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Christian City Councillors in the
Roman Empire Before Constantine

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Abstract

The cities of the Roman Empire had a degree of autonomy in the responsibility for their local affairs. This autonomy was exercised on terms that differed in detail from place to place, but the general principle was that there was a city or town council whose members were selected by a nomination process in which men (and, in a few cases, women) of the propertied class were available to be nominated and, once nominated, were obliged to serve unless the individual could establish by litigation that he or she was entitled to be exempt. Service was costly, requiring expenditure of council members' own funds on the community's needs; but a councillor might gain recognition and prestige by discharging council duties with distinction, and in some cases, service on a city council would qualify a councillor (who had sufficient means) to advance to imperial appointments in equestrian grades. The extent to which Christians served as members of councils (i.e., as decurions) during the period when Christianity remained illegal is of interest as a pointer toward the social status of Christians and the degree of engagement between the Christian churches and institutions of government in the Roman world. In this article, a catalogue of all pre-Constantine Christian city councillors who are known by name is given, with commentary on the evidence in each case.

In the first edition of *The Cambridge Ancient History*, Norman Hepburn Baynes (1939: 660) said that “in the life of the municipalities Christians no longer sought to live apart from their pagan neighbours: they held office as municipal senators.” But the terms of Diocletian’s and Galerius’ first edict against Christians, issued on February 22, 303, provided that Christians of higher social status, including councillors (“municipal senators”), should be reduced to the level of *humiliores* (those of low social and legal status), losing any legal privilege they previously had (Lactantius 1984: 12–13). This hints that the emperors were conscious that Christians mattered as a component of the Roman ruling class.

Sixty years earlier, in the 240s, Origen (2001: 8.75) had written in *Against Celsus* that Christians preferred to serve the church as clergymen rather than to join city councils:

if those who govern in the church, and are called rulers of the divine nation—that is, the church—rule well, they rule in accordance with the divine commands, and never suffer themselves to be led astray by worldly policy. And it is not for the purpose of escaping public duties that Christians decline public offices, but that they may reserve themselves for a diviner and more necessary service in the church of God—for the salvation of men. And this service is at once necessary and right.

By writing in these terms (answering Celsus’ claim that Christians ought to “take office in the government of the country, if that is required for the maintenance of the laws and the support of religion”), Origen elided the fact that for a nobleman of sufficient means in the third century, taking public office (by which, above all, city council membership is meant) was not a matter of free choice. For those who were nominated to vacancies, membership was compulsory. Few exemptions existed. As A. H. M. Jones (1940: 190) wrote, “In the third century we find cities hunting in the highways and byways to fill their magistracies.”

The canons of the council of Elvira (306) occupy a space between pragmatic acceptance that Christians are on city councils (which one might infer from Tertullian’s comments at the end of the second century about what commanding heights of the Roman world Christians were taking over¹) and Origen’s idealistic view of their declining to serve. Elvira canon 56 provides that “Magistrates are not to enter the church during the year in which they serve as *duumvir* [mayor],” which appears to indicate disapproval—though a milder disapproval than that attaching to jockeys and actors, who had to give up their occupations before they were allowed to convert to Christianity (canon 62: “Chariot racers or pantomimes

¹ “We are but of yesterday, and we have filled every place among you—cities, islands, fortresses, towns, market-places, the very camp, tribes, companies, palace, senate, forum—we have left nothing to you but the temples of your gods” (Tertullian 1954: 37).

must first renounce their profession and promise not to resume it before they may become Christians. If they fail to keep this promise, they shall be expelled from the church”).

The purpose of this article is to catalogue individually the Christians who are known by name to have served as city councillors or in equivalent roles in the Roman Empire before the edict of Milan (313). Doing this is important partly because of the close link that will be seen to exist between the social groups from which city councillors were drawn and the social groups from which Christian clergy were drawn.² The investigation with which this article deals is shaped on New Consensus lines, directed toward subjecting to scrutiny the role in the early churches of some of the “not many . . . wise by human standards, not many . . . powerful, not many . . . of noble birth” (1 Corinthians 1:26) to whom the apostle referred.

The catalogue that is presented here includes all Christian city councillors who are currently known by name and one son of a councillor, who was not himself a council member. The reason why it centers on Phrygia is possibly that after Aberkios, bishop of Hierapolis, died (probably between 190 and 195) and his grave monument was set up (Kearsley 1992; Merkelbach and Stauber 2001: no. 16/07/01; cf. Nissen 1968: 1), recording in cryptic terms that he was a Christian, people were less hesitant in Phrygia than in other areas to allow gravestones to make the deceased’s Christian faith evident. Near Eumeneia in particular, gravestones would threaten that if someone mistreated the burial place (for example, by burying another body without permission), that person would “reckon with God.” W. M. Ramsay, who investigated this district in the 1880s and published his findings in *The Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia* (1897), identified this formula as Christian. Dozens of gravestones exist that echo the Eumeneian formula, and a number of them describe the deceased as having been a city councillor. The first seven of the fifteen entries in the catalogue come from Phrygia, one other is also from an inscription on stone, and two are from papyri; numbers eleven to fifteen were preserved in literary sources.

