Whether you like this book will depend in part on your tolerance for nontraditional forms of scholarly writing and explanation. Burrus, for example, uses poetry in places to distill her thoughts and draws on contemporary performance art as an alternative heuristic for reading saints' lives. In this reader's opinion, Burrus's intellectual audacity succeeds, but some may not agree. It also will ultimately depend on whether you buy into Morton's conceptualization of "the ecological thought" as a sort of cosmic hermeneutic. While Morton's fractal interconnectedness and the neo-animism that underlies it work well when discussing relics and reliquaries, I do wonder whether they can as helpfully illuminate ancient Christian experiences of city walls or, more mundanely still, a random rock in the garden. Moreover, this is a book in dialogue with a wide spectrum of interlocutors, many of whom are not scholars of early Christianity, and which conveys a deliberately presentist message. For Burrus, "the ecological thought" is not just a lens for looking at the past; it is a necessary response to our own age of ecological crisis.

Nevertheless, there is still a lot here for the historian of early Christianity and late antiquity. *Ancient Christian Ecopoetics* is a crucial contribution to the cultural history of materiality in late antiquity, representing yet another significant step forward along a scholarly path first forged by Patricia Cox Miller with her book *The Corporeal Imagination* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2009). Put simply: this is the kind of study that cultural historians of late antiquity interested in the material turn need to be undertaking. The recent spate of publications on late antiquity's environmental history, many of which attract popular attention because of their dramatic claims to explain Rome's "decline and fall" as a response to climate change and pandemic disease, collectively fail to consider a critical question that Burrus probes in this book: how did late Romans experience and relate to their physical worlds? While purposely narrow in scope, *Ancient Christian Ecopoetics* presents us with one possible set of answers as well as a framework for pursuing further research.

Kristina Sessa
The Ohio State University
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Christianizing Asia Minor: Conversion, Communities, and Social Change in the Pre-Constantinian Era. By **Paul McKechnie**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019. ix + 332 pp. $99.99 hardcover.

Explaining the expansion of Christianity in the early Roman Empire is a longstanding challenge. During the three centuries between Jesus and Constantine, the new religion was practically unknown in many provinces, and some emperors and imperial officials sanctioned violent persecutions. But once emperors such as Constantine began supporting Christianity, its victory seemed to be ensured. The problem for modern scholars is to avoid triumphalist explanations that project this successful outcome back on earlier centuries.

Western Asia Minor is an excellent proving ground for examining early Christianity. The apostle Paul visited several cities and even resided at Antioch in Pisidia and Ephesus. The "Seven Churches" mentioned in Revelation were all in western Asia

Minor. During the second and third centuries, numerous inscriptions mentioned clerics, martyrs, shrines, and ordinary believers. Western Asia Minor was the Bible Belt of early Christianity.

Paul McKechnie's analysis of "Christianization" is focused on Phrygia, a large inland region located approximately between Ephesus and Pisidian Antioch. By spotlighting Phrygia and neighboring regions in the central highlands, McKechnie wants to replace the usual emphasis on the development of early Christianity in larger established cities with an investigation of a rural society dotted with small cities, villages, and imperial estates.

In his introduction McKechnie adopts terminology from the interpretive theory of Peter Berger and Thomas Luckmann about the social construction of reality. Berger and Luckmann were very distinguished sociologists of religion, and their ideas previewed some aspects of modern post-colonial theory. In particular, McKechnie deploys Berger's notion of "the sacred canopy," which referred to the way people ordered their knowledge of the world in terms of the divine. In this cognitive perspective, early Christianity offered a new and different plausibility structure. As McKechnie explains: "This book . . . is about how Phrygian communities . . . began the lengthy and radical task of changing their sacred canopy" (16).

The subsequent chapters investigate specific texts, people, movements, and problems. McKechnie argues that Colossians, a letter to the Christian community at Colossae in Phrygia, was aimed at "ideas about angels within pagan religious thought" (31), which in turn may have been influenced by a background of Jewish beliefs. He suggests that Papias, bishop of Hierapolis, collected data about Jesus's life in order to demonstrate its contemporary relevance and "lay the foundations of a plausibility structure which would be for the whole (Roman Asian) world" (56). Wider developments also affected Phrygia. On his trip to Rome from his see of Antioch in Syria, Ignatius wrote letters linking the unity of Christian teaching with the importance of having one bishop in each community; the account of the martyrdom of Polycarp, bishop of Smyrna, was sent to the Christians in a small city in Phrygia.

