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Community, Church, and Conversion in the Prefecture of Illyricum and the Cyclades

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Abstract and Keywords

This chapter surveys, through a series of case studies, the material aspects of early Christianity in provinces in the dioceses of Macedonia and Asia (Achaëa, Thessalia, Macedonia Prima, Macedonia Secunda, Creta, and the Cyclades now in modern Greece). While many of the urban spaces see some topographic changes in the fourth and fifth centuries, the biggest impact on both urban and rural environments is the construction of a diverse range of Late Antique churches. Church construction begins earlier in Macedonia and the islands than in the rest of mainland Greece, which reflects more diverse network connections in these areas. Within specific topographic regions (e.g., Crete, the Peloponnese), network connections play a role in the choice of church location, but the analysis of the spread of churches clearly indicates a steady process of religious conversion. The archaeology and topography of early Christian churches therefore provides a significant contribution to understanding processes of Christianization.

Keywords: Paros, Achaëa, Thessaly, Macedonia Prima, Macedonia Secunda, Crete, networks, Christianization, churches, architecture

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Introduction

WHILE there is clear evidence for Christian communities from the first to the fourth centuries in the eastern Greek provinces, their manifestation is most apparent from the late fourth century with the construction of the first churches.¹ This takes place in Macedonia, the Cyclades, and Crete from the late fourth century, while church

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construction in Achaëa reaches its height in the late fifth and sixth centuries. This lateness, particularly in Achaëa, is distinct from other places in the empire such as Rome and Palestine, where churches are built from the early fourth century.²

Recent scholarly study has shown that the Christianization of the eastern Greek provinces was a measured process, with elements of strategic and organic development (Sweetman 2015b). This work has also raised three interrelated questions: Where did the impetus for church construction come from? How did conversion processes avoid causing significant community friction? In the absence of a directed process, how did ideas spread (Sweetman 2015a, 2015b)? To answer these questions, this chapter will focus on the provinces of Achaëa, Thessaly, Macedonia Prima, and Crete in the diocese of Macedonia in the praetorian prefecture of Illyricum, as well as the Cyclades, which were part of the *provincia insularum* in the diocese of Asia in the praetorian prefecture of Oriens. Epirus and Macedonia Secunda are covered by Bowden (Chapter 28 in this volume).³ The overlapping political and ecclesiastical jurisdictions covered in this chapter create another layer of comparative data across shared connections through a diversity of channels. For example, Achaëa and Crete were under papal jurisdiction from Rome but were administered as part of the Eastern Empire under the political power of Constantinople (Makrides 2009, 51). The Cyclades came under the jurisdiction of the diocese of Rhodes, and the *provincia insularum* was under the political and ecclesiastical control of the East.

The aim of this chapter is to illustrate how a variety of material culture sheds light on the development of Christian communities, from the earliest dispersed groups to a more concerted program of religious conversion beginning in the fourth century, when evidence for both polytheistic and Christian traditions commonly coexists. Churches and their decor provide the main focus for this study, and the application of network analysis to the material culture illuminates the processes behind religious conversion from the foundation of the earliest churches of the fourth century to their diffusion throughout the fifth and sixth centuries (Sweetman 2015b).

Historiography

The focus of excavation and study of the Late Antique period has been on church archaeology. Excavation work on the early Christian churches in Greece began in the early part of the twentieth century, with archaeologists such as Soteriou, Orlandos, Pallas, and Stikas excavating and publishing churches across Greece (Figure 27.1). More recent work has included publications ranging from Tigani in the southern Mani (Drandakis, Gioles, and Konstantinidi 1981) to Alikì in Thassos (Sodini and Kolokotsas 1984). At this point, with a very small number of exceptions, most of the known churches in Greece have been excavated, although new examples are still identified in rescue excavations and survey (Sweetman 2013b).

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Figure 27.1 Map of sites and toponyms noted in the text in the region of Macedonia and Greece, based on Natural Earth Data, and the Ancient World Mapping Center: "Mod_Elevation," <http://awmc.unc.edu/wordpress/map-files>.

(Map: Courtesy of David K. Pettegrew)

While the focus of the earlier excavations was recovering the churches and establishing possible chronologies, more recent work has concentrated on specific details concerning church architecture or on particular themes. Grabar (1972) worked on martyria, while Asimakopoulou-Atzaka (1987) produced extensive records and analysis of the Late Antique mosaics (including secular ones). Epigraphic material was analyzed by scholars

including Feissel (1980, 1983), Bandy (1963, 1970), and Kiourtzian (2000). While issues of establishing chronologies still encumber progress for the Late Antique period, ongoing ceramic studies by scholars such as Slane and Sanders (2005), Diamanti (Opait and Diamanti 2014), and Tzavella (2014) will help refine church (p. 517) chronologies in the future. Other scholars have considered church construction within the context of wider Late Antique occupation; (see, for example, Oikonomou-Laniado 2003 for Argos and Rothaus 2000 for Corinthia); Avraméa's 1997 volume on the Late Antique Peloponnese was a promising start at synthesizing much of the material known at that point for that broad area. Attention to reconstructions of the practice of the ancient liturgy (Varalis 2001) are welcome contributions to further discussions of function of space (Sweetman 2010).

