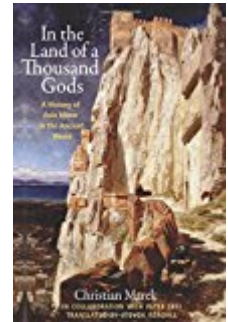


Christian Marek, Peter Frei. *In the Land of a Thousand Gods: A History of Asia Minor in the Ancient World.* Trans. Steven Rendall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016. 824 pp. \$49.50, cloth, ISBN 978-0-691-15979-9.



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Commissioned by Camarin M. Porter (Western Colorado University)

Steven Rendall's translation of Christian Marek's *Geschichte Kleinasiens in der Antike* makes accessible to the English-speaking world a truly ambitious and remarkable book. I can think of few people more qualified to write such a work than Marek, who along with his now deceased collaborator Peter Frei has been instrumental in bringing to light vast quantities of new evidence from Greco-Roman Asia Minor. The task is an enormous one: to recount the past of a region that was home not only to "a thousand gods," as the English title declares, but to dozens of indigenous and migrant peoples over the course of many thousands of years. The rich archaeological record of Asia Minor also ensures that short shrift cannot be given to "pre-historic" periods, while the plethora of material and written evidence from the Hellenistic and Roman periods in particular demands a breadth of knowledge and an organizational skill that fortunately Marek possesses in great measure.

What does it mean to write a history of Asia Minor in antiquity? For Marek it rests on four pa-

rameters. He defines Asia Minor as the ancient equivalent of the Asian territory of Turkey (pp. xiii, 714), while the ancient world stretches from the earliest human habitation to the reformation of the Roman imperial system under the emperor Diocletian (284 CE). He justifies this chronological endpoint by referencing the fundamentally different nature of the evidence after 300 CE, and the marked if gradual transition to the Byzantine world (pp. 550-551). Alongside these spatiotemporal parameters, Marek provides a thematic and methodological focus to the book. The significance of Asia Minor is for him its intermediary position "between East and West" (the subtitle of chapter 1), which causes it to act as both a site for the mixing of peoples and as a bridge transmitting culture and commercial goods internally and externally. As a result, the region is neither "eastern" nor "western." Methodologically, Marek finds it "appropriate to eschew theorizing as much as possible" in favor of remaining "as close as I can to the sources," since his aim is to represent the position of the current state of scholarship (p. xiv). I

will further discuss these parameters below, but for now it will suffice to observe that the consequence of his methodology is a structural emphasis on political narrative and state institutions as reflected by written sources that reproduces a pro-imperial, elite perspective that is often external to Asia Minor.

With these parameters in mind, which include extensive discussion of the geographical limits and topography of the region, Marek embarks in chapter 2 on an illuminating history of the study of Asia Minor, starting from the origins of fieldwork that emerged among various Europeans who visited the Ottoman Empire, recounting the major excavations that developed, and concluding with the rise of survey work that dominates much of the current research in Turkey today. Marek is laudably critical of the "European tunnel-vision" (p. 36) that favors certain areas over others, leading to an imbalanced understanding of the peninsula, but seems less attuned to the roles played by imperialism, colonialism, and nationalism in motivating the exploration and "discovery" of antiquities from the eighteenth century to today. For example, the desire by German travelers to colonize parts of northern and southern Asia Minor is mentioned as a brief and "curious" aside (p. 22). As a result, the story of this chapter ultimately, if tacitly, has the effect of legitimizing and even praising the Western appropriation of Asia Minor's ancient past, except where such appropriation conflicted with the agenda of the Republic of Turkey.

The subsequent five chapters, more than three hundred pages, take the reader through the long but fascinating chronological history of Asia Minor. Marek divides this narrative at first without reference to tradition: the Bronze Age is divided between chapters 3 ("From Prehistory to the Oldest Written Culture") and 4 ("The Late Bronze Age and Iron Age"). In the first of these, Marek displays his ability to incorporate less well-known and/or recently discovered information into his

narrative while still featuring the "heavy hitters" of early Anatolian history.

Thus, alongside his careful consideration of Göbekli Tepe and Çatal Höyük in chapter 3, the detailed discussion of the important sites of NevalıÇori and Çayönü adds to and provides context for examples of early settlements that are often presented in isolation. His subsequent coverage of Hittites, "Trojans," Phrygians, and Greeks (among others) in a single chapter allows him to underline important continuities between Bronze Age Asia Minor and the world that emerges during the "Dark Ages" of the early first millennium BC, although these could have been made more explicit given the length of the chapter (seventy pages).

More conventional is the organization of the following three chapters, roughly corresponding to the Classical-Hellenistic-Roman periodization model. "The Western Persian Empire and the World of the Greeks," chapter 5's title, perfectly indicates Marek's focus here, although he is careful to also note indigenous contributions to and adaptations of foreign influence and interference. With the Hellenistic and Roman periods Marek is clearly at his most comfortable. The narrative is vigorous and relishes in giving the unfamiliar but entertaining anecdote its due. I particularly enjoyed chapter 6's more balanced treatment of the Gallic/Galatian settlement of central Asia Minor, which is often portrayed only from the perspective of Macedonian kings attempting to bolster their political position through opposition to a "barbarian" other. Readers will also be taken with the palace intrigues of the many kingdoms that dominated north and central Asia Minor in the century or so before the Roman conquest. What was most impressive in both chapters was Marek's knack for weaving the abundant epigraphical material into his political narrative. These often locally produced texts provide a much needed corrective to literary histories that privilege the viewpoint of elites from the Greek

mainland or Rome, and often represent our only real evidence for an important development. For example, documents complaining of soldierly abuses in the Asia Minor countryside suggest the weakening of legal protections and a growing "military anarchy" (p. 355). This chapter (the seventh) concludes with Galerius' defeat of the Sasanid Narseh in 297, but in essence sees as its endpoint the accession of Diocletian.

