianity” (<i>Andreas Merkt</i>)	259
Christian Inscriptions from the Perspective of Ancient History (<i>Hartmut Leppin</i>)	275
Inscribing in Early and Late Antique Christianity (<i>Sylvain Destephen</i>)	291
Observations on the Language and Literary Style of Some Significant Christian Inscriptions (<i>Heinz-Günther Nesselrath</i>)	307

D. Supplements

Abbreviations	323
Bibliography	326
Concordance of Inscriptions (of B.)	337
Registers	341
1. Ancient Literature (selection)	341
2. Persons and subjects (selection)	343
Contributors to this volume	347

List of Figures¹

- Figure 1: ICG 829 (photo: Cilliers Breytenbach)
Figure 2: ICG 754 (photo: MAMA VIII 89)
Figure 3: ICG 753 (photo: MAMA VIII 88)
Figure 4: ICG 747 (photo from ECAM 2.833; courtesy of the *Calder Archives*, University of Aberdeen 3286/6/4/2/10)
Figure 5: ICG 748 (photo: MAMA VIII 64)
Figure 6: ICG 4744 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4203, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 7: ICG 4745 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4213, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 8: ICG 4746 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4215, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 9: ICG 4747 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4216, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 10: ICG 4748 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4217.2, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 11: ICG 4750 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4201, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 12: ICG 4751 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4202, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 13: ICG 4752 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4204, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 14: ICG 4753 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4205, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 15: ICG 4754 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4223, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 16: ICG 4755 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4219, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 17: ICG 4756 (*I.Ephesos* 7.2.4220, drawing: OeAW-OeAI/N. Zimmermann)
Figure 18: ICG 1031 (photo: *AnSt* 29 (1979) 178, pl. XXII [a]; courtesy of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara)
Figure 19: ICG 1028 (photo: *AnSt* 29 (1979) 177, pl. XXI [b]; courtesy of the British Institute of Archaeology at Ankara)
Figure 20: ICG 4731 (drawing: *Studia Pontica* III 20)
Figure 21: ICG 371 (photo: MAMA I 170)
Figure 22: ICG 372 (photo: ©British Institute at Ankara-PH15976)
Figure 23: ICG 4730 (photo: Christian Wallner)
Figure 24: ICG 4732 (photo: D. MICHAELIDES, *Cypriot Mosaics*, Nicosia ²1992)
Figure 25: Complex of Eustolios (MITFORD, *I.Kourion*, plan 4; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)
Figure 26: *I.Kourion* 201 [ICG 4733] (photo: Daniela Summa; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)
Figure 27: *I.Kourion* 204 [ICG 4736] (photo: Daniela Summa; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)
Figure 28: *I.Kourion* 202 [ICG 4734] (photo: Daniela Summa; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)
Figure 29: *I.Kourion* 203 [ICG 4735] (photo: Daniela Summa; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)

¹ The illustrations can be viewed at <https://icg.uni-kiel.de>.

- Figure 30: Complex of Eustolios: Overview, space with inscriptions, southern part east hall (photo: Daniela Summa; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)
- Figure 31: Complex of Eustolios: Baths, upper level with *I.Kourion* 205 [ICG 4737] (photo: Daniela Summa; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)
- Figure 32: *I.Kourion* 205 [ICG 4737] (photo: Th. Galanopoulos, 2015; courtesy of the Department of Antiquities of Cyprus)
- Figure 33: ICG 4055 (photo: Klaus Hallof; drawing: Jaime Curbera)
- Figure 34: ICG 4708 (photo: Nationalmuseum Warschau [Inv.-Nr. 198825])
- Figure 35: Zenonopolis (photo: Turgut Saner 29.08.2008; graphic: Birgit Pilhofer)
- Figure 36: ICG 2884 (drawing: Klaus Hallof)
- Figure 36a: ICG 2884 Fragment *h* (photo: K. Biliás; BBAW, Archiv der Inscriptiones Graecae)
- Figure 37: ICG 4828 (photo: A. P. Matthaiou; BBAW, Archiv der Inscriptiones Graecae; drawing: Klaus Hallof)
- Figure 38: ICG 3389 (photo: P. ASIMAKOPOULOU-ATZAKA, *Σύνταγμα των Παλαιο-χριστιανικών ψηφιδωτών δαπέδων της Ελλάδος*, vol. 3, *Μακεδονία-Θράκη*, Pt. 2, *Τα ψηφιδωτά δάπεδα της Μακεδονίας και της Θράκης (εκτός Θεσσαλονίκης)* (Thessaloniki 2017) 286–8 (no. I, 1.34), pl. 171)
- Figure 39: ICG 4646 (drawing: J. KEIL, “Johannes von Ephesos und Polykarpos von Smyrna”, in: M. ABRAHAMIC / V. HOFFILLER (eds.), *Strena Buliciana: Commentationes gratulatoriae. Francisco Bulie* (Zagreb 1924), 369–370)
- Figure 40: ICG 4652 (photo: J. KEIL / E. REISCH / F. KNOLL, *Forschungen in Ephesos*, vol. 4/1: *Die Marienkirche in Ephesos* (Wien 1932) no. 35)
- Figure 41: ICG 4711 (photo: Heinrich Schliemann-Institut, Universität Rostock; Archäologische Studiensammlung der Universität Greifswald Inv. 506)
- Figure 42: ICG 4711 (photo: Heinrich Schliemann-Institut, Universität Rostock; Archäologische Studiensammlung der Universität Greifswald Inv. 506)