Scholars most recently have turned their attention to wide issues of the impact of Christianization and the evidence for continuation of the polytheistic cult (Brown 2006; Foschia 2009; Saradi and Eliopoulos 2011; Sweetman 2015a; Tzavella 2014). While the vexing issue of chronology continues to hinder analysis of the data, new approaches to Christianization through the application of network analysis are providing useful methodological means for understanding continuity and change with the adoption of the new religion (Sweetman 2015a, 2015b). For example, the location of the earliest churches in Greece at internationally well-connected locations such as busy ports and sanctuaries can be explained through network connections (Sweetman 2015b). As the church grew (p. 518) in wealth and popularity, building spread, usually to the suburbs of towns near the sites of the first churches. An avenue of network analysis that merits further attention is the connection between Christianization processes and the location of Jewish

communities identified through inscriptions in places such as Thessaloniki, Delos, and Melos.

Early Christian Groups in Greece

Scholars of the New Testament, epigraphers, and archaeologists take different approaches to the study of early Christians. All contend with issues of context of scholarship, bias, and inconsistent survival of data. For example, Friesen (2004) has outlined how interpretations of the wealth or poverty of Pauline congregations have fluctuated according to the social context of modern writers. It is also difficult to corroborate different types of data. The presence of Jewish communities and their size at Philippi remain opaque in terms of Paul's accusers there (Acts 16:11–40), but at Corinth, a Jewish couple actively helped Paul to establish the church in the city (Acts 18:2–11; Valeva and Vionis 2014, 332). Given the textual evidence for a Christian community at Kenchreai during the time of Paul's visit in the early 50s (Acts 18:18), there was likely at least one house church there at the time (Rife 2010, 400), even if there is no archaeological support for it.

Literary data frequently attest to the presence of Christian communities, which are often invisible in the archaeological record of Roman Greece. This is because of high levels of integration in everyday life, death, and cult brought about in part through the slow assimilation of Christianity, even after it became the state religion. For example, Christian meeting spaces or house churches were merged into existing domestic contexts, which may have continued until the fourth century (for Athens, see, for example, Frantz 1965, 188). As outlined later in this chapter, Christian graves are not always recognizable in ancient cemeteries because inscriptions are not always identifiable as specifically Christian until the fourth century.

In terms of written evidence, letters reveal great variety of views and even levels of religious stringency; for example, Eusebius (HE 4.23) records a late second-century account of Bishop Dionysus of Corinth (160–80) urging Bishop Pinytus of Knossos to be more lenient with his congregation. Many fourth-century bishops are known from the accounts of the ecumenical councils; bishops from the towns of Sikyon and Patras attended the Council of Sardica in 344, and Argos and Sparta were represented at the Council of Constantinople in 381. Conversely, there is little archaeological data for the Christian communities in these periods. Only occasionally do archaeological and literary data corroborate each other. For example, Hierokles's *Synekdemos* records that Euphratas, the first bishop of Eleutherna, Crete, attended the fourth ecumenical council at Chalcedon in 451, and the narthex mosaic of the Eleutherna Basilica names the same Euphratas as the founder of the church. However, the only evidence for the Christian community at Eleutherna before the fifth century comes from a lintel inscribed with *Νείκην τῷ Κυρῆϊῳ* (victory to the Lord), which was in a six-roomed house whose

destruction layers date to the mid-third century (Stampolidis 2004, 64; Sweetman 2013a, 9 n. 52, pl. 33).

(p. 519) Mortuary Data

A combination of mortuary and epigraphic material constitutes the majority of archaeological data for early Christian communities preceding the first church buildings in the eastern Greek provinces in the dioceses of Macedonia and Asia. Three galleries of catacombs have been explored close to the ancient settlement of Trypiti on Melos, and they are among the earliest Christian burials in Greece (Figure 27.2; see Fiocchi Nicolai, Chapter 4 in this volume). There is evidence of a baptistery nearby at Trypiti (Renfrew and Wagstaff 1982, fig. 5.3) and a church and baptistery at Kipos on the south coast, but the plans of the churches are somewhat obscured. It may be that the existence of Jewish traders (discussed later in this chapter) was the conduit for the presence of the early Christian communities here. Epigraphic and iconographic analysis indicates the catacombs were Christian and in use primarily from the third to the fifth centuries; a small number of inscriptions suggest second-century activity. Both two-story and single chambers are found, and some of the larger examples contained multiple inhumations, likely family groups. A central Christian shrine dominates the widest space of Gallery B, and throughout the three galleries inscriptions and wall paintings survive (Figure 27.2). Mortuary data substantiate the protracted transformation of community customs as a result of religious change on a more personal level than that seen in the large-scale religious buildings.