² Elsewhere (*Contra Celsum* 3.30), Origen made a moral comparison between clergy and city councillors, to the advantage of the former: “[I]n comparing the council of the Church of God with the council in any city, you would find that certain councillors of the Church are worthy to rule in the city of God, if there be any such city in the whole world; whereas the councillors in all other places exhibit in their characters no quality worthy of the conventional superiority which they appear to enjoy over their fellow-citizens. And so, too, you must compare the ruler of the Church in each city with the ruler of the people of the city, in order to observe that even amongst those councillors and rulers of the Church of God who come very far short of their duty, and who lead more indolent lives than others who are more energetic, it is nevertheless possible to discover a general superiority in what relates to the progress of virtue over the characters of the councillors and rulers in the various cities.”

While the claim that the Eumeneian formula is (or can be) Christian is uncontroversial, Paul Trebilco has recently reopened the matter of whether or to what extent it was also used by Jews. His chapter in John M. G. Barclay's book *Negotiating Diaspora: Jewish Strategies in the Roman Empire* is entitled "The Christian and Jewish Eumeneian Formula," and he argues (in brief) that "the religious provenance of the vast majority of Eumeneian formula inscriptions is simply 'unproven'" (Trebilco 2004: 88).

A section in Trebilco's chapter is called "Jewish Use of the Eumeneian Formula." He discusses here two Eumeneian formula inscriptions that he regards as the best candidates for ascription to a Jewish context. The first is the Aristeas gravestone from Keramon Agora (Akmonia), in which the point on which he relies is that Aristeas bought the grave plot from Mathios, "a Semitic rather than an indigenous name" (Trebilco 2004: 71).³ Nomenclature is not conclusive in proving that both Mathios and Aristeas were Jewish in religion and not Christian.

Trebilco's second candidate, also from Akmonia, is a fragmentary inscription that lacks the name of the deceased but includes an elaborated Eumeneian formula, in which the deity is referred to as θεῶς ἰσχυροῦς ("God Most High"; cf. inter alia Sirach 24:2), and "the sickle of the curse" is invoked against those who bury someone in the burial place without authority.⁴ "The sickle of the curse" comes from Septuagint Zechariah 5:2, in which, instead of a flying scroll (as in the Masoretic text), the prophet sees a flying sickle (δρέπανον)—apparently because the translator read *maggal* ("sickle") instead of *megillah* ("scroll") in the Hebrew *Vorlage*. After half a page of discussion (showing some caution), Trebilco (2004: 70–71) concludes that this text is "far more likely to be Jewish" than Christian. His argument is that the quotation is from the Septuagint, not the New Testament, and therefore is more likely to have been used by Jews than

³ "(Aurelius A)risteas son of (Apol)lonios bought (this) unused place from Markos son of Mathios, of ten cubits by ten, in the year (.) . . .

[second hand] His children Alexandros and Kallistratos set this up for their mother and father, for the sake of memory.

[first hand] . . . promising to the neighbourhood association of the First-Gaters two (workmen with) two-pronged picks, per month (?), and the corresponding shovelling-crew: this he gave on condition that year by year they should decorate with roses (the burial-place of) my wife Aurelia. If they are not willing to decorate with roses year by year, they shall reckon with the justice of God" (Ramsay 1897: 455–457; quoted in Frey 1975: 1275). [Words in parentheses in quotes from Ramsey indicate damaged areas where Ramsay interpolated the text he judged most likely to have been in the gaps; dots in parentheses indicate a gap in the stone where there would probably have been two letters indicating a date. The space for the year would accommodate a numeral formed from (probably) two letters. The Sullan era (reckoned from 84 B.C.E.) was in use locally, so the first letter was probably Τ (300), and the year accordingly was 215 C.E. or later.]

⁴ "(. . . and if anyone brings in another dead body, he will reckon with God Most High, and (let) the sickle of the curse (come upon) his house (and leave none alive in it)" (Ramsay 1897: 563; quoted in Frey 1975: 769).

Christians. I think that this view is fundamentally unsound, although, as I will explain below, there is precedent for it.

The broader weakness in Trebilco's case is that none of the texts that he discusses must be Jewish and cannot be Christian. His claim that the Eumeneian formula might have been used by Jews can in theory be accepted (and the inscriptions that Trebilco instances have made their way into the Jewish corpus), but due weight should be given to the fact that some Eumeneian formula texts must be Christian and cannot be Jewish, while there is no conclusively Jewish case. There is sufficient reason, then, to think that all or most of the individuals named in the catalogue here were Christians.

CATALOGUE

1. *Aurelius Alexandros, son of Epigonos*

Grave altar (?) from Yakasimak/Eumeneia, in Phrygia. Mid to late third century (Johnson 1995: 3.2; Ramsay 1897: no. 359):

I, Aurelius Alexandros son of Epigonos, citizen of Eumeneia and councillor, constructed this burial-place for myself and for my wife, Tation. If any other should inter (someone else), he will reckon with God.