A. Introduction

Introduction

Cilliers Breytenbach and Christiane Zimmermann

1. Introducing Inscriptions by Christians

To this day, depictions of the history of early Christianity have been shaped by writings from the New Testament and other texts, such as documents from the so-called Church Fathers (especially Eusebius) or the acts of the ecumenical councils etc. Scholars reconstruct the spread and institutional development of Christianity based on these sources. Well-known examples include the reconstruction of the missionary journeys of the Apostle Paul through Asia Minor and Greece, as described in the so-called Acts of the Apostles. However, one crucial source for later developments remains largely neglected in these depictions: inscriptions originating from Christians. From the end of the second century on, the study of such inscriptions proves essential for portraying the history of early Christianity and for understanding Christian literary texts.¹ Inscriptions provide insights into the particular regional characteristics of early Christian communities, their leadership hierarchies, building activities, and also theological ideas. They highlight the diversity characterizing early Christian communities, which arose within specific regional and cultural conditions. Some of these inscriptions, such as the so-called Abercius inscription,² are well-known and have undergone thorough research. However, many others are gradually gaining recognition for their significance in illustrating the history of early Christianity.³

¹ Cf. BREYTENBACH 2026. For inscriptions that help to illustrate the texts of the New Testament or the persons named in them, see C. BREYTENBACH, “Das entstehende Christentum und griechische Epigraphik”, in: S. ALKIER / M. RYDRYCK (eds.), *Neutestamentliche Wissenschaft heute: Zur Enzyklopädischen Selbstverständlichung einer theologischen Disziplin* (Paderborn 2026), part III.

² Cf. MITCHELL 2023b, 87–99; ICG 1597; BLANK 2023.

³ Cf. MITCHELL 1993; BREYTENBACH / ZIMMERMANN 2018; HUTTNER 2013; HUTTNER 2025; MITCHELL 2023b; BREYTENBACH / TZAVELLA 2023; OGHEREAU 2023; PILHOFFER 2018. These volumes trace what became of some of the churches already mentioned in the New Testament and which churches were added when and where (cf. the overview in BREYTENBACH 2026). In the meantime, the first thematic studies on individual topics that can be illuminated on the basis of the inscriptions are also available. These include, for example, the early Christian use of the Bible, especially the Psalms and the Book of Isaiah

This volume neither introduces Greek epigraphy in general nor delves into all inscriptions that can be regarded as of Christian origin.⁴ It focuses on selected Greek inscriptions from Asia Minor and Greece that were put up by Christians, to which we refer short hand as “Christian inscriptions”.⁵ The volume also does not aim to discuss well-known and frequently mentioned inscriptions. Instead, it presents a selection of particularly interesting Christian inscriptions from the second to the sixth centuries, showcasing both the individuality and diversity of these texts and their messages. Before they are presented in section B., a few preliminary remarks about understanding (Christian) inscriptions as historical sources are necessary.

2. Basic Characteristics of Inscriptions, their Edition, and Presentation in this Volume

What distinguishes inscriptions as historical sources? Inscriptions consist of carvings in stone made at a specific time and placed in a definite location. They primarily served as immovable memorials for a limited audience. Since many inscriptions can be dated and localized, they are important sources for local history.

We can categorize inscriptions, although these categories often have a fluid character. Epigraphy typically distinguishes between decrees, honorary inscriptions, dedicatory inscriptions, building inscriptions, and funerary inscriptions. We should differentiate graffiti and dipinti from inscriptions: while inscriptions were carved in stone or highlighted in colour in a mosaic, graffiti were scratched into an object, and dipinti were painted with colour or ink on a (wall) surface.

We cannot interpret the text of an inscription without considering its material context. The carriers of the inscriptions typically consist of basalt, limestone, sandstone, or marble. It is crucial to know where, on what, and in what local context an inscription was found. Does it come from a building or a cemetery? Was it part of a tomb? Each contribution to the selected

(BREITENBACH 2023), Christian asceticism (ZIMMERMANN C. 2015a) the role of women in early Christianity (ZIMMERMANN C. 2015b, ead. 2014), and Christian imprecations (ZIMMERMANN C. 2021 and 2026).

⁴ Cf. KLAFFENBACH 1966; WOODHEAD 1967; ROBERT 1970; MCLEAN 2002; on Christian epigraphy, cf. KAUFMANN 1917; GROSSI-GONDI 1920; GUARDUCCI, *Epigrafia Greca IV*; BOFFO, *Iscrizioni Bibbia*.