Figure 27.2 Trypiti, Melos, Cyclades: catacomb interior showing central shrine.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)

(p. 520) During the fourth century, Christianization processes became more overt but still protracted, and older burial traditions continued to exist along with new Christian practices. The use of rock-cut tombs, barrel-vaulted graves, mausolea, sarcophagi, simple amphorae, cist or tile graves, and two-storied monumental tombs continue from the first

through the fourth centuries (Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou 1997). Christian and non-Christians were buried in the East Cemetery at Philippi from the third to fifth centuries, with interments ranging in form from barrel-vaulted family tombs (sometimes with

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paintings) to simple burials in pits, sometimes with roof tiles (Koukouli-Chrysanthaki and Bakirtzis 1997, 59). The standard Christian burial practices that slowly developed in the fifth and sixth centuries included the east-west orientation of the body and an absence of grave goods beyond the clothes and objects used during burial or connected with funerary cult (Figure 27.3).⁴ Other changes become clear, such as a perceptible increase in the number of children being buried in community cemeteries, as in the case of the Asklepion/Lerna hollow in Corinth (Sanders 2005, 434). Yet old practices endured as well: the tradition of placing a coin on the corpse occurred frequently until the sixth century (Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou 1997).

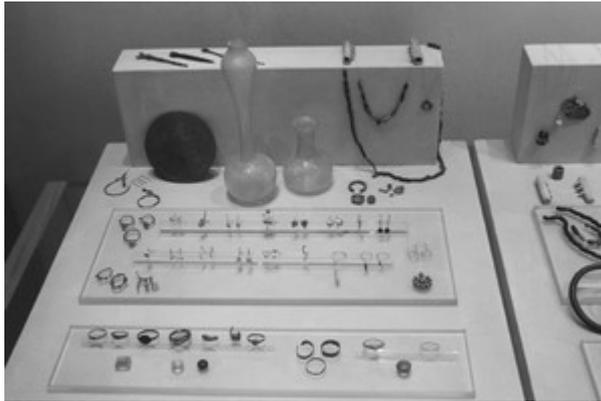


Figure 27.3 Personal goods (from graves): Byzantine Museum, Thessaloniki.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)

(p. 521) From the fourth century, Christian graves and sarcophagi were often marked with inscriptions or the presence of a chi-rho, a cross, or another Christian symbol. The dedication might comprise the name of the deceased and other personal or family details, including occupation and religion, such as that for the carpet weaver Menas and his wife, Konstantina, from

Argos (*SEG* 53, 318). Athenian gravestones reveal a wide range of Christian occupations, from physicians to gravediggers (Creaghan and Raubitschek 1947). A mixture of traditional forms of names and conventions continued alongside traces of the new ideology of salvation and resurrection (Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou 1997). Further hybrid traditions are apparent in curses found in Christian burials (see Feissel 1980, 466, for examples from Argos), and gravestones bearing *anathemata* (warnings against misuse of the grave) from Corinth (Walbank 2010, 267).

Many of the themes in mortuary wall paintings, such as feasts, birds, and landscapes, are familiar to Greek and Roman mortuary contexts but assume new symbolic meanings (e.g., paradise, or life in heaven) within a Christian context. The fourth-century barrel-vaulted tomb of Aurilia Prokla is one such example: it includes a scene of a family at a burial on the western wall, with images of peacocks, ducks, trees, plants, and flowers on the north and south walls (Figure 27.4). Likewise, a reliquary from Nea Iraklia in Halkidiki, which is dated stylistically to the late fourth century, depicts scenes from the Old and New Testaments (Figure 27.5). Fragments of a Sidamara sarcophagus (a Roman type from Asia Minor adopted by Christians and defined by the use of architectural (p. 522) features such as columns and arcades to frame individuals) in the Byzantine museum in Athens contain more ambiguous imagery: a possible philosopher who could be a young Christ alongside the Discouri and Muses. Images on early Christian lamps have a similar range,

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from overtly Christian with the use of the cross to the more subtle use of the peacock (Figure 27.6). Other examples of specifically Christian imagery include Christian funerary rites and scenes from the Old and New Testaments such as Daniel in the lions' den or the raising of Lazarus (Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou 1997).

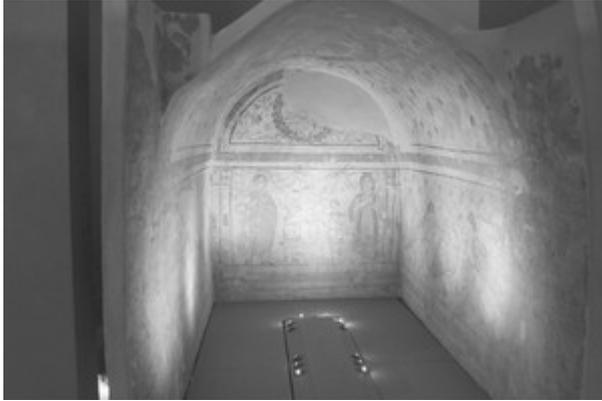


Figure 27.4 Tomb of Aurilia Prokla, Byzantine Museum, Thessaloniki.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)



