By Alan Ray Buescher

C A P P A D O C I A

in the First Century

THE BEGINNING of Christianity in Cappadocia appeared as a slow train approaching from the distant horizon. Some Cappadocian Jews experienced the miracle of Pentecost, hearing in their own language Galilean believers proclaiming the magnificent acts of God (Acts 2:9). Peter provided the other reference to Cappadocians in the New Testament in his first epistle, writing his letter to Christians "in the provinces of Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia," believers he addressed as "temporary residents of the Dispersion" (1 Pet. 1:1).

Even though Cappadocians were among the first to believe in Jesus Christ at the beginning of the Christian church in Jerusalem, Christianity apparently did not penetrate central and eastern Asia Minor (Pontus, Cappadocia, and northern Galatia) to any great extent until the mid-third century and later. History and archaeology barely provide a sketch of Christian communities in first-century A.D. Cappadocia. The New Testament provides no direct indication that Christian churches began in Cappadocia in the first century A.D. One of the Cappadocian fathers of the fourth century A.D., Gregory of Nyssa, perpetuated a legend that the Roman centurion who verbally glorified God at the crucifixion of Jesus founded the first church in Cappadocia. Others later added to this urban legend by naming the centurion Longinus, a native of Cappadocia. Jerome suggested that Peter preached in Cappadocia, but the accuracy of this claim remains vague.[1]

History indicates Jews inhabited Cappadocia by at least 139 B.C. (see 1 Maccabees 15:16-22). Cappadocia was part of the Roman Empire at this point. According to Lucius, who was a Roman official, Jews living in the region had an agreement with Roman authorities. The agreement gave the Jews a level of security and protection. Quite likely, the first Christians in Cappadocia came from such Jewish communities.

Despite this apparently slow beginning, near the end of the fourth century, the Cappadocian fathers, specifically Basil of Caesarea, his brother Gregory of Nyssa, and Gregory of Nazianzus, directed the growth of the church in central and eastern Asia Minor through their writings and actions. All three of these men helped define the doctrine of the Trinity as declared orthodox at the Council of Constantinople in A.D. 381.[2] Thus the influence of early Christians in Cappadocia ended up giving direction to Christians and Christian theology through the centuries.

The Viper Died

The geography and climate of Cappadocia, located in the highlands of central/eastern Asia Minor (in present-day eastern Turkey, see map, p. 66), may partially explain the slow growth of Christianity in this region. To the south, the Taurus Mountains hampered easy access to the region of Cilicia on the northeastern Mediterranean coast. Traveling west toward Galatia, the elevated steppe seemed never ending. The regions most accessible to Cappadocia existed to the north (Pontus and northeastern Galatia) and east (Armenia).[3]

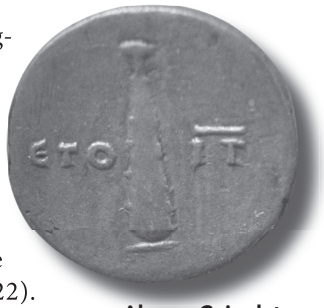
A rugged terrain chisels a rugged people. An early adage remarked that "A venomous viper bit a Cappadocian . . . the viper died."[4] Brutal Cappadocian winters entertained blizzards—sometimes making roads impassable until spring. Heavy snows could confine persons inside their homes for as long as two months. When the snows melted and farming season had begun, swarms of beetles always posed a potential threat to grain crops.[5]

The names Cappadocia (Greek, *Kappadokia*), Cilicia, and Crete all begin with the Greek letter *kappa*. These three regions developed the reputation as the three most loathsome and contemptible regions beginning with the letter *kappa*. No one had many kind words to say about Cappadocians. Worthless, deceitful, selfish, brutish—these describe how many viewed them.[6] Perhaps their harsh environment and living conditions contributed to their character and reputation. In any case, being Cappadocian was not easy.