⁵ With a few exceptions (e.g. ICG 1882, 3226, 3273, 3302, 4196, 4379), the Christian inscriptions of Asia Minor (up to the Amanus Mountains in the east) and Greece are Greek. For the Greek inscriptions of Rome and Italy, see FELLE 2018. The extensive (Latin) inscriptions of the West and the multilingual inscriptions of Syro-Palestine and Egypt deserve separate treatment.

inscriptions in this volume addresses this question at the beginning by providing an image (if available) and a description of the monument. These essential details, along with the monument's history of discovery, are typically thoroughly covered in the first publication of an inscription; in the present contributions, we summarize these aspects briefly with references to previous literature. The overwhelming majority of inscriptions attributed to Christians are funeral inscriptions and should be interpreted accordingly.⁶

The texts of the inscriptions originally appear in majuscule script, usually in *scriptio continua*, meaning without separation of words. In the contributions of this volume, we present them in an edited, readable version (i.e., according to the proposed epigraphic reading, considering upper/lower case, word spacing, and diacritical marks such as accents and punctuation). We preserve the original line division of the inscription, numbering every fifth line on the side in Arabic numerals, e.g., (5), (10), etc.

Over time, stones carrying the inscriptions often suffered damage or breakage, and many inscriptions survive only in fragments. A significant part of an epigrapher's work involves reconstructing missing parts of an inscription to render the text readable and understandable.⁷ To make the stone's condition and the epigrapher's work visible in the edition, we use a system of brackets and diacritical marks. This system was adopted from papyrologists at the Orientalist Congress in Leiden in September 1931 and has become binding for epigraphy since 1932, with only minor adjustments over time. According to this system the signals mean the following:

- []: Addition of missing letters by the editor
- [...]: Number of missing letters (in this case: three)
- [– – –]: An indeterminate number of missing letters
- (αβ): Resolution of abbreviations in the inscription by the editor; often used for the so-called *nomina sacra*
- <αβ>: Addition of letters omitted by the stonemason, corrected by the editor
- {αβ}: Deletion of evidently incorrect letters in the inscription by the editor
- αβ: Ambiguous letter fragments that can be read with some certainty
- [[αβ]]: Erasure of letters by the stonemason
- αβ_α: Letters overwritten by the stonemason, where traces of the earlier script remain legible
- ν vac.: Blank spots on the stone (ν = one letter, νν = two letters, vac. or vacat = several letters)
- |: Line break
- /: End of a metric unit.

⁶ On the context of funerary inscriptions, see ARDELEANU / CUBAS DÍAZ 2023; CUBAS DÍAZ 2021, 127–138.

⁷ Holy names have been abbreviated since the 2nd century: $\overline{\Theta\Sigma} = \theta(\epsilon\acute{o})\varsigma$, $\overline{X\Sigma} = \chi(\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{o})\varsigma$, $\overline{\Pi\beta} = \pi(\rho\epsilon\sigma\beta\acute{\upsilon}\tau\epsilon\rho\omicron)\varsigma$, etc.

3. Identifying Inscriptions as Christian

No corpus of ancient Greek Christian inscriptions exists. This results from the fact that epigraphic corpus undertakings (*IG*, *TAM*, *ETAM*, *IK*, *RECAM*, etc.) tend to cover smaller geographical and topographical areas where Christian inscriptions also appear but usually in small numbers.⁸ To create a genuine corpus of Christian inscriptions, larger units and cross-regional collections would be necessary. In the last century, two approaches emerged to address this: The *Recueil des Inscriptions Grecques Chrétiennes*, planned by the French Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres since 1905, resulted in only one volume for Egypt and one for Asia Minor.⁹ The Corpus of Greek-Christian Inscriptions of Hellas led to a partial Volume I and a Volume X for Crete.¹⁰ For some Balkan countries, collections of their Christian inscriptions exist and Macedonia within its ancient borders received exemplary attention from Denis Feissel.¹¹ However, for wide parts of the ancient world, scholars must rely on regional corpora and journal articles. Nevertheless, the *Inscriptiones Graecae* (*IG*), contrary to an agreement made in 1902 between the relevant commissions of the Prussian Academy, have consistently included Christian inscriptions in volumes published since 1999.¹² This reflects a new understanding of Late Antiquity as a coexistence of “pagan” and “Christian” cultures that should not be artificially separated in the study of epigraphic sources from any period.

Scholars typically collect inscriptions found in a particular region along with all other inscriptions from that area in regional corpora,¹³ usually categorizing them based on the categories mentioned in section 2 and arranging them chronologically within these categories.

Epigraphy has the unique characteristic among the disciplines of ancient studies that the influx of new material remains constant. Each year, scholars discover or edit up to a thousand new Greek inscriptions. Two annual publications compile these new finds. The *Supplementum epigraphicum Graecum* (*SEG*) publishes new texts in full, with brief commentary, about five years

⁸ Just two examples: The island of Kos has only about 35 Christian inscriptions out of 3933; the Boeotian city of Tanagra has 12 Christian inscriptions out of 2032.

⁹ Egypt: *IChr. Egypte*; Asia Minor: *IChr. Asie Mineure* (covering Caria, Lycia, Pamphylia, Lydia, and part of the Aegean islands).

