

ELIF HILAL KARAMAN

Ephesian Women in
Greco-Roman and
Early Christian Perspective

*Wissenschaftliche Untersuchungen
zum Neuen Testament 2. Reihe*

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Mohr Siebeck

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ELIF HILAL KARAMAN, born 1985; 2007 BA from Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir, Turkey; 2009 MA and 2015 PhD from the University of Manchester, Manchester, UK; since 2016 Research Associate in the Department of History of Religions at the Faculty of Divinity, Dokuz Eylül University, Izmir, Turkey.

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*To my mum Yurdanur, my dad Abdurrahman,
and my brothers Burak and Fatih.*

Preface

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İzmir, Turkey 2018

Elif Hilal Karaman

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The *Lex Julia* granted exemption from its penalties to women for a year after the death of their husbands, and for six months after a divorce had taken place; the *Lex Papia* granted them two years from the death of their husbands, and a year and six months after a divorce. *Rules of Ulpian*, 14.¹

To the unmarried and the widows I say that it is well for them to remain unmarried as I am. But if they are not practicing self-control, they should marry. For it is better to marry than to be aflame with passion. *1 Corinthians*, 7:8–9.²

The above passages both refer to marriage. However, they each approach the topic with different concerns. The *Rules of Ulpian*, a collection of Roman laws, simply explains how widows will be treated by the law in particular circumstances. *1 Corinthians* 7:8–9, a Christian letter from the New Testament, offers advice tailored to its audience dependent on their marital status. The two passages come from completely different genres of literature, and have very different authorial intents, social contexts, and intended recipients.

The intention of this volume is to examine the different roles of women in Greco-Roman evidence and early Christian³ literature, and to discuss the representations and changing perceptions of women in the two groups of sources. Using the city of Ephesus as a case study, and nuancing the approaches that have been taken by scholarship so far, we will consider similarities and differences in the ways Greco-Roman sources and early Christian writings present Ephesian women. Although the abovementioned law is a Roman one, we will see that first-century Ephesus was not straightforwardly Roman, and possessed its own indigenous culture that was neither entirely Roman nor Greek. Greco-Roman culture surrounded the Ephesian people, and we will argue that this was a native culture with its own characteristics. For this reason, we will not exclusively study sources of Roman origin. When we do employ evidence of Roman origin, however, we will see that there was a significant presence of Roman citizens in Ephesus which justifies our reference to Roman laws.⁴ The hybrid nature of the city will require careful con-

¹ Translated by Samuel Parsons Scott (Cincinnati: Central Trust Co., 1932).

² English translations of the New Testament will be cited from the NRSV throughout, unless otherwise stated.

³ A detailed analysis of this term will be offered later in this chapter.

⁴ The legal situation in Ephesus will be discussed on pp. 50–53.

sideration. The argument presented in this volume will emphasise the importance of local archaeological and literary evidence from Ephesus, which is required to construct an accurate background for the early Christian texts under consideration. We will also employ Greco-Roman evidence to comment upon these texts. We will challenge the theories of some scholars related to the subjects of locality and hybridity, arguing that – because of its hybrid and exclusive culture – it is crucial to consider Greco-Roman evidence from Ephesus and its surrounding area.

We will focus on the relationship between early Christian Ephesian writings and their Greco-Roman context in terms of how both sets of sources evaluate the life of a woman. Even though the quotes presented at the beginning of this chapter seem to set Paul at odds with his context, careful analysis will show that contrary to the view of many scholars, the early Christian writings fit with their context in many of their discussions about women. We will see that the early Christian and Greco-Roman sources agree on many issues related to women, such as the relationship between a husband and wife, the status of widows, the social standing of women in society, and women's roles as teachers. We will examine local evidence from Ephesus in light of that from Asia Minor and the Roman and Greco-Roman world more broadly, and will offer fresh insight into the ways that early Christian Ephesian texts represent women. Scholarship to date, we will argue, has not adequately considered localised evidence when researching the social context of early Christian Ephesus.

In this opening chapter we will begin by outlining the geographical area and time period that will be the focus of our investigation. We will then introduce our early Christian Ephesian writings and Greco-Roman Ephesian evidence, along with the women that they are witness to. Finally, we will clarify the methodology and terminology employed throughout the book.

