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TIBOR GRÜLL

«With spiritual writings and Homeric words»
A Hypsistarian soothsayer in fourth-century Phrygia

1. Roman Phrygia: a unique epigraphic culture and religious environment

People of the villages and small towns of Roman Phrygia are known to us thanks to an astonishing abundance of Greek and Latin inscriptions on stone, mostly votive and funerary monuments, and almost all dating to the later Roman Imperial and late antique periods. Roman Phrygia had a unique epigraphic culture in many ways.¹ PETER THONEMANN has argued that while a number of Phrygian cities were monumentalized during the Roman period, the Phrygian society ultimately remained decentralized, politically fragmented and primarily agrarian.² What is striking at first glance is the high proportion of beautifully crafted and ornamented tombstones (doorstones, funerary stelae and altars) with an astoundingly high number of metrical epitaphs written in Greek epic vocabulary even in the countryside. Most of these funerary monuments were erected in the second and third centuries C. E., which is completely in line with the peak of «epigraphic habit» throughout the Roman Empire.³ It was unusual for funerary inscriptions to indicate religious status anywhere before the third century C. E., but in Phrygia they often reflect religious affiliations of the deceased, whether the individual was a worshipper of the Greco-Roman gods, or a member of the Jewish or Christian community. There were four deities that STEPHEN MITCHELL treats as fundamental to the people of Phrygia: Zeus (addressed with many bynames), the Mother Goddess (also called Kybele), and a peculiar twin-god called «Holy and Righteous» (Ὅσιος καὶ Δίκαιος). Another surprising feature is that both Jews and Christians openly confess their religious affiliations before and after the Constantinian shift; in addition, naturally, also using the common symbols (menorah, ethrog, lulav – Christogram, fish, cross etc.) on their epitaphs. There were also sub-regions within this historical region of Central Anatolia where these religions coexisted rela-

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¹ KELP 2013; MASSÉGLIA 2013; UNWIN 2020.

² THONEMANN 2013, 36f.

³ MACMULLEN 1982; MEYER 1990.