¹⁰ For Isthmia and Corinth: *IChr. Peloponnes* (only the first sections were published); for Crete: *IChr. Crete*.

¹¹ For Bulgaria: *IChr. Bulgarien*; BEŠEVLEV 1979; for Romania: *IChr. Romania*; for Macedonia: *IChr. Macédoine*.

¹² For two places, Athens and Corinth, the number was so large that separate fascicles were published: *IG* II/III²5; *IG* IV² 3.

¹³ Cf. e.g. *IG*, *IK*, *RECAM*, *TAM*.

after their initial publication.¹⁴ The *Bulletin épigraphique* (in the *Revue des études grecques*) reports more quickly but only summarizes newly edited inscriptions from the previous year. Until 2016, it featured its own section on Christian and Byzantine inscriptions, for which Feissel was responsible. His profound readings and insightful comments, crucial for understanding new texts, have been reprinted separately for the years 1987–2004.¹⁵

Occasionally, Christian inscriptions appear in their own sections within regional corpora. The most important inscriptions for studying early Christian history from these regional corpora¹⁶, as well as from individual publications, now exist in a digital database: *Inscriptiones Christianae Graecae* (ICG).¹⁷ Due to the significance of Asia Minor and Greece for the early spread of Christianity, the Greek inscriptions by and for Christians from these two regions were included in the ICG first. All inscriptions discussed in this volume are digitally accessible via the ICG database.¹⁸

But which criteria can help identify inscriptions as of Christian origin? The answer to this question is less straightforward than expected, as early Christians had no specific reason to identify themselves explicitly as “Christians” on sepulchral or building inscriptions or to mention Jesus Christ.¹⁹ The worship of one or more deities did not form part of the information typically provided about the deceased in funerary inscriptions; far more significant was mentioning family relationships and, if applicable, listing of the virtues of the deceased. More indications from the end of the second century AD onwards do allow scholars to identify inscriptions as Christian. This trend increases in the third and fourth centuries AD, and from the fifth century onwards, most people in the core areas of the Roman Empire were Christian anyway. Scholars thus consider the majority of inscriptions from this time likely to be created by Christians. For studying the spread of early Christianity from the second/third to the sixth centuries AD, certain criteria are important for identifying monuments that were erected by and for Christians. The following criteria can help identify inscriptions:²⁰

1. Sometimes, names on a tomb inscription signal a Christian individual or family – for instance, when the name of the deceased or their relatives

¹⁴ Continuously published since vol. 26 (reporting year 1976). The volumes are accessible as a database (<https://scholarlyeditions.brill.com/sego/>).

¹⁵ FEISSEL 2006; see also FEISSEL 1989.

¹⁶ For further details, see BREYTENBACH 2023.

¹⁷ <https://icg.uni-kiel.de>. For earlier collections, see BREYTENBACH / OGEREAU 2017.

¹⁸ Even if the ICG database is very helpful for quick consultation, it does not replace the underlying editions of the inscriptions, which contain illustrations, basic information about the place of discovery, dating and the editorial history of the texts. These are noted in ICG.

¹⁹ Cf. also LEPPIN 2024.

²⁰ Cf. the more detailed account in BREYTENBACH / ZIMMERMANN 2018, 8–13.

comes from biblical tradition (such as Peter, Mary, or John). Later, other names became common primarily among Christians, like Thecla, Anastasia/os, Kyriake/os, Anenkletos, Aphthonia/os, and Sophronia/os. Christians did not name their children Jesus or Jesus Christ. However, the occurrence of these names in reference to the Lord clearly indicates a Christian monument, though it appears relatively rarely. In some cases, an inscription also uses a *nomen sacrum*, a sacred abbreviation. For example, an acclamation from Athens (ICG 1917) begins with the *nomen sacrum*: $\overline{\text{IC}}$ (Iesous) and adds $\overline{\text{XC}}$ (Christos Soter – “Christ the Savior”).²¹

2. Inscriptions with crosses provide strong evidence of Christian origin. Crosses could be carved above or below the text, beside or even between the letters²², or placed within a decorative arrangement, such as in a circle. The inscription itself can begin or end with a cross or be arranged around a cross.²³ A cross can also appear in an arch, symbolizing the door to the altar, with the cross representing the crucified Christ.²⁴ On an Attic epitaph, crosses even flank a swastika.²⁵ Crosses often appear later, having been added to an inscription.²⁶ The crosses vary in form: Greek (+ +), Latin († †), Maltese (✠), and so on. Some are circled ($\oplus$), flanked by doves or stars or adorned with ivy leaves (*hederae* ☙).²⁷ A unique cross with splayed feet appears on limestone blocks near Lystra.²⁸

3. Other Christian symbols include staurograms (⌞), Christograms (☩), and the letters *Alpha* and *Omega* (Α Ω).²⁹ These often appear alone or in combination with crosses or Christograms. Crosses and staurograms serve as the most frequent markers of a Christian inscription.