A. Place and Time

Ephesus happens to be located only an hour away from where I grew up, in the city of İzmir (modern day Smyrna). It has been selected as the focus for this project, however, because the city was of great importance in early Christian history. Ephesus is mentioned many times in the New Testament. Paul himself stayed there around AD 50; his mission is recounted in detail in Acts. It was from Ephesus, in fact, that Paul wrote his first letter to the Corinthians. There are several letters written to the Christians in Ephesus as well. In addition to Paul's letter to the Ephesians, a short letter in Revelation is addressed to Ephesus as one of the seven churches of Asia, and the first and second letters to Timothy are addressed to the city as Timothy was located there. 1, 2, and 3 John are also associated with the city. Ephesus is mentioned and

addressed not only in the New Testament, but also in other early Christian sources. Ignatius, bishop of Antioch, for example, wrote one of his many letters to the congregation in Ephesus. In addition to its hundreds of years of deep-rooted history before the arrival of Christianity, Ephesus played a key role in the Christian mission. My personal fondness for the city has helped me to establish a closer relationship with it, and – while it is not my home town, and everything relevant to the present study occurred nearly two thousand years ago – spending more than a decade in the area has enabled me to become familiar with modern Mediterranean culture, which I believe carries traces of ancient culture, however small they may be. It would, of course, be absurd to suggest that one can understand everything about the ancient people of a city just because one has lived nearby; I merely consider myself sympathetic to the sea air.

Ephesus has played a significant role in the history of Christianity. However, this study will focus on the first and second centuries AD. This period, especially the first century, was a critical era for Christianity. As a student who studied Islam for many years, I was always fascinated by the history of the Christian religion and especially by its early development. The most intriguing aspects of a new religion, both historically and sociologically, have always struck me as being the revelation of a new faith, its first message and followers, the new perceptions of identity that it creates, and the processes of transition involved in accepting a new faith. With the passion of a new faith, an individual may feel that they can change everything about themselves. In order for scholars to grasp the impact of a new religion upon its converts, it is essential to understand their prior social and religious customs. Prior customs may continue to be involved and become integrated into a person's new faith; over time, customs both old and new become united as one.

The focus of this volume is the earliest Christian believers. As far as possible, we will confine our investigation to the first and second centuries AD, in order to provide the clearest possible picture of the lives of the first Ephesian Christians. There are a number of reasons for choosing AD 200 as a border date. The earliest Christian sources that we have consulted are those from the New Testament. First of all we refrain to set an earlier date with the intention of including early Christian texts other than the ones in the New Testament such as the letters of Ignatius and Polycarp. We also have not gone beyond AD 212, when the edict of Caracalla was granted citizenship to all free men and women in the Roman Empire. Assuming a *de facto* citizenship for all the women of concern for this project would immensely simplify matters for us. However, citizenship issues are strongly related to a city's cultural elements; as we will discuss later, the presence of local citizenship laws is significant for our argument.

The first two centuries AD were not straightforward for Ephesus. With the demise of the Roman Republic and subsequent settlement of the Roman Em-

pire, the first century AD witnessed a great transitional process. In Ephesus, this transition was not only administrative, but also cultural. Because of its strategically important geographical position and important place among other cities in Asia Minor, the Romanisation of Ephesus was significant. The city had survived this century on its own terms: it embraced Romanisation in its own ways, and the result was a mixture of Roman and Greek culture. As we will see, the first century saw not only the advent of Christianity, but also of a Greco-Roman lifestyle. The people of Ephesus had a lot to digest: a new state, a new culture, and a new religion all appeared in the same century. For this reason, tracing the history of the early Christians in Ephesus is far from straightforward. We are dealing with a delicate period, and we need to treat it with sensitivity.

This study will not examine the entire Christian congregation in Ephesus, but will focus only on its women, who were key members both of the family and of wider society. However, women's roles in this period are not always fully appreciated. Often, they are assumed to be of secondary importance, yet both in domestic and public circles they played significant roles. Many studies of early Christianity do not pay adequate attention to women; moreover, studies which do explicitly focus on women frequently try to cover too vast a geographical area, rather than focusing on a particular locality. This study aims to contribute to the remedy of this by focusing specifically on the women of Ephesus.

B. Sources and Analytical Categories

In this section, we introduce our Christian and Greco-Roman evidence. First of all we will analyse our Christian sources, which will provide us with criteria by which to select our comparative Greco-Roman evidence.

I. Early Christian Writings

Before we discuss our early Christian sources in terms of their geographical relationship to Ephesus, it is necessary to discuss the time span of our evidence in detail. The sources at hand date from between the second century BC and the second century AD. The first and second centuries AD feature more prominently because of the contribution of the New Testament texts. Our goal is to examine sources concerning the lives of early Christian women, and to compare them with Greco-Roman sources. This is reflected, therefore, in our choice of Christian sources, and their dates of composition and circulation. As for the Greco-Roman evidence, our sources date as far back as the second century BC. However, because Christianity appeared much later than this, we will not be able to present any evidence for Christianity that is

dated before the first century AD. Our Greco-Roman evidence, on the other hand, ranges from the second century BC to the second century AD. Greco-Roman sources which are dated after the second century AD are still taken into consideration, especially archaeological evidence, provided it does not have Christian characteristics. The Greco-Roman evidence, of course, does overlap with the Christian evidence later on.