Figure 27.5 Reliquary, Byzantine Museum, Thessaloniki.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)

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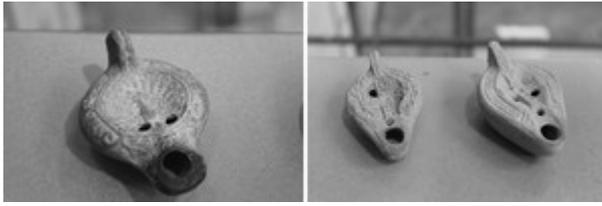


Figure 27.6 Early Christian lamps, Byzantine Museum Athens.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)

(p. 523) Although grave types did not vary greatly in Late Antiquity, the locations of cemeteries with respect to city walls did change over time, indicating more a modification in the use of space than a complete ideological change.

Christian burials were interred in the existing cemeteries outside the east and west walls of the city of Thessaloniki during the third century; in later centuries, specifically Christian cemeteries were founded in locations associated with martyrs or land inherited by the church (Kourkoutidou-Nicolaidou 1997, 129).

Epigraphic and Literary Data

Epigraphic data likewise show the continuation of polytheistic traditions and beliefs even after the construction of the first Christian churches in the eastern Greek provinces (see Brown 2006; Foschia 2009; Rothaus 2000; Saradi and Eliopoulos 2011). For example, two taurobolic altars from the fourth century, currently in the National Museum in Athens, indicate that animal sacrifice was still performed in Athens until at least the end of the fourth century. An inscription on one of the altars notes that the dedicant, Archelaus, was resident in Argos, where he had been initiated into local cults (Saradi and Eliopoulos 2011, 287). Inscriptions reveal investment in and continuation of cult at sanctuaries such as Epidavros and Olympia throughout the fourth century (Brown 2006; Foschia 2009, 211–13; Sweetman 2010, 209). Dedications and libations to the gods Apollo and Asklepios continued at Epidavros through the fourth century (*IG* 4.12). Polytheistic cult activity at Olympia may have only come to an end after the second decree of prohibition issued by Theodosius II in 438 (Sinn 2000, 122), even though a Christian presence may have existed on-site from the early fourth century (Moutzali 1994, 265–66). Archaeologists have also documented maintenance of entertainment buildings such as the theater at Sparta in 359 and the theater of Dionysus at Athens in the later fourth to early fifth century (Foschia 2009, 217–18).

Analysis of the written sources does not always support the archaeological interpretation of a gradual and diverse assimilation of Christianity; many Christian sources indicate a swift victory of Christianity over a belligerent polytheistic population (e.g., Sozomen, *HE* 2.5; see Sweetman 2015b, 293).⁵ Even non-Christian sources, such as Eunapius, describe the bleakness of the fourth century. In his *Lives of the Philosophers and Sophists* he discusses the despair that descended on communities (415), monks who commit unspeakable crimes (423), and, for Greece specifically, the overthrow of temples, which ruined the country (437, 465). However, in other sources the impact of Christianization is not so polarized. Although threats of temple destruction can be read in the Theodosian Code, local interpretation of the code could be varied (Hunt 1993, 143), and the Theodosian code contains suggestions for the upkeep (p. 524) of temples. For example, sections 16.10.8, 15, and 18 of the code allow temples to remain as long as there is no sacrifice, while section 10.10.17 tolerates festivals provided there were no sacrifice rituals.

Temple destruction in the Peloponnese is often attributed to Alaric and his associated Christian Crusaders in 395, but our account is based mainly on Zosimus's *New History* (5.5–5.6), which cannot be taken at face value; Brown has suggested (2008, 149) that destruction of temples may have been less extensive and more focused than once believed. The long-held belief that temples were often automatically converted into Christian churches has also been successfully challenged for Achaia (Dijkstra 2011, 392; Foschia 2009; Gregory 1986; Sweetman 2010) as well as for other provinces. The temples of Athena Alea, Tegea, and Apollo at Corinth were still standing until the sixth century,

when their superstructures were finally brought down long after the construction of the churches around them (Spawforth 2006, 160, 162).⁶

Processes of Christianization

Christianization processes were multifarious and dependent on a range of regional and local factors including individual bishops, community drive, and network connections. A series of case studies, including Philippi in Macedonia, Thessalian Thebes, Paros in the Cyclades, Knossos in Crete, and Corinth in Achaëa, allows us to see these gradual developments more clearly.

Macedonia

Macedonia in northern Greece has a comparatively large concentration of domestic and civic architecture from the Late Antique period, particularly in cities such as Thessaloniki, Amphipolis, Thasos, and Philippi (Snively 2010, 566). This is in part because of its extensive connections with Constantinople and the East and its wealth (generated from natural resources), in addition to the focus of archaeological work on these major Late Antique cities.