In the later second century the prophet Montanus proclaimed that the new Jerusalem had appeared in two small villages in Phrygia. Even though his New Prophecy had supporters across the Mediterranean in Italy, Gaul, and North Africa, many local bishops were strongly opposed to this revivalist movement that seemed to reject participation in Roman society. McKechnie suggests that this conflict typified "the dialectic between Christianity as counterculture and Christianity as institutionally linked with the secular world" (147). One opponent was Abercius, bishop of Hierapolis (not Papias's Hierapolis), whose inscribed epitaph commemorated his extensive journeys as far as Rome and Syria. Abercius was the new Paul (164). Not surprisingly, two centuries later a vita credited him as the apostle of Phrygia. In an appendix McKechnie includes a translation of the vita.

Eventually local notables became Christians. During the first century the men in the grandest family at Apollonia had served as priests of Zeus and the imperial cult; in the early third century a memorial to their descendant was engraved with a cross. McKechnie argues that this transition was "an early symptom of . . . a shift in the sacred canopy" (195). Epitaphs indicate that other municipal councillors in Phrygia were also Christians during the third century.

At the same time Christians developed a distinctive language for commemoration of the dead in epitaphs. A formula engraved on tombstones at Eumeneia threatened God's punishment against grave violators; in northern Phrygia the epitaphs included the

phrase "Christians for Christians." Other engraved epitaphs substituted a cross for the Greek letter chi. According to McKechnie, these formulas were a public manifestation of the adoption of a "Christian legitimation of the social order" (217). In the early fourth century the empire struck back when the emperor Diocletian issued formal edicts of persecution. This hostility was brief and limited. Afterward, an even more obvious manifestation of "the switch to a Christian sacred canopy in Phrygia" (258) was the construction of new churches.

McKechnie's overview of early Christianity in Phrygia is extensive and meticulous. It is also arduous to utilize. Much of the narrative includes digressions, distractions, superfluous details, extended engagement with other scholarship, and some patronizing dismissals. The narrative is episodic and fragmented, sometimes out of chronological sequence; it is difficult to translate these snapshots into the extended process of the historical rise of Christianity. The most significant hesitation is that the outcome is preordained. Suggesting that the presence of Greek-speaking Jews indicates that "there was potential in Phrygia for Christianity to grow" (44) already anticipates success and triumph.

The deployment of Berger's idea of world-construction provides a solid interpretive framework for examining the many varieties of early Christian sects. But Berger's complementary notion of world-maintenance could be applied to the pagan cults and Jewish communities that continued to flourish in Phrygia. Until the support of emperors tipped the balance, these rival religions also had the potential to expand. Because knowing the future affects our narratives of the past, we need reminding that the eventual success of a disruptive start-up like early Christianity was unexpected.

Raymond Van Dam
University of Michigan
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Raised on Christian Milk: Food and the Formation of the Soul in Early Christianity. By **John David Penniman**. Synkrisis. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2017. xvii + 328 pp. $85.00 hardcover.

In *Raised on Christian Milk*, John David Penniman shows that early Christian interpretations of Paul's milk-solid food distinction in 1 Corinthians 3:1–3 held more freight than a mere metaphor. Through an analysis of various Greco-Roman, Jewish, and early Christian texts, Penniman argues that, while early Christian writers had varying interpretations of Paul's distinction, their conceptions of human formation were always entwined with ancient theories of how food nourished both body and soul.

In chapter 1, Penniman demonstrates that early Christians did not start from scratch with their connection between food and formation. Drawing upon Hippocratic treatises, works by Plato and Aristotle, and other Greco-Roman works, Penniman focuses on the nourishment and instruction associated with breastfeeding as the bedrock of the sociocultural construction of Roman family values. Feeding children well directly affected the health of the *paterfamilias* and, by extension, the empire. The source and quality of breast milk either nourished the empire or was indicative of its moral slippage. In short, milk was political.