Christians in Caesar's Household: The Emperor's Slaves in the Makings of Christianity. By **Michael Flexsenhar III**. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2019. 208 pp. $89.95 hardcover; $29.95 paper.

In Philippians 4:22, the apostle Paul relays greetings from the saints "who belong to Caesar's household." Such a nugget of historical fact can be interpreted in various ways. For early scholars like J. B. Lightfoot, the fact was a sign of the Gospel's success in reaching the corridors of power in the earliest days of Christianity. But already for Adolf Deissmann in 1910, far more circumspect conclusions were to be drawn. The saints in Caesar's household were "simple Imperial slaves, petty clerks, employed perhaps at Ephesus in the departments of finance or crown lands" (27). Michael Flexsenhar's book is a convincing vindication of this more cautious view. More than that, it is the most comprehensive and focused study we have of the question of whether Christianity was adopted by the emperor's slaves—and what that might tell us about the new religion.

The *familia Caesaris* is the modern shorthand designation for a truly distinctive and important feature of Roman imperial society. In a regime where the Roman emperors ruled over a sprawling territory with limited formal bureaucracy, the *familia Caesaris* was a major instrument of power and property-ownership. In a society where slave-owning was common, enslaved and freed persons came to play a major but paradoxical role. On the one hand, slaves of the emperor were subject to the degradation, dishonor, and violence of the slave system. On the other hand, as slaves of the emperor, they seem to have enjoyed a kind of conditional eminence and to have developed an *esprit d'corps*. From the maturation of the imperial system in the mid-first century to the crisis of the Augustan regime in the mid-third century, the imperial *familia* was a highly visible element in Roman politics and social life. Yet, when we imagine the *familia Caesaris*, we must not only conjure up the handful of influential slaves and freed persons close to the emperor and his palace but even more so the small army of administrators and indeed "petty clerks" helping to administer the emperor's portfolio of public and private business.

Flexsenhar is, of course, not the first to argue that the saints in Caesar's household known to Paul were low-level functionaries in Asia Minor. But in his study, this caution is the beginning of a more thorough critical project opposing the view that Christianity spread quickly in the halls of power. Flexsenhar identifies the second-century *Martyrdom of Paul* as a "foundational story" (27). The text "reworked 'Caesar's household' from Philippians 4:22 as etiological source material to establish Paul's Roman martyrdom" (46). The text subsequently influenced Christian self-perception and Christian legend. By contrast, hard evidence for Christians in the *familia Caesaris* is limited. Flexsenhar is generally balanced. He allows that "there probably were personnel like Carpophorus, Hyacinth, and Marcia who in various ways were connected to Christians in Rome during the late Antonine period" (70). And as important as this fact is, it is a thin basis for extrapolating a bigger story about the early spread of Christianity.

In one instance Flexsenhar's critical spirit seems to overshoot. An enormous sarcophagus of the imperial freedman Marcus Aurelius Prosenes was inscribed in the

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640721000081 Published online by Cambridge University Press

early third century by his own freedmen. Prosenes had held eminent positions under Commodus. A secondary inscription on his monument recorded that he was "gathered to god on the 5 Nones" of some month of the year AD 217. The iconography of the sarcophagus was traditional and certainly not Christian; it displays Prosenes reclining on a dining couch "ready to be feted by his freedmen when they come to his monument" (89). While Flexsenhar encourages us not to dismiss this non-Christian imagery so nonchalantly and rightly adduces polytheistic parallels for the language of "gathered to god," the record of a specific death date is diagnostically Christian (as Flexsenhar himself acknowledges in a subsequent chapter on the catacombs). Maybe Prosenes held multiple identities, as it is now fashionable to believe, but to have such an unambiguously Christian formula on the extravagant monument of such a notable person in the Severan orbit remains striking. Flexsenhar's discussion is thorough and thoughtful, even if its conclusions can be questioned.

On the whole, Flexsenhar's study is a valuable and compelling exploration of how a shard of fact was turned into a memory and elaborated into a legendary motif.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640721000081

Preaching the Gospel to the Hellenes: The Life and Works of Gregory the Wonderworker. By **Francesco Celia**. Late Antique History and Religion 20. Leuven: Peeters, 2019. ix + 378 pp. $132.00 hardcover.

When Gregory became bishop at Neocaesarea in Pontus, he found only seventeen Christians; at his death, only seventeen pagans remained in his episcopal see. In the later fourth century, Basil of Caesarea and his brother Gregory of Nyssa, two of the famous Cappadocian Fathers, mentioned this anecdote celebrating the triumphant expansion of Christianity in northern and eastern Asia Minor. But because their source was most likely their grandmother, who claimed to be repeating Gregory's "sayings," the plausibility of the anecdote is immediately suspect. Its timelessness and symmetry are instead characteristic of oral traditions. As a result, most aspects of the life and the writings of Gregory of Neocaesarea are contested.

Francesco Celia's book is a meticulously comprehensive survey of both the ancient texts and the modern scholarship about Gregory. Even though his discussion still retains some of the characteristics of a dissertation, such as the lengthy summaries of the ancient texts and the tedious engagement with the smallest details of scholarly opinion, his chapters are impressive exemplars of the conscientious erudition that can become a sturdy foundation for subsequent studies.

The first part of Celia's book includes close readings of the ancient texts that mentioned Gregory—or rather, someone who might be identified as the bishop of Neocaesarea. In an extant panegyric, an anonymous orator described his religious enlightenment during his years of study with the famous theologian Origen at Caesarea in Palestine. In an extant letter, Origen encouraged a student named Gregory to use his familiarity with Greek culture in support of Christianity. The

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640721000081 Published online by Cambridge University Press