This is a typical and straightforward example of a third century Eumeneian Christian gravestone. It is clear from the Aurelius name that Alexandros died after the *Constitutio Antoniniana* was legislated in 214. That enactment made nearly all free inhabitants of the Roman empire into Roman citizens, and people who had received citizenship under the *Constitutio Antoniniana*, and their descendants, adopted the emperor's family name, Aurelius, as their Roman *nomen*.

2. *Aurelii Gemellos, son of Menas, and Menas, son of Menas*

Eumeneia in Phrygia. Third century (Ramsay 1897: no. 361):

Greetings. Aurelius Gemellos son of Menas, councillor, for his most sweet parents Aurelii Menas son of Menas son of Philip, councillor and civic elder, and Apphion daughter of Artas, for his own parents from their own child. In this tomb he previously buried his brother Philippos and his paternal aunt Kyrilla and my cousin Paula. His foster-sister Philete shall also be buried here, and anyone else to whom he agrees while still living. Anyone who tries to bury another in addition, shall receive from the immortal God eternal punishment.

This gravestone mentions two councillors: Aurelius Gemellos and his father Aurelius Menas, who is the deceased. In addition to being a councillor, Menas was a member of the *gerousia* (translated here as “civic elder”). Peter Garnsey (1970: 256) defines the *gerousia* as “an aristocratic club which is found in many eastern cities.” The *gerousia* was not always exclusively for councillors or former councillors, but Garnsey shows that birth and wealth were important qualifications for membership.

Note the lengthened Eumeneian formula: “shall receive from the immortal God eternal punishment” (μαστῖγα ἀώνιον). Louis Robert (1960: 438) inferred from this that the deceased was possibly Jewish rather than Christian: “*Gemellus d’Eumeneia était peut-être Juif ou un païen judaïsant: s’il était chrétien, nous aurions sans doute ici une nouvelle trace d’influence judaïsante dans la communauté chrétienne.*”

Robert’s argument is that the reference to punishment (μαστῖξ) is practically unparalleled in early Christian literature, whereas the word is well attested in the Old Testament (he gives the example of Psalms 91:9–10). Robert argues, therefore, that this is “*une expression plus juive que chrétienne.*” The difficulty with this analysis is identical to the difficulty with Trebilco’s argument for Jewish use of the Eumeneian formula: It relies on the supposition that the Septuagint belonged more to Jews than to Christians. Although it cannot be demonstrated beyond cavil that Gemellos and Menas were Christian and not Jewish, it is not correct to take an Old Testament allusion as probative for Judaism.

3. Aurelius Eutyches, son of Hermos, aka Helix

Grave altar from Ishikli/Eumeneia in Phrygia, showing three agonistic crowns (crowns awarded in athletic games). Third century (Johnson 1995: 3.4; Ramsay 1897: no. 364):

To the happy (dead). Aurelius Eutyches son of Hermos, nicknamed Helix, citizen of Eumeneia and other cities, of the tribe Hadrianis, councillor and civic elder, constructed this burial-place for himself and for his most revered and beloved wife Markella, and for their children. If any other person tries to bury anyone (here), he will reckon with the living God.

In this text, we read of Aurelius Eutyches, another civic elder, whose nickname, Helix, is recorded. Mentioning nicknames in epitaphs is a characteristically third century feature. Ramsay (1897: 522–523) speculated that the citizenship reference was to do with the Christian idea of a heavenly citizenship, but the agonistic crowns depicted on the gravestone show what the citizenships are about: Helix won them in athletic competition. He was a successful man by measures that counted in the third century: councillor, civic elder, athlete. His athletic record

might have secured him exemption from service as a councillor, had he petitioned against his nomination. This route to exemption had lasted in the eastern provinces since the time of Mark Antony and was to be amended by Diocletian (284–305) to limit it to holders of at least three agonistic crowns (Krueger 1989 [1954]: 10.54.1; cf. Jones 1940: 183, 190).

4. *Aurelius Zotikos, son of Praxias*

Grave altar from Ishikli/Eumeneia in Phrygia. Third century (Johnson 1995: 3.3; Ramsay 1897: no. 368):

Aurelius Zotikos, son of Praxias, citizen of Eumeneia, councillor, constructed this burial-place for himself and for my wife Glykonis and my children Aurelius Zotikos my son, and Dionysios, and Ammia my daughter, and for Mertine my aunt. No other person is allowed to be buried here. If anyone attempts to bury another here, he shall pay 2500 denarii to the imperial *fiscus*, and more important than everything, he shall reckon with God.

In this epitaph as well as the Eumeneian formula, a fine is mentioned. This is not an uncommon feature; sometimes the fine was payable to the imperial *fiscus*, sometimes to the city. It is impossible to say how often a fine of this kind was imposed on someone who then paid. Sometimes it was recorded that a copy of the epitaph had been placed in the city archive, so presumably, something more businesslike than a mere threat was intended.

