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A table of contents for *The Expositor* can be found here:

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THE BOOK AS AN EARLY CHRISTIAN SYMBOL.[1]

IN the EXPOSITOR, October 1888, p. 255 ff., three gravestones found in Northern Phrygia are described. All three bear the curious legend "Thou shalt not wrong God."[2] This legend is in one case accompanied by the representation of an open book[3] (indicated by incised lines). In this case certainly, and in the other two cases almost certainly,[4] the above-quoted words were engraved by a different hand from that which cut the principal epitaph describing the construction and purpose of the tomb. In the first case the principal epitaph remains in full, and is better expressed, better spelt, and better cut than the short legend. The legend is placed at the top of the stone unsymmetrically, and has all the appearance of being cut as an afterthought by an unskilled hand. The principal epitaph occupies the proper position at the bottom of the stone (though, either because it was too long, or because part was omitted, three names which complete it are added in the upper left margin).

In the other two monuments the legend is engraved in very rude fashion by an untrained hand between the heads of the human figures represented in relief on the stone, but in both the principal inscription is lost, in one case through the mutilation of the monument, in the other case through the defacing of the letters. Though definite certainty is in

[1] In the article in the last EXPOSITOR, February, I regret much the omission of a footnote to p. 156. The article was written hurriedly away from books at the end of the Christmas vacation, and a previous paragraph referring to Canon Tristram (where the note was in place) was omitted. I wrote to the printers asking that the following note should be inserted on a separate slip as an erratum (but the number had been printed and despatched before my letter arrived): "Canon Tristram's book is one of those that stand above praise: one uses it and is thankful for it."

[2] *τὸν θεὸν σὺ μὴ ἀδικήσεις*, with various gross mis-spellings: the ungrammatical future instead of the conditional is a symptom of the bad Phrygian Greek.

[3] Strictly, the object is a set of wooden *tabellae*, used for writing documents in, and having a superficial resemblance in shape to a book.

[4] The uncertainty is due to the incompleteness of the two monuments as is explained in the sequel.

these cases not attainable, yet the unusual and awkward position and the rude form of the letters in the legend points to the same conclusion as in the first monument.

The legend in these three monuments was probably added by a member of the family which purchased the gravestone. The stones were kept ready in stock by a tradesman, and purchased by the family. The regular epitaph was engraved by a skilled hand, doubtless in the workshop; the epitaph was put in the space that had been reserved for the purpose above or below the ornament, though the epitaph was sometimes too long and sometimes too short for the space. But the short additional legend in these three cases seems to have originated in the desire of the family for some expression of religious feeling; and the rough indication of a book or *tabellae* in one case almost certainly springs from the same source and was cut by the same hand as the legend. The legend and book are the only proof of Christian origin in one case, and the other two may probably be classed with it in this respect (though it is of course possible that the lost principal inscription in them may have contained some evidence of religion). This perhaps points to the desire for secrecy. The principal epitaph was of neutral tone, but the legend added by the family was more distinctive. Yet even this legend shows that veiled and cryptic character which seems to belong to the pre-Constantinian period, and which intentionally leaves the religion of the deceased uncertain to the ordinary reader, and clear only to the initiated.[1] There was no necessary cause why a pagan should not put on a tomb, "Thou shalt not wrong God." There is nothing overtly Christian about the words, and yet I believe that Christians understood them as a proof of the faith. The proof that the formula was used only by Christians is incomplete, but can now be made stronger than formerly.

[1] *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1904, p. 292.

There has been among some recent scholars a tendency to argue that every phrase which is not necessarily and certainly Christian ought rather to be regarded as pagan; and such scholars would be probably disposed to regard the use of the legend, which we are here discussing, as furnishing no proof of the Christian origin of the monument. The same remark would apply to others among the series of monuments described in the article just quoted and those which followed it.[1] But the discovery of new monuments has confirmed the Christian origin of most of the gravestones formerly published; and the writer has little to change in those articles, which traced the first outline of a great and growing subject, the Christian epigraphy of inner Asia Minor, though there is now a great deal to add.