Philippi is located along the Via Egnatia some 160 kilometers to the east of Thessaloniki; the latter city was the seat of the metropolitan bishop of Macedonia, who was also the vicar of the church in Rome. The city had prospered in the Roman period. (p. 525) Even St. Paul had visited Philippi in the mid-first century, although the immediate impact of his visit is invisible in the archaeological record. The earliest evidence of Christian worship in the city comes from a mosaic pavement found immediately to the west of a Hellenistic heroon within the city walls; dedicated by the bishop Porphyrius to St. Paul, the pavement dates to the first half of the fourth century.⁷ The first public church was constructed in the second half of the fourth century in the East Cemetery outside the city walls. The large octagonal church was constructed in the fifth century on the site of the early Christian building dedicated to Paul. Basilica A was constructed at the end of the fifth century, followed by Basilicas B and C in the sixth century, all within the walls and with easy access to the Via Egnatia. By the sixth century, Philippi could boast seven churches constructed within the newly rebuilt walls of the city.

Philippi clearly thrived as a pilgrimage town, as evidenced by the space provided for pilgrims—for example, in the form of the guest house at the Octagon. Like the rest of Macedonia, the city came under the religious jurisdiction of Rome in the Late Antique period. Yet the evidence of mosaics, churches, and other architecture in Philippi, Thessaloniki, and Amphipolis reflects connections with Constantinople. The architecture of the sixth-century Basilica B at Philippi, for example, recalls that of Agia Irini in

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Constantinople, a relationship that would not have been lost on visitors from the Eastern capital.

Thessaly

Thessaly comprises a large swath of the eastern coast of Greece between Macedonia and Boeotia, with Epirus to the west. Throughout its history it was a successful and well-networked region, but it is comparatively understudied. A recent and increasing focus on archaeological work in the province of Thessaly is revealing the vast extent of its liveliness in the Late Antique period. The plan of a new church was revealed at Makedonika in Atalanti (Yialouri 2001–4, 642), and work began on the excavations of the Late Antique church within the walls of the fortress at Velika, Larissa (*AR ID 4747*).⁸ The area is now identified as ancient Meliboia.

For the earlier Roman period, Karagiorgou (2013, 165) observes that while there is epigraphic evidence of Jewish communities in Thessaly, there is as yet no evidence of a synagogue in the region. Although some cities in Greece (e.g., Corinth) have produced evidence of synagogues, others (e.g., Philippi) have not. Many of the Thessalian cities (Larisa, Demetrias, Thebes) were renewed under Justinian (Procopius, *De Aedificiis* 4.3.5), but their development in later periods varies depending on the cities' networks.

(p. 526) For example, Karagiorgou (2013, 157) has argued that Larisa and Demetrias survived well because of their administrative and economic roles, while Thebes declined in favor of Demetrias in the sixth century because of the decrease in trade due to supposed barbarian movement in the Aegean.

Thessalian Thebes is unusual. Because the city was newly developed in Late Antiquity, residents were freer to construct churches without the need to negotiate for available space. Even taking this point into account, it is striking that there are at least eight Late Antique churches (four within the city walls and four outside), with a ninth possible example (Building 2) just to the southeast of Basilica C (Figure 27.7) outside the walls. Its bishop attended the first council of Nicaea (325), and the city is listed in Hierokles's *Synekdemos* (Karagiorgou 2013, 157). Evidence for pilgrims is clear from the clay pilgrimage ampullae discovered during excavations (Karagiorgou 2013, 166). The assimilation of Christianity in Thessaly appears to have made little or no impact on existing cult spaces. By the time the first churches were built, at least some of the sanctuaries (e.g., the sanctuary of Asklepios in the southwest of Thessalian Thebes) were already out of use. Unlike other cities such as Athens, where temple conversion occurs after a number of churches were constructed, there is no evidence for temple conversion in Thessalian Thebes (Sweetman 2015a).



Figure 27.7 Thessalian Thebes Basilica C.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)

(p. 527) **Achaea**

The earliest church identified in Achaea may be dated to the fourth century and located on the Sanctuary of Isis at Kenchreai (Sweetman 2015a, fig. 11). However, this date is somewhat in contention due to the difficulty of the stratigraphy recorded by the early excavators (Rife 2010, 427). The doubt about the date makes it more likely that the earliest churches were located at the edges of the Panhellenic sanctuaries, such as Delphi, Olympia, and Epidavros (Sweetman 2015a). Even in highly networked urban spaces such as Athens, the earliest churches, such as Ilissos, date to the fifth century.

