

AnneMarie Luijendijk, *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, Harvard Theological Studies 60, Cambridge/Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2008. Pp. xix + 294, 6 black and white plates. ISBN 978-0-674-02595-0. Paperback \$25.00.

- [1] In *Greetings in the Lord: Early Christians and the Oxyrhynchus Papyri*, a revision of AnneMarie Luijendijk's 2005 Harvard Dissertation *Fragments from Oxyrhynchus: A Case Study In Early Christian Identity*, Luijendijk sets out to survey and examine the pre-Constantinian (before 324 C.E.) documentary papyri (and parchments) that relate to either Christians or Christianity from Oxyrhynchus and its environs. Given that Oxyrhynchus has yielded a number of significant early documents relating to Christianity Luijendijk's work is a welcome contribution and represents the first book-length treatment of the subject. It is nice that there is finally something more substantial than Hugh MacLennan's chapter on Christianity at Oxyrhynchus in his 1935 book *Oxyrhynchus: An Economic and Social History*, Eldon Epp's "The Oxyrhynchus New Testament Papyri: 'Not Without Honor Except in Their Hometown,'" *JBL* 123 (2004): 5–55, or Peter Parson's chapter on Christianity at Oxyrhynchus in his 2007 monograph *City of the Sharp-Nosed-Fish*.
- [2] Luijendijk's book is divided into eight chapters with three subsections. In Chapter One ("Destination Oxyrhynchus: Historical Detective Work in the Footsteps of Monks and Papyrologists") Luijendijk outlines the scope of her examination, addresses some of the challenges of elucidating early Christianity at Oxyrhynchus from scraps of papyrus, and gives a general summary of the city and its papyrological remains. Though Luijendijk's study focuses almost exclusively on the documentary evidence the chapter concludes with a cursory overview of the literary evidence for Christianity in the city.
- [3] In Part One ("Meeting Christians at the Marketplace"), which is comprised of Chapters Two and Three, Luijendijk begins her work by considering what "markers" exist to allow one to identify Christians or Christian documentary texts in the early papyri. Starting with the use of "God" (θεός) Luijendijk considers whether such references are decidedly Christian and through a judicious analysis of various occurrences of the term in the singular, wherein she invokes P.Oxy. 14.1680 as a test case, she shows that in most cases this is not by itself a definitive Christian marker. Next she considers the use of the term "Christian," which is of course a sure indicator, but notes that there are only three attestations of the term in the Oxyrhynchus papyri in the period before 324 C.E. (P.Oxy. 42.3025 [256 C.E.]; P.Oxy. 43.3119 [ca. 260 C.E.]; SB 12.10772 [late III C.E.]) and that all of them occur in non-Christian documents. The chapter concludes by asking whether certain biblical names like Jacob or Maria, which are very uncommon in documentary papyri in the pre-Constantinian period, are conclusive Christian markers.
- [4] Chapter Three is devoted almost exclusively to the appearance and use of *nomina sacra* in some early letters. Luijendijk notes that *nomina sacra* are definitive markers of Christian identity and that they first appear in letters from the mid to late third century. In total Luijendijk identifies eleven letters from the pre-Constantinian period (listed on pp. 62–64) that employ *nomina sacra* and thus secure Christian authorship. Sidestepping the debate over the origin of *nomina sacra* Luijendijk argues that their employment in documentary texts presupposes that the authors of

the different letters had some sort of Christian education and raises the possibility that their use could suggest that the writers were clergy who were familiar with *nomina sacra* from literary manuscripts.

- [5] Part Two (“Papa Sotas: Bishop of Oxyrhynchus”), occupying Chapters Four and Five, builds upon Luijendijk’s theories in Chapter Three about the use of *nomina sacra* in letters and potential clerical contexts. In particular, Luijendijk makes a compelling case that a certain individual named Sotas, who appears in some mid-third century letters that employ *nomina sacra* (PSI 3.208; PSI 9.1041; P.Oxy. 12.1492) and in P.Oxy. 36.2785 is identified as “papa Sotas,” was almost certainly an early bishop of Oxyrhynchus. While Luijendijk admits that her argument about Sotas is largely circumstantial, she makes a very compelling case and her treatment of the letters mentioning Sotas is exemplary as she lucidly fleshes them out and tries to depict Sotas involved in teaching, church administration, and interestingly enough book production. These two chapters are probably the most original and interesting in the entire book.
- [6] In Part Three (“Legal Matters and Government Dealings”), comprising Chapters Six and Seven, Luijendijk shifts gears and considers the evidence for Christians in official documents. She begins with an analysis of the four extant Decian *libelli* from Oxyrhynchus from the mid-third century (P.Oxy. 4.658; P.Oxy. 12.1464; P.Oxy. 51.2990; P.Oxy. 58.3929). In her analysis of these texts Luijendijk prudently notes that while it is impossible to know if these *libelli* were actually issued to Christians they nevertheless advance our knowledge of the Decian persecution which greatly affected many Christians in Egypt. She concludes the chapter by examining two additional texts, P.Oxy. 42.3025 and P.Oxy. 43.3119, that mention “Christians” and may have related to the persecution under Valerian.
- [7] In the next chapter Luijendijk moves on to the “Great Persecution” initiated by Diocletian at the start of the fourth century and examines three documents. The first (P.Oxy. 33.2673) is a declaration of church property from the Oxyrhynchite village of Chysis submitted in February 303 C.E. While Luijendijk’s treatment of this well-known papyrus tends to repeat previous analyses she does make an interesting connection with P.Harr. 2.208 that may also have come from Oxyrhynchus. In her treatment of a property register (P.Oxy.33.2665) from 305–06 C.E., wherein the property of a noted “Paul from the Oxyrhynchite nome” was being sought, she makes an interesting case on onomastic grounds that perhaps Paul was a Christian and that his arrest and property inquiry was directly related to the imperial edicts issued as part of the Great Persecution. Finally, she looks at a letter (P.Oxy. 31.2603) where a certain man named Copres, who is clearly a Christian, made a power of attorney for a friend (who was presumably non-Christian) so he could avoid having to offer a sacrifice while appearing in court. While this letter is quite well-known and often cited since it shows how a Christian could avoid the obligation to sacrifice during the Great Persecution, Luijendijk does an exemplary job situating the letter and fully elucidating all of its many features. It may be noted that the contents of this chapter are repeated in a number of respects in an article Luijendijk published the same year as the book: “Papyri from the Great Persecution: Roman and Christian Perspectives,” *J ECS* 16.3 (2008): 341–69.
- [8] The final chapter is short and integrates Luijendijk’s different approaches to the documentary papyri from Oxyrhynchus. On p. 227 she notes, “my detailed analysis