As a result of its geography and climate, throughout ancient history Cappadocia remained on the outskirts of great civilizations and cultures that thrived along the Mediterranean coast and lowlands. Greek culture and Roman rule struggled to impact this rugged region, and Christianity was no exception. Indeed, the Apostle Paul never ventured to Cappadocia with the gospel, acknowledging that he received his itinerary from the Holy Spirit to move westward.[7]

LESSON REFERENCE

ETB: 1 Peter 1:1-12



Above: Coin dating A.D. 81-96 from Caesarea, Cappadocia; reverse has an image of a club.

Far left: Urgup, about 12 miles east of Nevsehir, is one of the most important centers in Cappadocia. The erosion by water and wind produced these formations, the "Fairy Chimneys."

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/DAVID ROGERS/MUSEUM OF ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY/UNIVERSITY OF MISSOURI/COLUMBIA (403/25A)

Facing page, clockwise from lower right: Christian frescoes from the 11th cent. in the Dark Church at Goreme. The frescoes include images of Christ enthroned; His betrayal by Judas, and shown, the Lord's Supper.

Nevsehir is the capital of the region of Cappadocia.

First inhabited about 3000 B.C., in the fifth century Nevsehir and the surrounding region came under Lydian rule.

A wide-angle view of the apse, central nave and flanking aisles of the Dark Church at Goreme, Cappadocia

Anchorite dwellings in Cappadocia.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/DR. LOUISE KOHL SMITH (32/20/10)

FAR LEFT: *ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO*/ DAVID ROGERS (5/17/9)
LEFT: COREL PHOTO

FAR LEFT: *ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO*/ DAVID ROGERS (32/21/7)
LEFT: *ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO*/ DAVID ROGERS (5/17/8)

PONTUS, GALATIA, ASIA, AND BITHYNIA

The Roman provinces of Pontus and Bithynia lay to the north and northwest of Cappadocia respectively, although the Romans had actually united the two into one province for administrative purposes approximately 63 B.C. Aquila stands unique as the only native of Pontus mentioned in the New Testament (Acts 18:2). The other two provinces listed in 1 Peter 1:1, Galatia and Asia, lay to the west. As with Cappadocia, Paul never visited Bithynia-Pontus, being prevented by the Holy Spirit from going to Bithynia (16:7), and evangelized only in southern Galatia, in the cities of Antioch (Pisidia), Iconium, Lystra, and Derbe. He experienced great success in western Asia on his third missionary journey, with a three-year ministry in Ephesus (20:31).[1]

These four provinces, together with Cappadocia, Lycia and Cilicia, comprised the peninsula that extends westward from the mainland of Asia between the Black Sea and Mediterranean, known also as Asia Minor or Anatolia (constituting most of present-day Turkey).[2] Asia, established as a Roman province when Rome conquered the kingdom of Pergamum in 133 B.C., boasted one of the richest economies in the Roman Empire.[3] One of its major cities, Ephesus, was a top-ranking city in the Roman Empire. The temple to the Greek goddess Artemis (the Roman Diana) made the list as one of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World.[4]

History is silent on the beginning of Christianity in Bithynia. Not until the correspondence in approximately A.D. 110 between Pliny, the governor of Bithynia, and Trajan, the emperor, does information surface concerning the status of churches in this province. The gospel affected Bithynia enormously, reaching persons of all ages and social ranking. The changed lives of so many persons adversely affected pagan temple attendance and caused a reduction in the sale of sacrificial meat for pagan worship, resulting in persecution of Christians at least by the early second century.[5] B

1. Philip A. Harland, "Bithynia" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible*, David Noel Freedman, ed. in chief (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 190; Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 84.

2. Finegan, 79-80.

3. Emil G. Kraeling, "Asia" in *Dictionary of the Bible*, James Hastings, ed., Frederick C. Grant and H. H. Rowley, eds., rev. ed. (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1963), 64.

4. Barry J. Beitzel, *Moody Atlas of Bible Land*, (Chicago: Moody Press, 1985), 182.

5. Pliny, *Letters Books VIII-X and Panegyricus, The Loeb Classical Library*, G. P. Goold, ed. (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1969), 10.95-97 (pp. 285-293).