Before the Christian origin of those Phrygian tombs can be reasonably maintained, it is necessary to raise and to answer the question, What was the thought and purpose in the mind of those who added this legend to some of those tombstones? Such an addition is indicative of a certain view about life and about death. What was that view? It would not be possible to answer this question with any certainty from these three cases alone; but the analogy of many other mununents inscribed with other formulae points decisively to the answer. The legend represents the warning or hortatory utterance of the dead man. He in his new estate has read the lesson of the world, and preaches it on his grave-stone, just as Avircius Marcellus did in a much wider exhortation on his grave. Now the one great lesson which the Phrygians at that time generally emphasized on their gravestones was the sanctity of the grave, and the vengeance which will overtake any violator. Both pagans and Christians during the third century (to which most of the monuments of this kind belong, though a few are probably as late as the earlier years of the fourth

[1] EXPOSITOR, October, 1888–May, 1889.

century) looked for protection and vengeance both to the civil courts and to the Divine power. Christian formulae have it that he who injures or violates the tomb "shall have to reckon with God," or "shall give account to God, who is to judge the living and the dead," etc. These formulae are developed out of pagan suggestions.[1] It is characteristic of the Christian formulae to appeal more clearly and explicitly to the judgment day, as the time when the reckoning shall take place and the punishment be inflicted.

This is a somewhat meagre lesson to teach, and indicates a narrow and half-pagan view. The ordinary Phrygian Christian of the third century was still, in some respects, strongly tinged with the old pre-Christian ideas about the grave and its sanctity. Such ideas are always difficult to eliminate from the minds of a converted people. Perhaps it is neither wise nor right to try to eliminate them too rapidly. Certainly the Christian gravestones of the third century in central Asia Minor show generally this extremely jealous maintenance of the sole right to the use of the tomb (a jealousy which originated in the pagan idea that the tomb is the temple of the dead man, where he enjoys the worship and is ready to grant the prayers of his descendants who maintain his religious cult, and that any intruder would diminish his enjoyment by sharing in the worship). Yet there are traces[2] that even during the third century the Phrygian Christians were advancing towards a more noble and Christian view, in which the tomb was open to friends or to the brethren generally.

In the unbroken monument, which has just been described, a book[3] is roughly indicated by incised lines beside the legend. In the EXPOSITOR, as above quoted, I sug-

[1] These are described in *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, ii. pp. 496 ff., 514 ff.; but other pagan examples occur besides those there mentioned.

[2] *Cities and Bishoprics*, ii. pp. 531 f., 732 f.

[3] The Greek word βιβλίον, a book, is often used to indicate a document of the kind that was generally written on *tabellæ*.

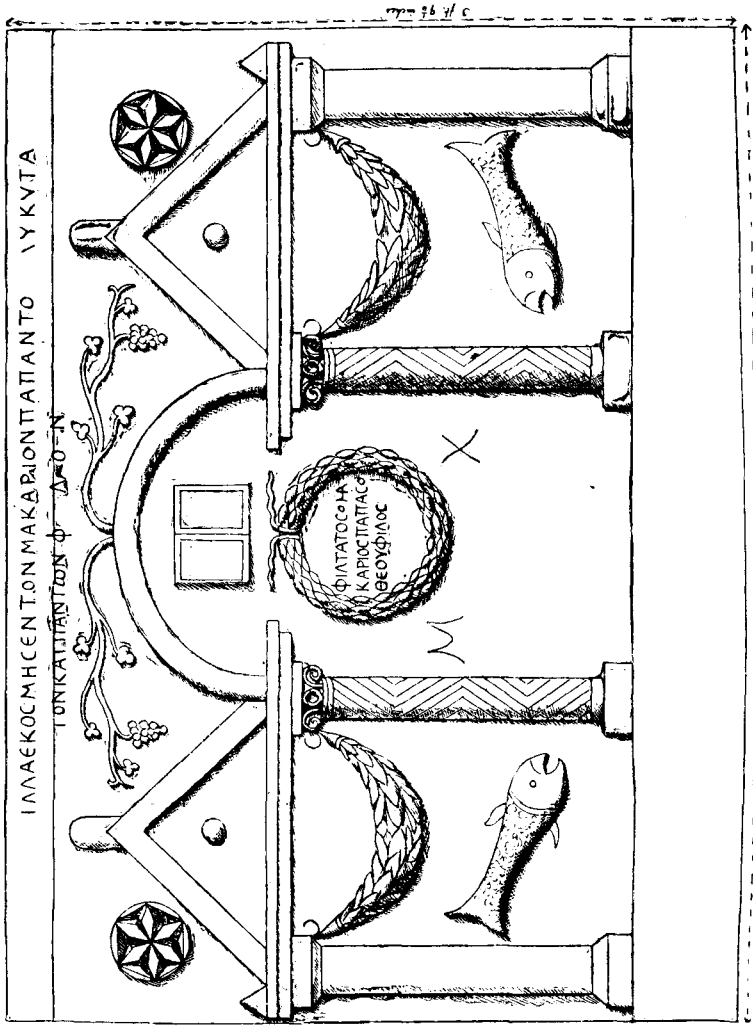
gested that this was intended to represent an open codex of the Bible (which was possible at that period); but the fact that the legend and the book are added together by the same rude hand makes it natural to understand that they stand in a close relation to one another. If that be so, the book must rather be understood to be a record of the covenant or arrangement between God and man; and the book is opened to test the faithfulness with which the covenant has been kept. In fact the book is simply a symbol of the judgment of God which all men must submit to. The thought of the day of judgment was uppermost in those Phrygian epitaphs; and in one of them the formula is "he shall have to reckon with God both now and at the day of judgment."[1] It is not so much a book in our sense of the word, as a set of tablets, of the kind on which letters, wills and many other documents of ordinary life or of legal character were inscribed.