Corinth was a Roman colony, and its strategic location contributed to its fundamental role in the trade networks of the Mediterranean. A significant amount of work has been undertaken on the analysis of the Late Antique city (Brown 2008; Sanders 2005) and its hinterland (Pettegrew 2016). Studies of ceramics (Slane and Sanders 2005), lamps (Broneer 1930), mortuary material (Walbank 2010), coins (MacIsaac 1987), and epigraphy have made Corinth one of the best-understood Late Antique cities in the Peloponnese. Ten Late Antique churches are known, and it is possible to see an incremental spread of churches from the suburbs, cemeteries, and sanctuaries to within the old city walls. The earliest churches appear in the northern suburbs, in cemeteries (Kodratos) and other pertinent locations, often on communication routes (for example, Kraneion in the east and Skoutelas in the north) (Sanders 2005, fig. 16.1; Sweetman 2015a, fig. 18). The mid-fifth-century date of the Lechaion basilica has recently been challenged; recent work on the ceramics indicate a later date, probably in the sixth century, for its foundation (Sanders 2005, 439–40). The majority of churches built in Corinth were constructed in the sixth century, with the later examples occupying the central urban space (the church beside the temple of Apollo, built in the seventh century) or highly visible space (the church on the temple of Aphrodite on the Acrocorinth, dating to the seventh century) (Sweetman 2015a).

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There is only scant archaeological evidence for pilgrimage in Corinth, although the clear associations of two martyrs (Kodratos and Leonidas) and the site's accessibility would have made it a likely pilgrimage center. A fifth- or sixth-century ampulla (ASCSA #C 1976 471) was discovered in the forum, and other excavations at Corinth have yielded ampullae comparable to Athenian examples from the second century (ASCSA #P 12362 and ASCSA #P 23213) and the sixth to seventh century (Brazinski 2014, 82), and ampullae from Anemurium and Humayma (Jordan) dating to the sixth to seventh centuries, respectively (Brazinski 2014, 89).

In Late Antique Achaëa, pilgrimage created important kinds of network connections. Some were cleverly orchestrated, while others grew organically depending on the location, key players (bishops, elites, etc.), and the religious nature of the site. Quite often sites of healing became pilgrimage sites after new associations with martyrs (for example, the church associated with the martyr Kodratos is close to the Asklepion). In many respects, a tradition of pilgrimage continued, but in a new religious context. In other cases, the preexistence of a well-traveled pilgrimage route would have been enough to (p. 528) spawn a number of strategically located religious sites of importance. This may in part explain the evidence for early church construction in the Cyclades.

The Cyclades

Scholars have often imagined that the Cycladic islands were generally abandoned after the Gothic raids in 268 (Kulikowski 2007, 19–20). However, current work and new Late Antique material on the islands indicate that the islands were not as desolate as traditionally believed, and the Cyclades may prove to be an important area of study in understanding Christianization processes.

While early churches are known from Amorgos and Thera, one of the earliest well-dated examples on the Cyclades is that of the late fourth-century Panagia Katapoliani in Paroikia, Paros (Figure 27.8). The original wooden church of Empress Eleni was located in the existing Roman cemetery in a prominent position close to the sea. The stone church of Agios Nikolaos replaced it, which added a well-preserved baptistery founded by Constantine (Eusebius, *Vit. Const.* 3.42–46). Justinian's sixth-century restoration created a larger cruciform church incorporating the Agios Nikolaos church in its northeast apse. It is generally believed that the architect of this church was Ignatius, apprentice of Isidorus, architect of Hagia Sophia in Constantinople. Although the earliest church at Paroikia may have been the result of imperial processes, it is likely that the other (p. 529) churches on the island—Agios Giorgos Thalassitis, Krios, and Tries Ekklesias—were constructed from local directives. As with other areas of Greece, evidence for the conversion of temples to churches is limited to those temples that seem to have gone out of use before the construction of the church, as in the case of the conversion of the Sanctuary of Demeter near Sangri on Naxos (Figure 27.9).

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Figure 27.8 Paroikia, Paros: Panagia Katapoliani baptistery.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)



Figure 27.9 Naxos, sanctuary of Demeter, church conversion.

(Photo: Rebecca Sweetman)

The evidence of the churches excavated on many of the Cyclades indicates that these islands were Christianized earlier than mainland Greece (examples include Paroikia on Paros, Katapola on Amorgos, and Agia Irini on Thera). However, many of the churches were constructed inland (Kea, Paros, Santorini, and Amorgos). Unlike Cyprus, which catered to the

passing trade of pilgrims, the communities of the Cyclades gained access to ideas, architects, and patrons earlier than other areas but show less evidence for regular and extensive pilgrim traffic. This may in part explain the lack of ampullae that have been thus far recorded from Late Antique sites on the islands.

Crete: Knossos

Approximately one hundred churches were constructed on Crete between the late fourth and sixth centuries; the earliest examples are found on the edges of major cities such as Gortyn and Knossos. Two late churches at Vizari and Fodele may have eighth-century phases (Sweetman 2013a, 89). The earliest church building on the island is likely (p. 530) to be that of the trefoil sanctuary church at Knossos, known as the KMF church (Figure 27.10). Two other churches have been identified: the Sanatorium basilica, located in the north of the city, close to the KMF church, and Agia Sophia in the center of the Roman