4. Specific Christian terminology remains rare. Although the term “Christians” (Χριστιανοί) was already used in the first century AD as an external description for Christians in Antioch (Acts 11:26), it only appears on Christian gravestones from the fourth century AD onwards, but even then only

²¹ Cf. note 7.

²² ICG 121, 2165, 2176, 1918, 1919, 2094. Some of the earliest Christian funerary inscriptions from Cyprus (2nd–3rd c. AD) include the name of the deceased followed by the usual pagan funerary expression $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\epsilon}/\eta\ \chi\acute{\alpha}\iota\rho\epsilon$ with X carved in shape of a cross or written $\chi\rho\iota\sigma\tau\acute{\epsilon}$. However, in most cases these elements cannot prove the Christian faith of the deceased, s. SUMMA 2019, 231–232 for further references.

²³ ICG 1912, 1933, 1990, 1993, 2172a.

²⁴ ICG 1880.

²⁵ ICG 2048.

²⁶ ICG 84, 113, 1132.

²⁷ ICG 2174, 2239, 2173, 1935, 1988.

²⁸ ICG 829, see B.I. BREYTENBACH, “The Resurrected Jesus, Jonah, and the Big Fish”, 51–53.

²⁹ ICG 304, 534, 1900, 1904, 1910, 1924, 1966, 2028, 2029, 2047, 2217.

very rarely.³⁰ Earlier exceptions come from inscriptions “from Christians for Christians” (Χριστιανοὶ Χριστιανοῖς) in the Upper Tembris Valley in Phrygia.³¹ By the fourth century, Christians frequently identified themselves as πιστοί (the faithful).³² In Late Antiquity, inscriptions also referred to individuals as “slave of Christ” (δοῦλος/ῆ Χριστοῦ) or “slave of the Lord” (κυρίου) or “slave of God” (θεοῦ).³³

5. Besides crosses and specific terms, other indications mark an inscription as Christian: some monuments explicitly mention that the deceased belonged to a church or specific Christian group.³⁴ Biblical quotes, allusions, and Christian titles such as bishop, presbyter, deacon, reader, or monk also identify a monument as Christian.³⁵

6. In the Greek East, Christian inscriptions rarely depict animals or human figures.³⁶ However, some animals – such as lambs, fish, peacocks, and doves³⁷ – may point to a Christian origin, especially when paired with other signs for Christian origin.

7. Certain terms, like κοιμητήριον (place of rest), πιστή / πιστός (faithful), ἀναπαύομαι (to rest), and specific formulas, often suggest Christian inscriptions. For example, the “Eumeneian formula” ἔσται αὐτῷ πρὸς τὸν θεόν (“he will be accountable to God”) or the formula δώσει λόγον θεῷ, which warns tomb violators of divine judgment³⁸, strongly suggest Christian origins.

8. Christian provenance becomes even more probable when the inscription’s original location is a church, a Christian cemetery, or another place used by believers.

4. Dating Christian Inscriptions

Dating inscriptions presents a notorious challenge. Since few Christian monuments carry explicit dates, and even fewer of those dates can be definitively linked to a specific year, epigraphers must rely on other methods

³⁰ ICG 922, 973, 974, 1142, 1225, 1284, 1289, 1477, 2079, 2121, 4917.

³¹ Cf. MITCHELL 2023b, 211–264, 340.

³² ICG 116–122, 211, 286, 371, 848, 1501, 2079.

³³ ICG 322, 476, 531, 736, 762, 872, 1087.

³⁴ ICG 115, 327, 619, 1271.

³⁵ See below 5.5.

³⁶ Depictions of people can be found in ICG 171, 1086, 1087, 1224, 1362, 1365, 4503; see also the personification in B.8. SUMMA, “The Epigraphic Dossier of the Complex of ‘Eustolios’”, 151.

³⁷ On the dove as a metaphor, see also B.6. HUTTNER, “Grabinschrift der Palladion”, 128–131.

³⁸ Cf. MITCHELL 2023b, 110–5; on these formulae and other variants, see also BREYTENBACH / ZIMMERMANN 2018, 518–28.

to estimate an inscription's age. The commonly held view that crosses only appeared as Christian symbols after Emperor Constantine's time is contradicted by the identification of staurograms (✠) from the late second and crosses dating back to the third century.³⁹ The following points can help in dating inscriptions:

1. Prominent, datable figures like emperors and governors rarely appear in Christian inscriptions. However, after the *Constitutio Antoniniana* in AD 212 of Caracalla (211–217), who was adopted by Marcus Aurelius, the vast majority of new Roman citizens received the Aurelius *gentilicium* (family name). The presence of the family name "Aurelius" in inscriptions (e.g., ICG 748) suggests a date from the third century onward. The absence of this name (e.g., ICG 747, 774) might indicate that the inscription is even older.⁴⁰ The Flavius *gentilicium* became common starting in the fourth century, likely due to the first "Christian" emperor, C. Flavius Valerius Constantinus (306–337). Those who entered public service had the right to use the family name "Flavius."

2. Inscriptions that focus solely on the family relationships of the deceased tend to be older than those that mention Christian church membership or titles like bishop, deacon, or monk.