The origin of the legend might throw light on the purpose; but I do not know whence it is derived. The words are not taken from the Septuagint (in which only *ἀδικεῖν ἐν θεῷ*, not *τὸν θεόν*, seems to occur, e.g. 2 Chron. xxvi. 16). They are, probably, to be understood as a summary statement of the covenant, which is supposed to be stated in the *tabellæ*. These tablets have been opened when the formal judgment of the case has begun, just as, in ordinary legal processes, the tablets containing the formal agreement on which the case turned were opened in court when the legal process began.

That this is the preferable interpretation seems to follow from a Christian tombstone, probably of the period 250–280 A.D., found at Isaura Nova about forty miles south of Iconium. This stone, one of the most important of the recently discovered Christian monuments of that country,

[1] *Cities and Bishoprics*, ii. p. 514, no. 353. Compare also the two formulæ already quoted.

is shown in the accompanying illustration, drawn by Miss A. Margaret Ramsay, and published by her in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1904, p. 265. The illustration is here



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This remarkable monument of a Lycaonian bishop is

the oldest as yet known in Asia Minor, in which a distinctively Christian character is imparted to the ornamentation: the figures represented are chosen by Christian taste and are intended to produce a specially Christian effect. Yet there is nothing necessarily Christian either in the general scheme of the monument or about any one of the details. There is none of them that might not conceivably be used by a pagan, and most of them were freely used in pagan art of the period in question. The total effect, however, and the spirit of the whole, are indubitably Christian, and the monument affords extremely interesting evidence about the local religious feeling in the second half of the third century.

One part of the ornamentation alone is probably a Christian idea in origin, and not adapted from contemporary pagan art—the two fish. The fish is hardly known as an ornament in pagan art. Sacred fish indeed are well known in pagan religion, and it is quite probable that some esoteric meaning or power was there attributed to the fish; but the fish does not seem to have affected the popular art of contemporary society. Only in Christian thought and Christian symbolic expression was the fish of the highest importance, so as to make it a suitable device in a prominent place on an elaborate gravestone like this. The two fishes symmetrically indicated on this stone would alone be sufficient to suggest that it is a Christian monument.

The Christian character of the stone is demonstrated beyond question by the inscriptions. The principal inscription follows the usual pagan form, and yet differs subtly from it: a lady whose name ends in the termination -illa (Nonilla or something similar) "did honour to the blessed Papas, the sweetest one and friend of all." Nonilla must have been closely connected with the deceased, as the term "sweetest" (γλυκύτατος) is practically restricted on

the tombstones of the country to express near relationship.[1] She was probably his wife, yet she does not mention the relationship nor the name of the deceased. She only calls him by the title, which already had become almost a technical term for a bishop among the Christians, *μακάριος πάπας*.

The first explanation of this peculiarity which suggests itself is that the title Papas had already in this part of Asia Minor almost superseded the original name of the bishop: the office, like many of the great pagan priesthoods, was *hieronymos*, i.e. the bearer disused his personal name, and took the hieratic official title in its place. A different explanation, however, will be advanced at the end of this paper as possible, founded on the theory that the bishop was a martyr.

His relatives here even seem to sink their relationship, and regard him only in his hieratic aspect. There is hardly another epitaph in this district in which the relative who erects the tomb fails to mention the relationship to the buried person. The rule which is observed in some gravestones of this same town, e.g. of another bishop, and some other Christian officials, presbyter, œconomissa, etc., whose name and title alone are inscribed on their tombs, is really a different sepulchral formula, in which the maker of the tomb is not mentioned.