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city. Both the KMF and Sanatorium churches were built in existing cemeteries, while Hagia Sophia appears to have been a later construction (Sweetman 2004). Although more churches have been identified at Gortyn, the former capital, Knossos appears to have been a well-connected hub and there is strong evidence to suggest that it played a key role in the dissemination of trends for Late Antique art and architecture. The architectural innovations seen in the KMF basilica (Figure 27.10), such as the early use of the trefoil sanctuary, which appear to have a western origin, may well spread through its connections to locations such as Egypt (Sweetman 2004). Further evidence of the city as a hub is seen in the Sanatorium basilica, where the mosaics show clear evidence for movement of craftspeople between Knossos, Elis, Sardis, Istanbul, and Eresos (on Mytilene) (Sweetman 2013a, 134, pl. 23, 24). The occurrence of tripartite transept churches, particularly in coastal locations such as Panormos and Almyrida, reflects connections of the island with Epirus (Bowden 2004). The central location of the island and its openness to new ideas makes it reasonable to assume that the island's location contributed to less focused and more organic processes of Christianization, although this does not preclude some imperial involvement. The largest basilica on the island, the fifth-century Sector M Basilica at Gortyn (about 68 by 35 meters), may have had some imperial patronage; it shares some parallels with the Lechaion basilica at Corinth, which is arguably also constructed with imperial support (Sanders 2004, 187). The later sixth-century church of Agios Titus in the center of Gortyn may also have been an imperial foundation.

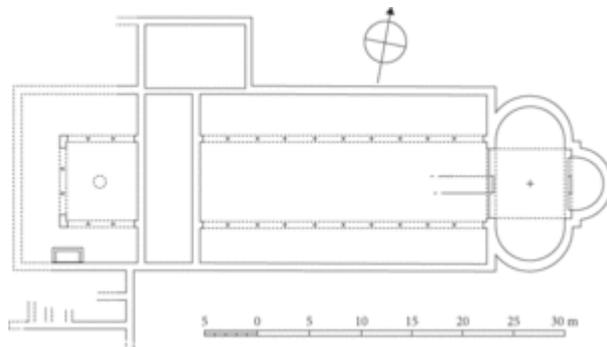


Figure 27.10 Plan of KMF basilica in Knossos, Crete.

(Reproduced with permission of the British School at Athens)

(p. 531)

Christianization and Networks

Archaeological data for the eastern Greek provinces provide a nuanced view of Christianization, one more subtle than the fragmentary literary data would indicate. Conceptualizing the spread of Christianity as peaceful, incremental, and in some cases strategic can be understood in light of the different network connections that created the conduit for the proliferation of ideas. The evidence outlined above emphasizes the variety

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of instigators of religious change from imperial input (Katapoliani, Paroikia, and Philippi Basilica B) to local developments (Corinth) to pilgrimage, trade, and other economic connections (Thessalian Thebes and Knossos).

Further explanations for the diversity can be deduced through the application of network analysis to the topography of churches. While the earliest church on the Cyclades, Katapoliani, is likely to have been an imperial foundation, other early churches at Thera and Melos are understandable in light of trade connections, and possibly even Jewish communities. The relative lateness of church building in Achaëa is explicable because of its relative lack of integration, but once the impetus for church building sets in, it follows the network hubs such as ports and Panhellenic sanctuaries. A degree of strategic planning in these initial foundations is used to capture an audience without alienating the population (Sweetman 2015b). In contrast, the most networked places in Crete are the larger towns such as Knossos, Gortyn, and Eleutherna; church construction spreads along routes through the mountains (e.g., along the Amari valley) and then to busy ports such as Chersonisos by the mid-fifth century (Sweetman 2013a, 146).

In many of the cities discussed in this chapter, as well as in Athens, Patras, and Demetrias (Batziou-Efstathiou 2002, 48–49), the earliest churches are found on the edge of towns. They occupied highly visible locations such as main gates and routes or cemeteries without encroaching on existing buildings (Sweetman 2015a).⁹ In spite of Čurčić's (2010, 233) suggestion that the earliest churches in Philippi were built to promote Christianity, the earliest public church was constructed in a cemetery outside the walls, and the later churches were constructed in more overt places within the walls (Sweetman 2015b). At the same time, the temples in the Forum were left untouched and Basilica A was constructed just 150 meters southeast of the sanctuary of Egyptian gods. As such, any attempt to make Christianization more blatant happened after the initial church construction outside the city walls.

The location of the first churches in Thessalian Thebes provides a good contrast to the development of many of the Christian cities. Here it seems that the earliest churches, Basilicas A (Basilica of Agios Demetrios), B (Basilica of Bishop Elpidios), C (Figure 27.7), (p. 532) and I were constructed within the city walls (Karagiorgou 2013, 163).¹⁰ The later churches of Thebes, Basilicas D (Cemetery church) and F (Martyrios), have been dated to the late fifth or sixth centuries, and both are located outside the walls (Karagiorgou 2013, 163). In such a new city, the lack of preexisting traditions gave more freedom to construct within the city center.