3. Certain key words or formulas can be linked to specific time periods. For instance, the closing formula *μνήμης χάριν* ("for the sake of memory") often suggests a date before AD 212. In some regions, such as Corinth, the term *κοιμητήριον* ("sleeping place") for tombs became significantly more common after the fifth century AD.

4. Groups of stylistically similar tombstones allow more confident dating than isolated pieces. For example, Mitchell demonstrated that certain inscriptions could be grouped based on their exterior or semantic similarities.⁴¹ Once a single text from such a group is dated, other inscriptions from the group can be similarly placed. This principle also applies to groups of inscriptions using certain phrases, such as those threatening tomb violators (see 5.4). Mitchell used the so-called "Eumeneian formula," already widespread among Christians before the mid-third century, as a dating criterion.⁴²

5. The origin, style, and decoration of the inscription's carrier stone can assist in dating inscriptions. If a monument from a specific masonry can be dated, other similar pieces from the same workshop likely come from the

³⁹ Cf. BREYTENBACH / ZIMMERMANN 2018, 15–8, ICG 747, 748, 829, 1551; see also SPIER 2007, 30–2, pl. 18–20; ROTH 2021.

⁴⁰ Cf. MITCHELL 2023b, 184.

⁴¹ MITCHELL 2023b, 16.

⁴² Cf. MITCHELL 2023b, 112–5, 126–130, 134, 143, 176; for further formulae see BREYTENBACH / ZIMMERMANN 2018, 14, 18, 20–3, 118, 149, 160, 194, 227–8, 246, 254–5, 262–3, 283, 514–528.

Index of Ancient Literature (selection)

Old Testament and Apocrypha

Gen 7–8	56
Deut 32:18	100
Ps 2:7	100
Jonah	53–4, 56–7
3 Macc 6:8	53

New Testament

Matt 10:11–14	103
Matt 12:39–40	53
Luke 1:53	101
Luke 23:42–43	70–1
Rom 12:13	103
Phil 4:4–7	70
Col 2:18	92
1 Tim 3:3.8	102
Heb 13:2	103
1 Pet 3:20	56
1 Pet 4:9	103
1 John 5:1	100

Other Christian Literature

<i>Acta et Martyrium Andreae</i>	55–8, 251
<i>Acta Ioannis</i> 107.9	254
<i>Acta Pauli et Theclae</i>	34, 182
Alexander Monachus <i>Laud. Barnab.</i>	301
<i>Apocalypsis Petri</i>	253
Augustinus Hipponensis <i>De mor.</i> 1.75	167
<i>Ep.</i> 22.1.6	167–8

Basilius Caesariensis	249
<i>Ep.</i> 46	127
<i>Homilia in SS. In mart. Sebast.</i> 2	298–9

Pseudo-Basilius Caesariensis <i>Hom. Virg.</i> 1.4; 4.2	127
--	-----

Clemens Romanus <i>1 Clem.</i> 10.7; 11.1; 12.1 and 3	103
---	-----

<i>Didache</i> 11–13; 13.3	103
----------------------------	-----

<i>Epistula Tertia ad Corinthios</i> 3:29–30	53–4
---	------

Eusebius Caesariensis <i>HE</i> 3.31	227, 300
4.23.10	103
5.24	227
5.24.2–3	300
6.25.9	227

Flavius Josephus <i>AJ</i> 9.213	53
-------------------------------------	----

Gregorius Nazianzenus	116, 123, 125–6, 129–30
<i>De virginitate</i>	126–7
<i>Carm. de se ipso</i> 32	130
<i>Carm. mor.</i> 1.197 f.	128
<i>or.</i> 8.7; 8.10	125–6
(→ <i>Anthologia Graeca</i>)	

Gregorius Nyssenens <i>V. Greg. Thaum.</i>	88
---	----

Gregorius Thaumaturgus <i>Pan. in Orig.</i> 6	95
--	----

Hieronymus <i>C. Vig.</i> 4	166
--------------------------------	-----

Ioannes Chrysostomus	249–50	<i>Anthologia Graeca</i> 8.33	129
		8.119.3f.	125
Irenaeus Lugdunensis			
<i>Adv. haer.</i> 5.5.2	54	Dio Chrysostomus	
		<i>Or.</i> 34	230
Iustinus Martyr			
<i>Dial.</i> 138.1	56	Hesiodus	
		<i>Op.</i>	172
<i>Martyrium Perpetuae et Felicitatis</i>			
	251	Homerus	
		<i>Il.</i> 3.292, 4.510, 4.540	147
<i>Martyrium Pionii presbyteri et sodalium</i>		<i>Od.</i> 4.72–74, 5.244,	147–50
	85, 252	8.57, 8.362–366, 11.250,	
		17.319, 19.494, 22.204,	
		24.212	
Origenes			
<i>C. Cels.</i> 5.59–61	266	<i>Hymni homerici</i>	
		5.58–66	150
Tertullianus			
<i>Apol.</i> 39.5–6	235	Martial	
		<i>Epigr.</i> 8.75	239
Theodoretus Cyrrensis			
<i>Comm. in ep. ad Col.</i> 2.18		Menander	
	92	<i>Gnomai</i> 283; 291	84
Theodorus Paphensis			
<i>Vita Spyridonis</i>	137	<i>Oracula Sibyllina</i> 8.302	56
Canones		Philo Alexandrinus	
		<i>Cher.</i> 43f.	100
Concilium Laodicense, <i>Canon</i> 35		<i>Spec.</i> 1.221	237
	93		
		Plinius minor	
		<i>Ep.</i> 3.5.4	239
		<i>Ep.</i> 10.96	292
Other Greek and Latin Works			
		Quintus Smyrnaeus	
Aelius Aristides		<i>Posthom.</i>	171–2, 313–4
<i>Fr.</i> 15.7	103		