Naming is not at this date a sufficient indication of Christianity, yet Zotikos appears to be a characteristic name for Christians.⁵ Zotikos of Otrous, a city close to Eumeneia, is mentioned as a presbyter in Apollinarius of Hierapolis' book against the Montanists, quoted by Eusebius (1964–1965).

5. *Aurelius Menophilos, son of Menophilos*

Ishikli/Eumeneia in Phrygia. Third century (Ramsay 1897: no. 371):

I, Aurelius Menophilos son of Menophilos son of Asklepiades, councillor, constructed the underground burial place in front (of this monument) for myself, and Apollonios my son, and his wife Meltine, and Menophilos and Asklepiades my grandchildren, and for any others to whom I may agree in my lifetime. If anyone tries to bury another, he will reckon with Jesus Christ.

⁵ Here is another Zotikos from a nearby city: "Aurelius Hermes, son of Zotikos, son of Markos, councillor, Aurelius Arte[. . .]" (Buckler, Guthrie, and Calder 1933: 4, no. 186). Zotikos' son Hermes was a councillor. Conservatively, I have not numbered him along with the Christian councillors, but I think there is a better than even chance that he ought to be on the list.

In the case of this gravestone, the Eumeneian formula is amended by the addition of an iota-chi monogram.

It is probable that Eumeneia was the place where something happened during the great persecution that was recorded by Eusebius and Lactantius, both of whom (frustratingly) neglect to specify where in Phrygia the incident occurred. Eusebius says that a city was “inhabited solely by Christians” and that the army was sent in and burned the place down.⁶ Lactantius, who as a courtier of Diocletian’s might have been better placed to know exactly what happened, does not corroborate Eusebius’ unlikely-sounding claim about a city where everyone was Christian but seems to describe something more like burning down a church with the congregation in it.⁷

Ramsay inferred that the absence of fourth century inscriptions in the vicinity of Eumeneia was connected with the city’s having been destroyed or having suffered a great setback at the time of the great persecution. If Eusebius and Lactantius were writing about Eumeneia, it was an unusual place before the great persecution. Yet there are Christian city councillors attested for the same period from outside Eumeneia.

6. Aurelius Messalas, son of Messalas

Grave altar from Sivasli/Sebaste in Phrygia. Third century (Johnson 1995, 3.6):

Aurelius Messalas son of Messalas, citizen of Sebaste, physician, councillor, constructed this burial-place, while still living, for himself and his wife Ammia and for his grandson Messalas. No other person has permission to bury another body (here) after the death of Messalas. Otherwise, he shall reckon with God.

Here, for the first time, we are outside Eumeneia—but not far outside: just over the Burgas Dagh mountain. An oddity in this case is that doctors could get exemption from nominations to city councils. Carsten Drecoll asserts that there

⁶ “A small town of Phrygia, inhabited solely by Christians, was completely surrounded by soldiers while the men were in it. Throwing fire into it, they consumed them with the women and children while they were calling upon Christ. This they did because all the inhabitants of the city, and the curator himself, and the governor, with all who held office, and the entire populace, confessed themselves Christians, and would not in the least obey those who commanded them to worship idols” (Eusebius 1964–1965: 8.11).

⁷ “[S]ome plunged headlong into massacre, like one individual in Phrygia, who burnt a whole community, together with their meeting-place. The more cruel he was, however, the more merciful he turns out to be. The worst sort is a man who lulls you with a bogus appearance of mercy; the butcher who decides to kill no one is the really harsh and cruel man” (Lactantius 2003: 5.11.10–11).

were no doctors known as liturgy-payers (i.e., councillors and others who undertook community expenses at their own cost) in the third and fourth centuries. In view of this epitaph, that assertion appears to be incorrect, but there was a general rule “that those who practise medical science are completely freed from liturgies” (Drecolll 1997: 49); this rule is cited in a second century petition from the Fayum, in Egypt (Mitteis and Wilcken 1964 [1912]: 395), and is related to legislation by Vespasian and Hadrian (Mommsen and Watson 1985: 5.4.18.30).

In this small number of epitaphs, then, there are two Christians who served in the financially burdensome role of city councillor even though they would apparently have been entitled to exemption if they had sought it.

7. Anonymous, husband of Non(n)a, and his brother Trophimos

White marble grave stele found at Aykırıkçı in Phrygia. Third or fourth century (Gibson 1975: no. 27):

(Here lies) the lover of the good, who once more has appeared in a palace, having been initiated into all goodness. Because of your honour God laid on you a grace not to be despised, and he laid grief at lack of you on your wife Nona and your father and your mother, who bore you in a palace, majestic among the people. And your brother Trophimos, also beloved: both rulers of the homeland of the people. You are grieved over by everyone, grieving over the loss of your hospitable character and your righteous conduct towards everyone. He made this monument for himself with his own efforts, and wrote the epitaph in memory, together with his wife Nonna. They sent their children ahead, while their grandparents were still living. Let no one of my own family or (more distant) relatives demolish this memorial, nor let any person of another family hereafter strip my bones or dig up my body, since eternal punishment shall come. Christians for Christians, we set up this work.