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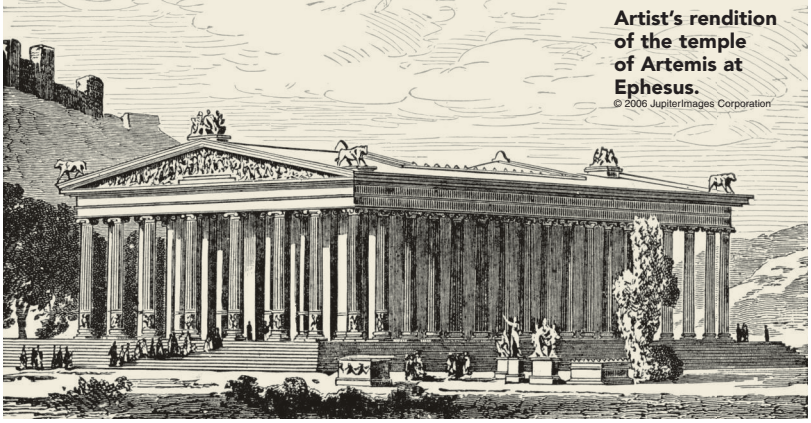


Artist's rendition of the temple of Artemis at Ephesus.

It's All About the Money

Money motivates governments and moves armies—always has, always will. Cappadocia, while not lacking in natural resources, became significant to the Romans not only as another source of income to fuel its expansion, but also as a frontier border from which to defend its empire from outside attack and to protect its interests in the Near East.

Archelaus, appointed by Marcus Antonius as the last king of Cappadocia before Cappadocia became a Roman province, ruled from 36 B.C. until his death in A.D. 17. Archelaus understood and sought political alliances. His daughter, Glaphyra, married Alexander, son of Herod, and he maintained influential connections in Rome. However, approximately three years before his death, the authorities summoned Archelaus to Rome, charging him with treason. The results of this trial remain unknown. Upon Archelaus's death, the Romans immediately incorporated Cappadocia into its empire as a province—with little objection from the Cappadocians. Their agreeing was perhaps largely aided by a reduction in taxes.[8]

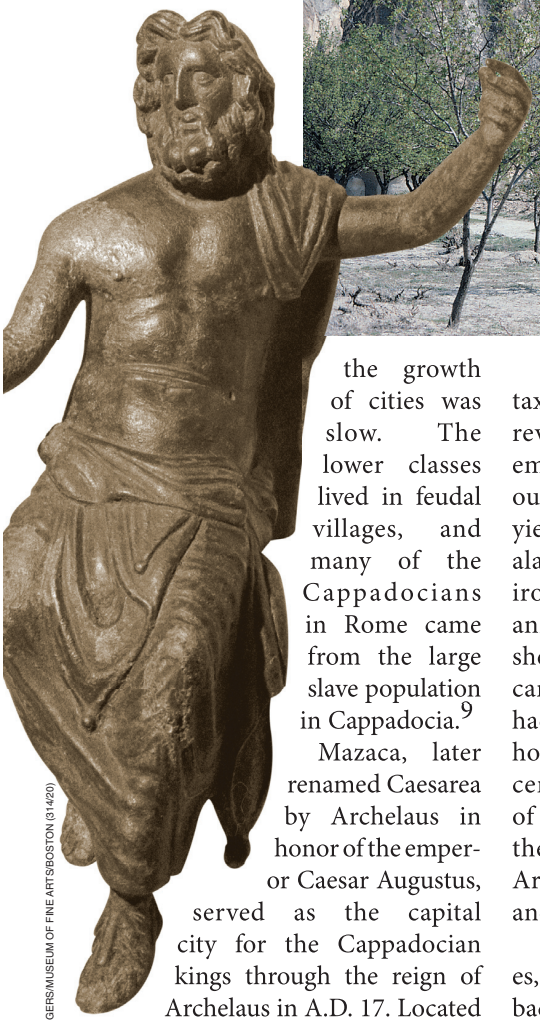
Roman procurators of equestrian rank replaced the Cappadocian monarchy from A.D. 17 until A.D. 72. Cappadocia, with only two significant cities (Tyana and Mazaca) at the time of its incorporation into the Roman Empire, posed a unique situation for Rome. Without municipal governments in place, the procurators did little to alter the existing feudal internal organization. Instead, they allowed the local feudal lords to retain much freedom and sovereignty in the judicial and administrative matters of their local domains, which made even more sense with few Roman citizens residing in Cappadocia. The Cappadocian kings had divided the land into *strategiai,* which the Romans left unchanged. One or more feudal lords provided the leadership in the *strategiai.*

Roman rule provided a catalyst for more urban development, but

Right: At Zelve, volcanic rocks and cones provided comfortable dwelling places for the area's inhabitants. Zelve remains one of the best-preserved examples of a cave dweller community.