Index of Persons and Subjects (selection)

- Afterlife 97–101, 119–22, 128–30,
 246–50, 248–50, 285
 Ambrose 254
 Amphilochius of Iconium 22, 33, 117,
 263
 Angel 88, 92–4, 261–2, 285
 Antiquity 269–70
 Antisemitism 24, 239, 280
 Apamea 19, 56, 76
 Apollo 139, 142–5, 152, 207, 270–1
 Apostolicity 228, 262, 267, 299–300
 Asceticism 16, 18, 31–4, 115, 126, 130,
 263–5, 267, 271–4
 Atticism 307
- Basil of Ancyra 126–7
 Basil of Caesarea 33, 249, 263, 298
 Beliefs 34–7, 268, 285
 Bishops 25, 26, 88, 108–10, 114–7,
 122, 130, 135–8, 153, 167–8, 172,
 177, 180–2, 185, 198–9, 218, 220,
 226, 230, 262, 263–4, 274, 286–7,
 296–301, 304
 Blind spots 288–9, 305
 Body/Soul 36, 128–9, 248, 268
 Burial 232–9, 280
- Calendar 189–204, 262, 305
 Catacombs 54, 93
 Cemetery 155–9, 162–5, 278
 Cemetery of the Seven Sleepers 59, 66–7,
 74
 Christianisation 21, 269, 272, 277–8,
 306
 Church building/basilica 38–40,
 108–10, 153, 165, 182, 187, 214,
 222–3, 226, 235, 239, 287, 292, 304–5
 Classical tradition 139, 283, 296, 312
 Classicism 307
 Clergy 25–31, 36, 109, 263–7, 279, 284,
 304
 Constantinople 219
 Cross 8, (9–10), 52–3, 54–6, 242–3, 26,
 261, 262–3, 277, 304
- Cross, anthropomorphic 52–3, 54–6,
 262–3, 277
 Curse 9, 24–5, 75, 82, 88–9, 159, 163–4,
 239, 283, 303–4
 Cyprus 133–8, 139–50, 300–1, 312–3
- Deacon 25, 29–30, 217, 219, 220, 297
 Deaconess 296–7
 Dekanoi 236, 266
 Devil 244–5
 Dove 9, 121, 128–30, 132, 147
- Education 19, 21–2, 29, 31, 86, 87, 88, 95,
 172, 219, 269, 271, 283, 302, 308
 Egypt 243, 253, 264, 282, 284
 Elite 286, 303
 Ephesus 59–69, 71–4, 66–7, 72, 74, 114,
 136, 153, 199, 221, 226, 229–30, 231,
 236, 239, 262, 267, 294, 299–300
 Epigraphic habit 276–82, 291, 305
 Eschatology 34–7, 70, 248, 250, 251,
 255
 Euergetism 18, 139, 144–5, 152, 162,
 179, 273, 287, 297, 302–3
 Eumeneia 20, 75–8, 86–8, 311
- Faith (→ beliefs) 31–2, 36–7, 41, 74, 86,
 108, 117, 142, 148, 209, 246, 250–1, 286,
 287, 293, 296, 305
 Family 10, 12–8, 28, 99–103, 122, 162–3,
 166, 268, 282, 301
 Feast of the Dead 166–9
 Firminianus (bishop of Zenonopolis)
 181–2, 185, 309
 Fish 52–7, 277
 Formulae 9, 10, 24, 25, 37, 52, 60–73,
 75–6, 93, 122, 131, 164, 214, 267–8, 278,
 292, 302, 304
 Funeral rites 155–60, 162–3
- Genres of inscriptions 277–81, 293–306
 Gregory of Nazianzus 115–6, 312–4, 316
 Gregory Thaumaturgos 88, 94–5
 Grief 131