This epitaph represents a case in which the name of the deceased is not given. His wife and brother are named. It is an early example of the “Christians for Christians” gravestones from the upper Tembris valley, which were documented and discussed by Elsa Gibson (1978). Note the reference to “eternal punishment,” which, appearing here in an explicitly Christian context, could support the idea that Louis Robert was wrong about Gemellos and Menas being Jewish. This time, the phrase is *κόλασιν αἰώνιον*.

The talk of being born in a palace underlines the deceased person’s position as a member of the nobility (he was “majestic among the people”), but it appears to be combined with an idea of passing to the next life as a kind of initiation that brings the deceased to another palace, presumably a heavenly one. I include this gravestone as one that belongs to a city councillor on the basis of the phrase

describing the deceased and his brother Trophimos as “both rulers of the homeland of the people”; this I take not to be merely general, as “majestic among the people” might be, but to mean that they were councillors.

8. *Markos [Aurelius] Demetrianos*

Limestone column from Bolu/Bithynion-Klaudiopolis in Bithynia. Died perhaps before 250 (Johnson 1995: 3.1):

For the most pure ones who had faith in God, Markos Demetrianos who was First Archon and held all political offices and held the office of Agonothetes with distinction, and our dearest mother Aurelia Pannychis, Aurelia Demetrianes their daughter and their son-in-law Domitius Heliodoros, together with her brother Demetrianos and her uncle Chrysippus, set up this gravestone, *in memoriam*.

The interesting thing about this gravestone is where it is from. It does not use the Eumeneian formula but describes the deceased as “the most pure ones who had faith in God,” a phrase that is intended to apply to Christians. Demetrianos, as a man who was First Archon of Claudopolis, must have been at the more affluent and more influential end of the curial class (i.e., the class of local magistrates). The gravestone is from Bithynion/Claudiopolis, the home city (perhaps a century before) of Antinous, favorite of the Emperor Hadrian, in the province of Bithynia—therefore from a place that was quite distant from Eumeneia and Phrygia. This is important because it suggests that displaying epitaphs with Christian wording was not merely a Phrygian local quirk.

9. *Heraclides (and Arrianos)*

Egypt. Early third century (Rabel 1917: 1.16; Naldini 1998: no. 4):

Greetings, my incomparable lord and brother Paul. I, Arrianos, address you, praying for all the best things in life to happen to you. Since [--]menibes is coming to you, I thought it necessary to address you, together with our lord our father. And now I remind you [about . . .] the gy[mnasiarchy], so that we (= I) may not be bothered here. For Heraclides cannot [. . .]; for he hims[elf] was nominated to the council. . . . I pray that you will be in perfect health, in the Lord.

It is not known where in Egypt this papyrus document was written or where the recipient was. Unlike Aurelius Eutyches (Helix) and Aurelius Messalas, who seem to have accepted council membership even though they had grounds to petition against it with a good prospect of success, Arrianos writes to his brother Paul to prompt him to take action that (it is hoped) will result in Arrianos not

having to serve in a senior council role as gymnasiarch. The prayer at the end, “in the Lord,” shows that the writer was a Christian. It is unclear whether Heraclides, who (the writer says) has been nominated to the council, was a Christian. In view of the context, it seems more likely than not.

10. *Aurelius Ioannes*

Karanis, in Egypt. November 13, 304 (Boak and Youtie 1960: no. 114).⁸

Aurelia Ptolema, acting through me, her husband Aurelius Ioannes, formerly (?) gymnasiarch, to Aurelius Isidorus, greeting. I have received from you my own share (of the harvest) of the arouras which you have cultivated in the horiodeiktia of Karanis, for the crop of the past 20th and 12th year: four and a half artabas of wheat, equal 4½ art. I retain my claim concerning the previous 19th, 18th and 11th year. I, Aurelius Ioannes, have written the entire receipt. Year 21 and 13, Hathyr 17.

The landowner’s husband, formerly or currently gymnasiarch of Karanis in Egypt, has a name with a clear biblical resonance. The question is whether he was Jewish or Christian. Arthur E. R. Boak and Herbert Chayyim Youtie, editors of the Isidorus archive, argued against supposing that he was a Jew: “It is unlikely . . .,” they wrote, “that a Jew could have held this office even as a *munus* so late as 304 C.E. and still have retained any standing in his own religious community” (Boak and Youtie 1960: 377). Although I list Ioannes [John] with hesitation, then, I have decided that he merits inclusion in this catalogue (while Aurelius Hermes son of Zotikos does not) because it seems unlikely that someone other than a Jew or a Christian would be named Ioannes.

11. *Papylos*

Thyatira, in the province of Asia. Second or third century (*Martyrdom of Carpos, Papylos and Agathonike* 24–30, in Krüger 1965):

The proconsul then left Carpos and turned to Papylos and said to him, “Are you a councillor?”

