

Religious Patronage and Mosaic Donor Inscriptions at Sardis and Anemurium

The cities of Sardis and Anemurium (the first the capital of the Roman province of Lydia and an important political center, the latter a marginal city on the coast of Cilicia that flourished between the first and seventh centuries CE) differ so drastically in character that scholars have neglected to appreciate how similar cultural realities affected and shaped the Jewish and Christian communities in both cities during the fourth and fifth centuries CE. We can gain a deeper understanding of the links between these seemingly disparate religious communities by comparing the mosaic donor inscriptions uncovered at the synagogue at Sardis with the Christian donor inscriptions discovered in churches at Anemurium. This paper argues that in periods of order following times of decline and uncertainty, the Jewish and Christian citizens of Sardis and Anemurium combatted uncertainty by using religious patronage to legitimize themselves as members of their communities and to validate the synagogue and churches as civic centers.

Although scholars have published the donor inscriptions at Sardis and Anemurium in collections (Seager 1974 and Kroll 2001; Russell 1987 and Campbell 1998), little work has been done to consider the donor inscriptions as representative of larger movements within the cities' communities (Trebilco 1991), and no scholar has addressed the similarities between these donor inscriptions, especially in their language and placement within the synagogue at Sardis and churches at Anemurium. Work on the synagogue has focused on tracing the building's phases of constructions to determine its place within the history of the Jewish Diaspora and of the city's Jewish community (Seager 1972). Scholars have focused particularly on the donor inscriptions featuring the "Godfearers" (θεοσεβεῖς), attempting to determine the position of this subset of Jewish community, Gentiles who had not fully converted to Judaism but still attended synagogue (Reynolds and Tennenbaum 1987). James Russell published a collection of the mosaic donor

inscriptions at Anemurium (Russell 1987), analyzing the language of the inscriptions and the composition of the mosaics, but making no further arguments about the significance of the donor inscriptions in the city's history.

The purpose of this presentation is to consider the ramifications of the similarities between the mosaic donor inscriptions decorating the synagogue at Sardis and those in the churches located in Anemurium. These donor inscriptions originate from periods when the communities in both cities were emerging from periods of turbulence and transition. The donor inscriptions in the synagogue at Sardis were created when the Jewish community was in a perpetual state of change with major renovations to the synagogue extending over half a century (Seager 1972), while the inscriptions at the churches in Anemurium were created when the community was emerging from two centuries of decline during which the city's civic center crumbled (Russell 1980). Through inscriptions that commemorated their religious donations, prominent citizens in both cities validated their status and power in the city and also marked the synagogue and churches as important centers of their communities. Jewish patrons in Sardis treated the synagogue as a venue in which to display their connections outside of the religious center, emphasizing their secular honors and ties to the Sardian community. Nine inscriptions list the patron as a member of the city-council, a position only wealthy citizens could purchase (Inscriptions 3, 24-25, 16-17, 24-26, 31, 34, 37, 67; Kroll 2001). At Anemurium, several patrons of the Necropolis Church highlighted their governmental and military positions (Inscriptions 12 and 13; Campbell 1987). Patrons also stressed their religious connections in their donor inscriptions. The Godfearers at Sardis contributed six donor inscriptions to the synagogue, validating themselves as members of the Jewish community (Inscriptions 8, 9, 22, 57, 59, 66; Kroll 2001). Similarly, at Anemurium, two newly baptized church patrons commissioned donor

inscriptions emphasizing their ties with the Christian community (Inscriptions 17 and 23; Campbell 1987). The content of these inscriptions indicates that strategically commemorated religious patronage served crucial secular and social purposes in the ancient world no matter how disparate the religions or the social milieu.

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