of these underutilized manuscripts has offered glimpses into the lives of early Christians different from those that Christian literary writings offer.” This is indeed the case as Luijendijk has succeeded in elucidating the lives of a few early Christians from Oxyrhynchus whose only remains exist on a few scraps of papyrus or parchment.

- [9] On a number of fronts this work is exemplary. It is clearly and cogently written and is well-documented with copious footnotes; thus, the work is appealing to both the scholar as well as the informed layperson. Luijendijk is often able to lucidly contextualize a given document and flesh out how it contributes to a greater understanding of Christianity at Oxyrhynchus in the pre-Constantinian period. This is particularly the case with the Sotas Correspondence treated in Chapters Four and Five. Though Luijendijk admits that her argument that Sotas was an early bishop of Oxyrhynchus is conjectural, since the publication of her work her hypothesis has been confirmed. In a recently discovered Ethiopic manuscript that dates to the Aksumite age (IV–VII) and contains fragments of some thirty-six different treatises, is found a work identified as the *History of the Alexandrian Patriarchate* (not to be confused with either the *Coptic History of the Church* nor the *Arabic History of the Patriarchs*). During the episcopacy of Theon (ca. 282–300) it reports that he ordained a man by the name of Sotas as bishop of Oxyrhynchus who must surely be the same Sotas who appears in the Oxyrhynchite letters treated by Luijendijk.
- [10] Notwithstanding the high quality of this work and its numerous strengths there are a few shortcomings. To begin, Luijendijk probably should have included some more documents in her examination to make her treatment of documentary Christian texts from the pre-Constantinian period more complete. P.Vind.Sijp. 26, a mid-third century letter, sent between the Oxyrhynchite and the nearby metropolis of Cynopolis between two Christians occupying the lower strata of nome administration should have at least been mentioned even if it was not going to be treated. Similarly, there is a disregard for P.Oxy. 20.2276, a letter almost certainly written by a Christian that dates to either the late third century or the early fourth century.
- [11] Turning to Luijendijk’s treatments of certain papyri, while she does a solid job contextualizing the documents and extrapolating some very insightful conclusions, sometimes her transcriptions tend to add little more than what appears in the *ed. pr.* or updates in the *Berichtigungsliste der griechischen Papyrusurkunden aus Ägypten*. Furthermore, on occasion some of her textual emendations seem somewhat questionable. For example, her reconstruction of ll. 1–2 of SB XII 10772 (p. 137), which is indebted to Luigi Moretti (“Note Egittologiche,” *Aeg* 38 [1958]: 199), is doubtful and it seems more likely that the reading currently given in SB XII 10772 is correct since it does not require an abbreviation in the lacuna and seems more natural (cf. prescript for P.Oxy. 14.1680 on p. 32). On another front, sometimes it would have been nice to see a little more integration of literary sources to help flesh out some of the documentary texts she treats. When she discusses P.Oxy. 33.2665 and the notable “Paul from the Oxyrhynchite nome” who is mentioned in this text, it would have been helpful to consider whether there might have been any connection between this individual and another seemingly notable Paul from Oxyrhynchus who is mentioned in Marcellinus and Faustinus, *Libellus Precum* 26 (PL 13.101A–B; CSEL 35/1 p. 33, 35–36). Likewise, when discussing the evidence for the “Great Persecution” at Oxyrhynchus she never considers the

sole literary source preserved in the *Acta Sanctorum* (vol. 40, August tom. VI pp. 14–15) that details the martyrdom of seventeen Christians from Oxyrhynchus. Though this text is briefly mentioned on p. 101, since it mentions a bishop of Oxyrhynchus, it may have potentially helped to supplement her study of the papyri in this chapter.

- [12] To conclude, it would be very unfair to end a review of Luijendijk's book on a negative note since most of its shortcomings are trifling matters and overall the work is exemplary and is a great service to the academy. Undoubtedly this work will be of use for many years to come; one cannot begin to examine Christianity at Oxyrhynchus without consulting this work and engaging with Luijendijk's many compelling conclusions. Luijendijk has certainly set a high standard for how history ought to be written from the papyri.

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