“I am a citizen,” he replied.

The proconsul said, “A citizen of where?”

“Thyatira,” said Papylos.

⁸ Ptolema (acting through Ioannes) gave another receipt (no. 115) on Hathyr 21 (November 17) 306. I wish to thank Professor Alanna Nobbs and Dr. Malcolm Choat for drawing my attention to Heraclides and Aurelius Ioannes and informing me that the texts will feature in *Papyri from the Rise of Christianity in Egypt* (forthcoming).

The proconsul said, "Do you have children?"

"Yes, many, by the grace of God," said Papylos.

One of the people shouted out, "He means he has children according to his Christian faith!"

Papylos' first answer to the proconsul of Asia (sitting at Pergamum) is, in my opinion, not a denial of being a councillor. W. M. Ramsay did not think it was either.⁹ However, it is worth considering the proconsul's reasons for asking the questions he did. There are two possible reasons why his first question to Papylos was "Are you a councillor?" rather than, for example, "Are you a Christian?" First, he might have had before him a document denouncing Papylos as a Christian and saying something like "This person, proconsul, is a councillor, so in view of his prominence in the community you had better not disregard the fact that he is a Christian." He might have thought Papylos' civic responsibility an exacerbating circumstance and therefore wanted to raise the matter in his examination. The second possibility is that when he was brought into court Papylos was dressed in a manner characteristic of a city councillor, for example, wearing a purple headband.

Then there is the matter of the second question, "Do you have children?" Papylos, with his "aggravating" manner of responding to questioning, replied in a spiritual sense, which provoked a hostile voice in the public gallery to shout out that Papylos was talking in terms of the Christians' faith, not of children of his own, in the ordinary meaning of the word.

When he asked about children, the proconsul might have been giving thought to the consequences for Thyatira of putting a city councillor to death. If Papylos were to die, even though council membership was not fully hereditary, it would be a normal consequence for his son to be nominated to the council, at least when the son was old enough. This hint of the importance of hereditary succession on city councils combines with other features of the *Martyrdom of Carpos, Papylos and Agathonike* to make it practically certain that it is a martyrdom from the persecution of Decius (250–251) rather than being based on events from the second century. Eusebius (1964–1965: 4.15.48) refers to Carpos' martyrdom in a second century context, just after telling the story of Polycarp. In the martyr act, however, the proconsul says to Carpos, "You must sacrifice; for the emperor commanded it." That fits the situation in 250 with precision, although perhaps the same thing could have been said at other times. The Latin version says that it is a Decian martyrdom, and T. D. Barnes (1968: 514–515), in his article on pre-

⁹ "At his trial the question was put to him 'bouleutes ei?' to which he merely replied 'polites eimi': but this need not be understood to imply that he was not a senator, for his style of answering was very aggravating. The official report is sufficient proof that he was a senator" (Ramsay 1897: 519–520).

Decian martyr acts agrees,¹⁰ so there seems to be sufficient reason to think Eusebius mistaken about the second century date.

If this is so, then Papylos, in Thyatira in the middle of the third century, is directly comparable with the Christian city councillors from Phrygia and Bithynia whose epitaphs feature above. The remaining fly in the ointment is citizenship. One could perhaps call the martyr *Aurelius* Papylos if it were agreed that he lived in the third century when all free people were Roman citizens; but then one would need to explain the proconsul's asking, "A citizen of where?" and Papylos' replying, "Thyatira." This exchange remains credible in the third century context and is particularly plausible if Papylos' answer to the question about being a councillor should not be read as a denial. However aggravating Papylos meant his answers to the proconsul to be, it must have been clear to him that he was being asked from what *city* he came.

12. Romanos

Antioch in Syria. Died November 18, 303 (Delehaye 1932):

(3) Asclepiades was angry and ordered him to be hanged. But his staff advised that he was a son of a councillor. Asclepiades ordered him to be brought out of the noose, and said to him, "Tell me, Romanos, are you really a son of a councillor as my staff advise me?"

Romanos said, "What difference does that make? Do you think Christians have their freedom because of that name? We are free because we acknowledge the Father through Christ. And we are more powerful than you who are in command in the time of this vain world."

(7) Asclepiades said, "By the gods, even if you are a son of a councillor, I will dishonour your family by torturing you."

Romanos said, "By Christ, your supposed dishonour is glory and honour to me, and to all who come to this kind of examination."

Asclepiades said, "Hang him up and torture him severely for his stupidity!"