We begin with the New Testament. All of our sources from the Christian era are literary, so the geographical relevance of these texts to Ephesus is based on the place of composition and/or the source's intended audience. Essentially, we have consulted texts which were written from or to Ephesus, or mention the city in some way. Having identified these sources, we distinguished the parts of them which mention women, either specifically by name or in general terms.⁵ In the New Testament, the literary evidence included the Acts of the Apostles, 1 Corinthians, Ephesians, Colossians, 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, 1 Peter, and Revelation. Although Acts and Revelation are not letters in their literary forms, Revelation does contain seven short letters addressed to the seven churches of Asia, one of which is the church of Ephesus (Revelation 2:1–7). Acts is not addressed to anywhere specific, but it does mention Paul around the time he stayed in Ephesus (Acts 18:19–19:41). The rest of the featured texts from the New Testament are letters. The New Testament epistles are the subject of debate on many issues, particularly their authorship. There are, for instance, scholarly arguments relating to Paul's 'disputed' and 'undisputed' letters. These arguments are not of concern to the present study, however, so authorship will only be discussed insofar as it illuminates the attitudes represented in the texts.⁶

Of the letters that we have selected, the first and second letters to Timothy and the letter to the Ephesians were written *to* Ephesus. The letters to Timothy were written to Timothy who was in Ephesus at the time. The authorship of 1 and 2 Timothy is disputed, even though the author identifies himself as Paul in 1 Timothy 1:1. The letter is generally considered as non-Pauline, and referred to as one of the Pastoral Epistles, along with 2 Timothy and Titus. Hence, we will hereafter refer to the author as Pastor. The author of the letter to the Ephesians also claims to be Paul (Ephesians 1:1). However, this letter is regarded as one of the 'disputed' Pauline letters. Nevertheless, for simplicity's sake, we will refer to the author as Paul.

One of Paul's 'undisputed' letters, the first letter to the Corinthians, was written *from* Ephesus. Paul himself mentions that he is in Ephesus while he was writing the letter, and plans to stay there a bit longer (1 Corinthians 16:8). Even though the letter was not addressed to Ephesus and was written to

⁵ More specific information regarding the sources will be given as and when they are used in the course of this volume.

⁶ A relatively detailed authorship argument is discussed on pp. 80–84.

deal with particular issues occurring in Corinth, I still believe that the letter may carry in it some clues relating to the environment in which it was composed.

There are several early Christian letters both from the New Testament (Colossians and 1 Peter) and from bishops, which were sent to the areas around Ephesus. The letter to the Colossians was written to a town called Colossae, approximately one hundred miles east of Ephesus. There is also the possibility that this letter was written from Ephesus, as its compositional origin is something of an uncertainty. For this reason, we judge it appropriate to include the letter in this study, especially as its eventual destination was relatively close to Ephesus. The first letter of Peter, on the other hand, does not seem to have been written to a specific location. All that we know of its addressees is that the letter refers to them as “the exiles of the Dispersion in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia” (1 Peter 1:1). The letter was possibly intended for reading aloud to the congregations of cities in the aforementioned provinces in Asia Minor. Since Ephesus was most likely one of these cities, the letter has been included in our collection of sources.

The second set taken into consideration is a set of letters written by bishops. These are from a later date, roughly the early second century AD. However, they share some common ground with the New Testament letters discussed above in that they were written to, or from around, Ephesus. Ignatius was the bishop of Antioch, and lived roughly between the late first and early second century AD. Ignatius sent several letters to different congregations in the cities of Asia Minor. Two of these, the *Letter to the Smyrnaeans* and the *Letter to Polycarp*, were addressed to Smyrna, a city located around forty-seven miles from Ephesus. Another epistle, *The Letter to the Philippians*, is sent *from* Polycarp, the bishop of Smyrna. While these letters might not be written directly from or addressed directly to Ephesus, they may well reflect similar issues, as the sources are associated more directly with the city. A similar argument can be made for the *Acts of John* and *Acts of Paul*. These Apocryphal writings are dated to around the late-second century AD, and cannot be traced back to any particular place. However, they do contain stories set in Ephesus, and present excellent examples of the perception of early Christian women.⁷

Up to this point, we have not mentioned any of the Johannine literature among our early Christian texts. Although they do fit within the requirements of time and place for our study, they do not really have much to say about

⁷ There are, of course, other sources that claim obvious links to Ephesus, and also fall into our time period. These include the letter of Ignatius *to the Ephesians*, the *Martyrdom of Polycarp* and the fragments of Polycrates (a second century AD bishop of Ephesus). The reason for not covering these works here in detail is either the absence of a reference to women, or the absence of a reference to women relevant to our discussion.