If the view that the title is here substituted for the name of the deceased is correct, it would suggest that a strong pagan influence affected this local development of Christianity. In fact it might be asked whether the title Papas was not due to pagan influence. That title was applied in Asia Minor to the chief god; and it was also used as a title

[1] . . . . ιλλα *ἐκόσμησεν τὸν μακάριον πάπαν, τὸν γλυκύτατον καὶ πάντων φίλον.* The formula with *ἐκόσμησεν* was extremely common in Lycaonia: it is paraphrased in a metrical epitaph of Nova Isaura (Miss Ramsay, No. 1) as *τεῦξε οἱ ἀγλαίην*, "wrought a beautiful monument for him." Ignatius spoke of the deacons of Magnesia as *τῶν ἐμοὶ γλυκυτάτων*.

in addressing an earthly father. The similar word ἄππας occurs as a title of a special kind of priest[1]; and πάπας may have probably been used both generically as an address to a priest of high rank, and as a title of some special kind of priest (though no example can as yet be quoted from the scanty remains that have come down to us), since the name of a god (for example, Attis) was often applied to his priest in Asia Minor. The pagan word Papas was perhaps adopted by the Christians, just as episkopos and many other pagan titles were adopted by them.

The title Papas is used also by Gregory Thaum., *Ep. Canon.* i. (as Dr. Sanday mentions), which confirms our inscriptions as a proof of usage in Asia Minor; and Professor Harnack[2] points out that the title *makarios papas* was in Egypt appropriated to the Bishop of Alexandria during the third century, alone among the Egyptian bishops (the others being addressed as πατὴρ ἡμῶν). The use of this expression in our inscription, therefore, points to the third century; and the dating 250–300 A.D. is confirmed by many other reasons mentioned in Miss Ramsay's paper.

The architectural scheme is common to a large number of sepulchral monuments in the same town, and is unknown except in a small district around.[3] Reasons are stated in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies* (partly by Miss Ramsay, and partly by the present writer in the conclusion of her article) for thinking that this whole series of monuments forms part of the development of the Christian town, and "arose during the inspiration and quickening of mind and activity caused by the general acceptance of the new religion in the city" (p. 292). How such a scheme came into use on

[1] See Buresch, *aus Lydien*, p. 130 f., Ziebarth, *das griech. Vereinswesen*, p. 153; Ramsay *Cities and Bish. of Phrygia*, i. p. 142, (where Ἄππας is wrongly taken as a second name of Zeuxis, instead of his title).

[2] *Berlin Sitzsungsber.*, 1901, p. 990. See *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1904, p. 268.

[3] Over thirty examples are published in the article quoted, and many others are known.

gravestones is an unsolved problem[1]; but there is obviously nothing Christian about it originally; a Christian character can only have become attached to it through association. It is well-known, and is inevitable in the circumstances, that art among the Christians only by slow degrees disengaged itself from contemporary art as it existed in society generally and assumed a special character of its own. To this originally non-religious scheme doubtless a Christian meaning became attached, but what it was is unknown.

The crown in the centre is one of the commonest ornaments in pagan monuments of this period in Asia Minor; but to the Christian who planned this monument or gazed upon it, the symbol doubtless was "the crown of life," promised to the victor in the Smyrnean Church.

The trailing vine-branches would recall the words "I am the vine, ye are the branches." But the ornament was often used in pagan art without any symbolic intention. It was a Christian art that caught up the detail and gave it a meaning of its own.

This interpretation of the details selected for the ornamentation of this remarkable monument will, doubtless, have to encounter the charge of being fanciful and subjective. But those who have examined the subject for themselves, and worked through the evidence point by point, know that symbolism is of the essence of early Christian art, The Christians began at first by using the ordinary surroundings of life, including the ordinary system of ornamentation (where ornament must be used); gradually, they formed their own surroundings and made their own art; and their decorative art created itself out of existing forms by selecting those details which were suited to express Christian ideas and thoughts. It is by tracing the presence of symbolism and of a straining after mean-

[1] Though not used, so far as known, elsewhere in sepulchral monuments, a similar scheme is employed in manuscripts; see, e.g., Strzygowski *Kalenderbilder*.

ing in the details that we detect the first steps of Christian art as it disengaged itself from previously existing art. There must inevitably be some degree of subjectivity and doubt in the attempt to trace the beginnings of this symbolism. We have to try to determine the point at which a detail which had been used by ordinary people universally in a different way began to be used by Christian hands in a definitely Christian way, and to bear a certain meaning to Christian eyes and minds.