Eusebius' *The History of Martyrs of Palestine* (1861) tells the story of the martyrdom of Romanos at about a page's length. In this account, Romanos, a deacon from a rural area around Caesarea, is at Antioch during the great

¹⁰ The Latin version also calls Papylos a deacon, except that his name is given as "Pamfilus" (Krüger, 1965). If this evidence is accepted, Papylos is the only council member in this catalogue who is known to have been a clergyman. But in the same Latin text, answering the question about council membership ("*proconsul . . . dixit ad eum: Principalis es?*"), Pamfilus says, "*Non sum*" ("I am not") but goes on to say that he is a citizen. In Greek, then, there is no denial of being a councillor, and nothing is said about being a deacon; in Latin, he is said to be a deacon but not a councillor.

persecution and is distressed at seeing people going and sacrificing to idols, so he calls out, warning them against doing so. As a result, he is arrested and brought in front of a judge, who sentences Romanos to be burned at the stake. The sentence is about to be carried out, but the emperor is in town and decides that the punishment will be commuted to Romanos' having his tongue cut out. This is done, but the martyr afterward is miraculously able to speak. Eventually, he dies by being strangled in the jail.

There are fuller versions of this martyrdom in both Latin and Greek, and (as is often the case) they are probably in some respects less well informed than Eusebius' account. The Greek *Martyrdom of Romanos*, however, which is about twelve pages long, in comparison to Eusebius' one, is the source of the quoted passages at the beginning of this entry. Romanos is brought in front of the governor in Antioch. Without much delay, the governor gives an order for him to be hanged. When the hangman's noose is already around Romanos' neck, the governor's staff advise him that Romanos is a son of a councillor (πατρόβουλος). The governor has Romanos brought out of the noose and questions him: Is he really a councillor's son?

Romanos is more forthcoming than Papylos. He acknowledges being a councillor's son and insists that his Christian freedom does not derive from the legal privilege to which he is entitled. Romanos' attitude is confrontational, as Peter Garnsey observes,¹¹ and after about three more pages of dialogue, the governor decides to proceed with a punishment that would not normally be inflicted on *honestiores* (people of more honorable rank). Decurions and their parents and children were not subject to being condemned to the mines, to hanging, or to being burned alive.¹² Ulpian had said in the *De officio proconsulis* that if somehow an illegal sentence to one of these punishments were passed, the correct procedure was for the judge who had wrongly passed the sentence to refer the case to the emperor for him to decide what punishment (if any) should be inflicted.

Romanos did not have (or want) a smart lawyer to insist on correct procedure on his behalf, and he, and all other Christians of the better-off classes, had been reduced to the status of *humiliores* by the first persecution edict in February 303. It is likely, too, that during the great persecution, a governor could have counted

¹¹ "It was only after submitting to long harangues and relentless abuse from the saint that the exasperated governor resumed his original plan" (Garnsey 1970: 245).

¹² "[D]ecurions cannot be condemned to the mines or to the *opus metalli* nor subjected to the gallows nor burned alive. If, by chance, they are so sentenced, they must be freed. This, however, cannot be done by the person who pronounced sentence, but the matter must be referred to the emperor so that the penalty may be altered or remitted by his authority. The parents and children of decurions are also in the same position. We should take 'children' to mean all their children, not only their sons" (Mommsen and Watson 1985: 48.19.9.11–13, from Ulpian's *De officio proconsulis*).

on imperial support for whatever vigorous anti-Christian action he chose to take. Possibly, there is a reflection of that fact, and of the claim in Eusebius' *Martyrs of Palestine* that the emperor was in town at the time, at the end of the Greek martyr act, when Governor Asclepiades reports to Maximian everything that has happened. But there is a chronological difficulty: The martyr act dates the death of Romanos to Dios 18 (November 18) in the first year of the great persecution (303); but on November 20 of that year, Diocletian and Maximian were in Rome celebrating Diocletian's *vicennalia*; therefore, the source's claim that Maximian decided that Romanos' tongue should be cut out cannot be correct. That Romanos died by being strangled in the jail could, however, appear plausible.

13. *Ambrosius*

Greece. Second century; referred to in author-ascription of Syriac version of *To Greeks*:

Ambrosius, a chief man of Greece, who became a Christian, and all his fellow-councillors raised a clamour against him.

In 1855, William Cureton published in his *Spicilegium Syriacum* a translation from a sixth or seventh century Syriac manuscript (British Museum MS. Add. 14,658) and placed it together with J. K. T. von Otto's recension of *To Greeks* as it appears in the Leyden manuscript (MS. Voss Q 30). "We may . . . say that the traditional writer of *To Greeks* and *To Diognetus* is a certain otherwise unknown Ambrosius," Edward Bickersteth Birks concluded in *A Dictionary of Christian Biography* (Birks 1911: 257). If the Syriac and Greek texts are as closely related as Cureton and Birks argue, then *To Greeks* appears to be an apologia directed by Ambrosius toward "fellow-councillors" who objected to his having become a Christian.