- Hades 34–5, 53, 81, 85, 248
 Heaven 35, (121, 128–30), 228, 241–5,
 246–7, 248, 253–5
 Hebrew 83–4, 282
 Hedonism 250
 Hexameter (→ poetry) 313–9
 Holy (→ saints) 23, 81, 94, 127, 134–6, 225,
 229, 231, 234, 245, 247, 263, 300, 305,
 189–204
 Homer 144, 147–50, 162, 170–1, 271, 295,
 302, 314,
 Honour 221–31, 273–4
 Hospitality 103, 273
 Hypatios 232–40, 273, 310
- Iconium 14, 19–20, 27, 29, 33–34, 52
 Iconography (→ cross) 164, 302
 Ikaria 205–8, 212–4
 Individuality 268–9
 Inscriptions
 – Building inscriptions 11, 12, 135,
 175–82
 – Classification as ‘Christian’ 6–9
 – Dating 9–11, 66–8, 179–80
 – Ecclesiastical inscriptions 296–301
 – Funeral inscriptions 293–5 and *passim*
 – Verse inscriptions 21–2, 28, 78, 79,
 82, 84, 99, 111, 116, 124–5, 131, (135),
 137–8, 144, 147, 149, 160–2, 170–1, 209,
 243, 247, 248, 254, 271, (274), 280, 296,
 301, 303, 311–5, 316–20
- Jesus Christ 146–7, 238, 244–7, 253–6, 304
 Jew/Jewish 24, 30, 56, 69, 75, 83–4, 86,
 92–4, 239, 282
 John 223, 226–8, 231, 235, 239, 299–300
 Jonah 53–7, 268, 277
 Joy (→ laughter) 81, 249, 250, 251–2, 254,
 256
 Justinian 222–6, 299–300
- Kanonikai 236–7, 266
 Koimeterion (sleeping place/tomb) 169
 Kourion 139, 141–4, 147, 151, 152–3, 303
- Language 271, 282–3, 291, 302, 307–20
 Laodicea Combusta 105, 111, 312
 Laodicea Pontica 97
 Late Antiquity 6, 83, 220, 279, 286, 289,
 295, 299, 300, 302, 305
 Laughter 246, 247, 248–9, 251–2, 253–4,
 255, 285
- Lector (→ reader)
 Light 85, 165–6, 283
 Liturgy 38–40
 Longinus (brother of Zenon) 177, 179
 Lycaonia 51–2, 56–7
 Lystra 8, 14, 27, 52, 102, 261, 284
- Marcus Iulius Eugenius (bishop) 13–4, 20,
 107–11, 117, 286, 308
 Martyrs 37–8, 73, 132, 167, 177, 179,
 181–3, 189, 193, 194–200, 203, 246–7,
 250–253, 254–5, 268, 293, 298, 299,
 305
 Mary (holy virgin) 228, 234, 235, 272
 Maximinus Daia 108, 109, 117, 265
 Metrical errors 312, 314
 Metrics (→ inscriptions → verse in-
 scriptions)
 Military 21
 Montanism 86
 Mosaic 38, 39, 67–8, 134, 135–6, 138, 139,
 140, 141–2, 147–8, 151, 152, 153, 217,
 218, 219, 279, 287, 301
 Mourning 131, 249–50
- Nag Hammadi 253
 Names 13–5, 311
 Noah’s Ark 56–7, 87, 129
 Nomen sacrum 8, 82
 Nonnos 172, 313–4, 316
- Occupations 18–21
 Oppianus 314, 316, 318
 Origen 87–8, 94–5
- Paideia (→ education) 144, 149, 295, 311
 Paradise 36, 70, 250, 252–6
 Parapegma (→ calendar) 190, 203–4
 Persecution 20, 37–8, 67, 72–3, 108, 109,
 117, 203, 265, 282, 287, 288, 305, 308
 Philanthropy 237–8
 Philippi 215–20, 301, 309
 Piety 86, 101, 150, 152, 285, 296, 298, 303
 Plurality 261–5, 268–9
 Polycarp of Smyrna 226, 228, 231, 239,
 299
 Poverty 18, 101–2, 144, 232–9, 263, 273–4
 Presbyter 25, 26–8, 29, 215–20, 263–4
 Purity 32, 126–8,
- Quadratus 193
 Quintus of Smyrna 171–2, 313–4

- Reader 25, 30–1, 217, 218–9, 264
Resurrection 34–7, 51–7, 72, 74, 85, 170, 277, 293
Rivalry (ecclesial) 221, 226, 229, 239, 283
Roubes 77, 82–8, 92, 94–5, 284

Saints 182–3, 189–90, 193–204, 223, 226–8, 231, 235, 239, 252, 262, 298–301
Self-Presentation 276–80, 286–7, 279
Sikyon 189–91
Smile (→ laughter) 247, 249, 250–1, 252, 253–5, 304
Smyrna 226–31
St Sokrates 182–3
Son of Man 53, 54, 56
Soul 36, 94, 100–2, 128–9, 248, 268
Spyridon (bishop of) 135–8, 301

Tanagra 155–73
Tavium 119
Theodoros of Paphos (bishop) 137
Theology 34–7
Tremithus/Tremithousa 135, 136
Trinity 157, 244–5

Values/virtues 17–8, 149, 285–6
Virginité 125–8, 225, 265, 270–2, 286, 296

Women 16–8, 19, 30, 31–4, 97–103, 119–32, 150, 264, 284, 206–7

Zenonopolis 175–9, 183, 184–6, 298