In this attempt an element of uncertainty is unavoidable. But in the interpretation given of the monument before us there seems to be no fancifulness; there is the creative play of trained imagination, working through sympathetic understanding, which must always be applied in interpreting the past. The interpretation of the symbolism of a distant past cannot be proved with definite objective certainty. Confidence and assurance come through the recognition of heart by heart[1]: we feel the meaning which the heart of that ancient time is struggling to express to our heart and to all time: a common emotion, a common belief and a common humanity enable us to feel and to respond.

In the present case we have fortunately the indubitable evidence of the inscriptions to show that the family which purchased this monument from the professional stonecutter and ordered the words to be engraved on it, was Christian. But might it not be supposed that the stone was cut by pagans and sold in a pagan shop? That cases of this kind often occurred cannot be doubted; but in the present instance, this is utterly improbable. The choice of ornament speaks to us, if we have the trained historical imagination. There never was a pagan stone like this one.

At the same time it must be plainly recognized and confessed that the study of early Christian art in Asia

[1] The words of Faust to Wagner will occur to every reader.

Minor is only beginning. The monuments have never been collected, or studied, or published. When they are more fully known, much will be learned that is now hid from us; and perhaps it may be found that some of the first steps in interpretation were mistaken. But pioneers must take some risks, when they are attempting to lead the way into a new region; unless they take the risk and go ahead, the beginning cannot be made. All the greater is the risk, if it be true (as we believe) that in Asia Minor the first stages in the formation of a distinctively Christian form of art were made.

Even the two rosettes have probably a religious significance. The suggestion made by Miss Ramsay in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1904, p. 268, seems to me to be correct and to be corroborated by other unpublished Lycaonian monuments. The rosette was regarded in Lycaonian Christian art as an ornate elaboration of the early monogram[1] ☧; i.e. I.X. for *Ἰησοῦς Χριστός*. This monogram was placed within a circle, the three lines being made diameters; and ornamental character was imparted.

That this form of Christian monogram was used in central Asia Minor is proved by the Phrygian inscription published in the *Cities and Bishoprics*, ii. p. 526, no. 371, which belongs probably to about A.D. 270. This symbol is rare, because it was disused early. A Roman inscription of A.D. 268 or 279 contains it. In the fourth century the symbol ☧ had taken its place.

In the original Christian form out of which this rosette was developed the three cross lines would naturally be more clearly emphasized, and examples of this more recognizable form are common: in some cases the rosette is hardly more than three incised lines placed diametrically within a circle (as in No. 17 in the above-quoted article, *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1904, p. 280). But in most

[1] De Rossi, *Inscr. Christ. Urb. Rom.*, No. 10.

cases the symbol is varied and elaborated so as to become almost purely ornamental, though certainly the meaning of the ornament was remembered for a time. At last, however, even the meaning was forgotten, for in a few late examples, the four-armed is substituted for the three-armed rosette.[1]

A similar instance of elaboration of another early Christian symbol into a mere ornament is found in the use of the cross. The cross +, either simple or within a circle, was used as a symbol to mark a Christian tomb from an early time. It was placed somewhere on the surface, in such a way as to be recognized by the initiated, while it might readily be taken by the ordinary passer-by for a mere meaningless ornament. It was even placed occasionally within a square or rectangle, in which case it was exactly like an ordinary Pagan ornament used on Pagan graves from the Midas-tomb in the eighth century B.C. downwards. In that last case no confidence can be felt that it is intended as a Christian symbol. One example is given by Miss Ramsay, *loc. cit.*, p. 285, No. 29, who expresses no opinion as to the religion of the stone. Another Phrygian example was published by me as Christian in the *Journal of Hellenic Studies*, 1883, p. 424: later I changed my opinion, and mentioned it as more probably Pagan in the *Cities and Bishoprics of Phrygia*, ii. p. 705. Finally I have again been emboldened to regard it as probably Christian by the newly discovered Lycaonian class of ornate Christian tombstones. These changes of opinion show how slippery a subject the interpretation of symbolism, which was intended to be elusive, must necessarily be. The reason why for a time I regarded the tomb as more

[1] Most of these four-armed (or, as we might call them, eight-armed) rosettes are found in Pisidia, where Christian art was of later origin and probably derived from Lycaonia, without proper understanding of the meaning.

probably Pagan (as stated in the place just quoted) was that the style of ornament was so closely analogous to native Phrygian ornament, and bore no resemblance to any known Christian symbolism, while it seemed doubtful if the cross was used as a Christian symbol so early as A.D. 121 (the date on the tombstone, probably); but the question is changed essentially, since this symbolic language in Lycaonian art has been discovered.