Judith M. Lieu (1998: 178) repeated the long-established consensus view when she described the *Epistle to Diognetus* as "a perhaps late-second-century apologetic writing whose original authorship, context and audience is now lost to us." Miroslav Marcovich in 1990 had edited the Greek text of *To Greeks* in a set of works by Pseudo-Justin, and he credited Ambrosius with "an excerpted, considerably expanded and obviously vulgarized version of the *Oratio*" (Marcovich 1990: 104). Lieu's declining to conclude that Ambrosius was the author of both texts and was a councillor seems excessively cautious. There is sufficient evidence to support the conclusion. Ἀμβρόσιος is a well-attested name at dates from the sixth century B.C.E. onward in Greece,¹³ and a councillor could

¹³ The name is epigraphically attested in southern Greece (Fraser and Matthews 1987–2005: Vol.

fairly be described as a “chief man,” so there is nothing implausible about supposing that the Syriac scribe might have been right.

14. *Erastus*

Corinth. First century (first quote: *Romans* 16:23; second quote: Kent 1966: no. 232).

- (1) Greetings from Erastus, treasurer of this city [sc. Corinth].
- (2) [. . .] Erastus laid (this pavement) at his own expense in return for his aedileship.

Paul in *Romans* sends greetings from Erastus, “treasurer of this city.” Speculation that Erastus might have been a public slave rather than a council member seemed to be laid to rest when an inscription identified a pavement in a courtyard to the east of the theater in Corinth as having been laid by Erastus at his own expense in acknowledgment of his aedileship.

In 1998, however, Justin J. Meggitt (1998: 135–141) put up a spirited defense of the skeptical outlook. Broken before “ERASTUS,” Meggitt says, the inscription might for all we know originally have read “EPERASTUS.” Perhaps more convincingly, he questions the date of the pavement, as others have done, and points out that there could be more than one Erastus and that Paul in *Romans* “may be referring to an office *within* the church” (Meggitt 1998: 136). Knowing that Erastus is a “significant figure for followers of the ‘New Consensus’” (Meggitt 1998: 135), Meggitt (whose book is anti–New Consensus) devotes several pages to laying out his case for thinking that “Erastus’ economic situation was most likely indistinguishable from that of his fellow believers” (Meggitt 1998: 141).

I will not reexamine the arguments for two Erastuses any further, but I will comment that the same argument has been applied to two Origenes (the Christian not being the man who studied with Ammonius Saccas) and two Tertullians (the Christian not being the lawyer). I think these arguments weak and, in the end, damaging to understanding of the Roman world and the Christian world, because they seek to make those worlds too separate from each other. As this article reemphasizes, they were the same world.

1, 31; Vol. 2, 24; Vol. 3A, 32) but not in central Greece (Fraser and Matthews 1987–2005: Vol. 3B) or Macedonia, Thrace, and the northern Black Sea (Fraser and Matthews 1987–2005: Vol. 4), though feminine versions of the name occur in those regions, so it might not be proper to infer that Ambrosius was more likely from southern Greece than from another area.

15. *Dionysius the Areopagite*

Athens. First century (first quote: Acts 17:22; second quote: Acts 17:32–34).

(1) Paul stood in front of the Areopagus and said, “Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way.”

(2) When they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some scoffed; but others said, “We will hear you again about this.” At that point Paul left them. But some of them joined him and became believers, including Dionysius the Areopagite and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

At Athens, when Paul fell into debate with Epicurean and Stoic philosophers, he was brought to the Areopagus, the meeting place after which the Athenians’ city council was named. His answer received a mixed reaction, but those who became believers included Dionysius the Areopagite.

Athens in the first century C.E. retained its long-established system of local government comprising Assembly, Council, and Council of the Areopagus. In the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E., the activities of the Council of the Areopagus were restricted in scope, involving little more than acting as a court in murder trials. But by the first centuries B.C.E. and C.E., the Areopagus was the “real” council at Athens, as Cicero comments in an aside in his *De natura deorum*: “If someone says that the republic of Athens is governed by a Council, we must understand him to mean, by the Council of the Areopagus” (Cicero 1979: 2.74). Former archons (city office-holders) were members of this council. Therefore although the account in Acts emphasizes the interest the members of the Areopagus had in philosophy,¹⁴ it was a local government body and not only a place for philosophical discussion.

CONCLUSION

Fifteen individual councillors are recorded here, assuming that Arrianos (number 9) avoided having to serve (two each are named in number 2 and number 7). One entry (number 12) records a son of a councillor in his own right (the reader will have observed that sons and other family members of councillors occur in other entries). Nine individuals were councillors in Phrygian cities in the Roman province of Galatia, and the other individuals are attested one each from the provinces of Bithynia, Egypt, Asia (Lydia), and Syria (Palestine) and two from Achaia, Ambrosius (number 13) being simply from some place that a Syriac

¹⁴ “[S]ome Epicurean and Stoic philosophers debated with [Paul] . . . they took him and brought him to the Areopagus and asked him, ‘May we know what this new teaching is that you are presenting?’” (Acts 17:18–19).

writer called “Greece.” If the gravestone of Aberkios, locally known but not world famous, was decisive in making Phrygian Christians think they could record their Christianity on their gravestones with impunity, then there is reason to think that there were Christian city councillors in other places across the Roman Empire, whose memorials would not record that they were Christians.

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