The final two chapters treat the "Imperial Administration under the Principate" in the region and the economic, social, and cultural history of Asia Minor in this same period. Both chapters provide useful insight into an especially well attested regional experience of the Roman Empire. Asia Minor is of course by no means typical of provincial life elsewhere, but nevertheless well illustrates the constant negotiation and renegotiation between the imperial government (and its cultural influence) and the native structures and traditions of the peninsula, such that by the end of the ninth chapter the reader is left with the enduring impression that the inhabitants of Asia Minor shaped their lives and what the empire was in the region as much if not more than the central administration. This impression is a product of Marek's keen attention to the voluminous epigraphical, archaeological, and numismatic evidence that he has helped to publish.

The book concludes with a brief epilogue discussing the legacy of Roman Asia Minor in the subsequent Byzantine and Ottoman periods, followed by a seventy-five-page appendix providing a chronological list of all the rulers of any part of the region. After the endnotes comes a bibliography, helpfully organized according to chapter sections, and three indices organized by scholarly author, primary source text, and topic.

One could hardly hope to write a more coherent, entertaining, and informative account of the ancient history of Asia Minor. The book will indeed be of great interest "not only to the specialist but also to the general reader interested in histo-

ry" (p. xiii). There is an important qualification here, however: Marek often assumes a general knowledge of Greek or Roman history in mentioning terms, names of rulers, or places outside Asia Minor. The nonspecialist will be confused, for example, by the casual use of the terms "Diadochus"/"Diadochi" (referring to the generals who fought over Alexander's empire), which is nowhere explained. Moreover, the book's maps provide uneven assistance to the general reader. In contrast to the seven maps portraying the various stages of provincial organization in Roman Asia Minor, the only maps in the chapters that cover the Persian and Hellenistic empires do not display political boundaries at all, despite a major focus on such political entities. So perhaps it would be better to say that the book will be useful to specialists, other scholars of classical antiquity, and amateur historians who know the basic outline, terminology, and geography of the ancient Mediterranean.

For specialists in ancient Asia Minor, the book will inevitably elicit rumination about how such a history should be written. My own critical focus alights upon the book's parameters outlined above. I have no quibble with the chronological limits decided by Marek—the work is long enough and someone else can write the sequel. On the other hand, it is somewhat problematic and anachronistic to define Asia Minor as geographically equivalent to modern Turkey. This is to assume a territorial integrity whose historicity legitimates nationalistic claims at the expense of minorities, most obviously Armenians (although Marek gives due attention to the ancient Armenian homeland in chapter 7). Marek's failure to clearly delineate the eastern limits of Asia Minor in chapter 1 is symptomatic of the impossibility of finding historically based reasons for equating modern nation-state with ancient region. Instead, the region should be defined as closely as possible according to ancient usage and perceptions.

Turning to Marek's thematic focus, I heartily endorse his portrayal of Asia Minor as a cultural crossroads and "mixing bowl" (my phrase). Indeed, such an emphasis had the potential to weave a common thread across the thousands of years covered by the book, revealing significant patterns of continuity and change in a way that only a chronologically ambitious survey can. Unfortunately, this theme suffers from neglect in the rest of the book, referenced occasionally but never determining what to cover or how to situate the overarching narrative. As a result, the general purpose of the work remains poorly defined, apart from sating antiquarian interest and serving as a starting point for engaging in scholarly controversies.

One particular reason to hope for more consistent attention to Asia Minor as a bridge and site of congruence between "East and West" is the desire for a more nuanced understanding of distinctions between cultural zones that the study of liminal spaces can bring. Many ancient historians, myself included, doubt the validity of seeing the Greek world and the Near East in such polarizing terms, so a history of Asia Minor as part of both and therefore neither could serve as a test case for the utility of these categories. Such a project is of course impossible without a clearly defined conceptual apparatus that Marek methodologically rejects as "theorizing." The result is not the rejection of "abstract concepts and models" (p. xiii), however, but the application of them without allowing the reader any awareness of their appropriateness. Ethnic and cultural labels that generalize similarities often noted only by modern observers become historical realities: "Greeks" settle in western Asia Minor beginning in the eleventh century, almost five hundred years before the word is used in a pan-ethnic sense; the "Hellenization" of the region is recounted in multiple chapters despite the abandonment of this term as unhelpful in describing what cultural adaptations meant to those implicated; peoples are "indigenous" if they arrived before a certain period, but

groups who miss the cutoff are forever seen as foreign no matter how many centuries they inhabit the peninsula. In other words, rather than clarifying "East" and "West" through Asia Minor's intermediary position, Marek simply assumes their fixed nature as a prerequisite to tracking cultural developments in the peninsula.

Other critiques are possible, such as the imbalance between the Roman period (covered in three chapters) and what precedes it, which is not just a product of disproportionate evidence. Yet these remarks should not detract from the book's value as a unique source of information on a region whose history is underappreciated by non-specialists. The translation is smooth with only occasional errors and oddities—unlike German, English does not consider history and philology "sciences" (p. 15). In any case, my criticisms only further speak to Marek's ability to push our thinking about why such a history should be written and how it can shape our broader understanding of the ancient Mediterranean world. It will find a home on many a shelf in the Anglophone world, and I hope it will increase the possibility of graduate courses being taught on this subject as a means of de- and/or recentering the discipline's lines of sight. It will certainly become the inspiration for many future dissertations, articles, and books, and that is really the main purpose of any publication worth its salt.

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