It is only by the collection and classification of examples that confidence can be attained; and as yet there is not a sufficiently large collection of examples to justify confident assertion in every case. There is, however, still a large number of monuments to collect, and hardly any attempt is being made to collect them before they disappear. Most travellers regard these humble and often very rude monuments with contempt, and do not always take the trouble even to make drawings of them when they find them; sometimes they do not even copy the letters or describe the stone. I have found sometimes in my old note-books examples of Christian symbolic monuments, whose character at the time I had not recognized, though later discoveries had shown that they must be Christian. In some cases I had fortunately made a sketch of the ornamentation; but in other cases I have only a brief note in words, or retain a mere memory of what I lost.

In the Lycaonian monuments, published by Miss Ramsay, this symbol of the cross appears in the pediments of the architectural scheme, Nos. 3, 4; more or less varied it appears as an ornament in Nos. 10, 11 (in No. 11 resembling a mere star, in No. 10 a Maltese cross); still more elaborated it is seen in Nos. 14, 28, 30, 31, 34 (in several of these being combined with the rosette), worked up into the swastika[1] it appears in Nos. 4, 16, 17, 23, 25; and in No. 16

[1] Professor Sterrett was the first to recognize the swastika on Lycaonian gravestones as a Christian symbol (*Wolfe Expedition*, Nos. 220, 56, 93).

it appears a second time as a curiously elaborated double swastika. Contemplating long series of monuments, found all in one small town, the product of a short period, about 250–350 A.D., and of a few workshops, one must recognize that the use of the cross in Christian symbolism goes back to an early time, at least to the second century.

Returning to the tomb of the Blessed Bishop, from which the discussion started, we perceive that in such a monument as this the symbol indicated in the central pediment above the crown must, beyond all doubt, have a Christian meaning. Now in this case the nature of the symbol is clearly indicated; it is not in our sense a book; it is an open set of *tabellae*. The depression in the surface of each *tabella* to contain the wax (in which the document was inscribed) is clearly indicated. The pair of tablets was represented on this grave, because it had already been appropriated to sepulchral Christian purposes, and we have recognized it as the Christian symbol indicating death and the judgment of God after death; the tablets are opened to indicate that the process of judgment has begun. The tablets were unsealed and opened after death had taken place.

Therefore we must understand that the entire symbolism of the central and principal part of the monument indicates the judgment after death and the crown of life which is the reward of him who has been faithful unto death. In this crown is engraved the second part of the inscription: "Very dear is the blessed Papas, the friend of God." In the last phrase, Theou-philos, we shall be justified in seeing a play upon the name of the deceased, the blessed bishop, Theophilos.

Was Theophilos, then, a martyr? Had he gained the crown of life by faithfulness unto death in the fullest and highest sense? It is impossible to say. There is nothing inconsistent with the probabilities of the case in supposing that Theophilos was actually a victim of the Decian persecution A.D. 251. In that case we should have here a

Christian memorial of that great persecution to set alongside of the dated memorial erected to one of the priests, who stimulated and directed the pagan reaction against Christianity at that time, a memorial which was recently discovered at Akmonia.[1] But, on the other hand, it is equally possible that the symbolism had already been widened in its application, and was used on the tombstone of any Christian, martyr or not. The avoidance of the name, and the indication of it only by a play on the meaning of the word Theophilos, would perhaps point to the former alternative as the more natural; and in that case the substitution of the title for the personal name would lose much of the half-pagan aspect which at first sight it seemed to bear, and would be only the result of the necessary concealment. The Roman government did not war against the dead, as a rule, but granted the remains of martyrs to their friends; yet even then it would hardly be permitted to the friends to raise so stately a monument as this must have been and inscribe it explicitly to the memory of a criminal who had been executed by official authority. The epithet *makarios*, also, was especially appropriate to a martyr, though *makarios papas*, it is true, may have been the regular designation of a bishop in Asia Minor, as well as in Alexandria. The whole inscription, in its two parts, certainly diverges far from the common style of sepulchral epigraphy, whether Christian or pagan; and the theory of martyrdom would well explain the character of the monument and the epitaph. But beyond that probability it is at present impossible to go.

W. M. RAMSAY.

[1] It was published by the writer in the *Revue des Études Anciennes*, 1901 p. 275 f. (with a correction of the date in the same *Revue*, 1902, p. 269). On the whole subject some remarks are made in the *Letters to the Seven Churches of Asia*, p. 110.

(*To be concluded.*)