Once church construction began, well-networked cities such as Corinth, Knossos, Thessaloniki, and Philippi continued to have new churches built until the seventh century. Cities such as Thebes in Thessaly saw a new growth in importance in this period. In spite of recommendations in the Theodosian code for the end of polytheistic cult practice and the destruction of temples and sanctuaries, there is little evidence of a common response to this, with the exception of localized negative reactions, such as the destruction of the cult statue of Nemesis at her temple in Rhamnous (Moutzali 1993). In fact, in many areas

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polytheistic cult practice appears to continue alongside Christian practice, as seen in a range of levels in terms of burial practices, personal dedications, and continued use of international sanctuaries such as Epidavros (Sweetman 2015a). Furthermore, evidence for temple conversion is limited to periods after church construction has been well established.

Saradi and Eliopoulos (2011, 263) suggest that polytheistic practice was more persistent in the Greek provinces due to a number of factors, including a respect for cultural traditions and the presence of the philosophical schools, but network connections also played a significant role in the chronology of Christianization. The close contact that Thessaloniki had with Constantinople through its imperial connections is reflected in the early construction of churches, with the occurrence of Constantinopolitan features in the art and architecture of these churches (e.g., the Rotunda, Agios Demetrios, and Agia Sophia). At Philippi, accessibility from the Via Egnatia facilitated pilgrimage. This is particularly emphasized through provision of direct access from the Via Egnatia to the octagon that housed the relics of Paul and a spring of holy water. The existence of early Christian connections with key figures such as St. Paul or his pupils do not necessarily result in archaeologically identifiable contemporary Christian groups, but the later church certainly made use of them, as reflected in the early churches and large number (seven) of them at Philippi.¹¹

Network connections could be made in a variety of ways, including ever-important pilgrimage. In Thessalian Thebes the numbers of ampullae suggest that the city was a site of pilgrimage, becoming a bustling city with eight churches in the Late Antique period. In contrast, the Cycladic islands and Crete have good evidence for early churches, but this may be explained by trade connections rather than pilgrimage.

There is more work to be done on monasteries, but their presence in Thessaloniki (such as the Latomos monastery) is in contrast to the few identified in the area (p. 533) under discussion here. Thus far, only one possible monastery has been identified in the Peloponnese (Baths A at Argos) (Oikonomou-Laniado 2003, 21) and two possible examples from Crete, a seventh-century monastery established on the location of the earlier so-called Praetorium at Gortyn (Zavagno 2009, 89) and a possible one identified on Istron Island off the north coast of Crete.

Conclusion

In the last few decades archaeological analysis has helped change traditional and negative views of Christianization and encouraged notions of early Christianity as contributing to innovative change and extensive investment in the cities of the Greek provinces. As a result of archaeological analysis in Greece, Christianization is now more commonly seen as a group of multivariate processes that include significant elements of

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choice and variation depending on a range of factors including network connections (Sweetman 2015a, 2015b).

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Notes:

(¹) This chapter focuses on those in the modern political state of Greece.

(²) Rome: the San Crisogono or the Lateran Basilica (Krautheimer 1986, 36–37, 46–47). Palestine: the Church of the Nativity at Bethlehem or the Rotunda on Golgotha (Krautheimer 1986, 60–61).

(³) The *Notitia Dignitatum* provides good data for the administrative organization at this time.

(⁴) The inclusion of jewelry and grave goods became increasingly limited throughout the Late Antique period as burial traditions became gradually more austere and further removed from their pre-Christian origins.

(⁵) Caraher (2003, 77) further notes a range of sources such as Pseudo-Dionysos and Maximos Confessor, who discuss the importance of the role of church-building in the conversion process. Snively (2010, 545–46) notes that the sources concerning Macedonia are similarly divided into Christian and non-Christian, including Theodoret's *Ecclesiastical History* and the sophist Malchus's *Byzantiaka*.

(⁶) Although this is largely the case for Greece and many other regions, there are of course individual examples of temple destruction by Christians. For example, the Serapeum in Alexandria was destroyed in the late fourth century (Socr., V, 16), an act apparently authorized by Theodosius, and the destruction of the temple of Asklepios at Aigiai in Cilicia was at the apparent behest of Constantine (Eus. VC 3.56–58; Soz. HE 2.5).

(⁷) It may be that the three-aisled Building 2, without an apse, in Thessalian Thebes is also an early fourth-century church (Karagiorgou 2013, 159).

(⁸) This refers to the site number given in the publication *Archaeology in Greece Online*: <http://www.chronique.efa.gr>.

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⁽⁹⁾ At Demetrias, Basilica B (the cemetery church) was constructed outside the walls of the city at the end of the fourth century (dated by coins), while Basilica A (Damokratia) was constructed in the early fifth century within the walls in the northwest part of the city (Batziou-Efstathiou 2002, 48–49).

⁽¹⁰⁾ Basilica C is a later church lying on top of two earlier churches, the first of which dates to the late fourth century and is likely to be the earliest in the city (Karagiorgou 2013, 159).

⁽¹¹⁾ Although tradition holds that Paul's pupils such as Dionysus the Areopagite and Titus went on to become bishops of Athens and Crete, respectively, in both cases the archaeological evidence for contemporary Christian communities here is limited.

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