Below: Zeus of Mazaca (Caesarea) in Cappadocia; the tetrahedron in Zeus's right hand represents Mount Argaeus.

ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/ DR. LOUISE KOHL SMITH (3/2/20)



ILLUSTRATOR PHOTO/DAVID ROGERS/MUSEUM OF FINE ARTS/BOSTON (3/14/20)

the growth of cities was slow. The lower classes lived in feudal villages, and many of the Cappadocians in Rome came from the large slave population in Cappadocia.[9]

Mazaca, later renamed Caesarea by Archelaus in honor of the emperor Caesar Augustus, served as the capital city for the Cappadocian kings through the reign of Archelaus in A.D. 17. Located on a plateau on the north side of the 13,000 foot, volcanic, snow-capped Mount Argaeus, Caesarea developed into the leading Roman city of the region. Not until the fourth century A.D., however, did it boast several schools, gymnasiums, and temples to the Greek gods Zeus, Apollo, and Fortune.[10]

Although Rome had lowered taxes on the feudal lords, much revenue flowed to the Roman emperor from the lands previously owned by Archelaus. Mines yielded translucent marble, crystal alabaster, onyx, silver, lead, and iron. Varieties of domesticated animals flourished in Cappadocia: sheep, goats, cattle, pigs, mules, camel, and horses. This region had long had a reputation for its horses, going back to the eighth century B.C. However, most of the revenues generated from the land previously owned by Archelaus came from the minerals and precious stones.[11]

Despite the land's rich resources, most of Cappadocia remained backward and impoverished. Many people lived in caves carved in the soft volcanic rock formations, often sharing their homes with their animals. The land yielded enough grain for export, but most of the wine and olive oil that locals consumed was imported. The inhabitants of eastern Cappadocia also enjoyed harvests of fruits and nuts.[12]

War and Peace

Any international conflict involving Rome in Cappadocia came from the east. The Euphrates River provided the region's eastern border, dividing the Roman Empire to the west from Rome's primary adversary to the east, the Parthians, whose empire encompassed a large part of present-day Iran. The country of Armenia, on the east bank of the Euphrates, also provided an additional buffer from the Parthians, making the politics of Armenia of great interest to the Romans and Parthians alike as they vied for control in the Near East.[13]

Peace ruled between the Roman province of Cappadocia and the Parthians for 16 years after the Roman procurator took office in A.D. 17. However, when Armenia's King Artaxias died in A.D. 34, a hostile 3-year struggle began between Rome and the Parthians to determine the next ruler of Armenia. Rome never actually sent forces against the Parthians, rather Pharasamanes, the king of Iberia, took the lead in skirmishes against the Parthians.

ILLUSTRATOR MAP/ LINDEN ARTISTS/ LONDON

Rome had chosen Pharasamanes's brother, Mithridates, as their candidate for king of Armenia. History is silent about how this war affected Cappadocia; but the settlement reached between Rome and the Parthians in A.D. 37 established Mithridates as the new ruler of Armenia, with the Parthian king, Artabanus, returning to his throne after a temporary loss of power.[14]

The greatest struggle for Armenia arose in the reign of Nero, with Cappadocia becoming a strategic military outpost for Rome during the Parthian and Armenian War, which waged from the A.D. mid-50s to A.D. 66. Rome recruited throughout Cappadocia and Galatia to fill its legions, which normally were composed of Roman citizens. As a result, some Cappadocians gained Roman citizenship through enrolling in the legion. Since Cappadocians raised horses, most of the Cappadocian recruits probably joined the cavalry. Other Cappadocians joined Roman auxiliary forces and probably gained citizenship only after completing 25 years of service. The wives and children of these military recruits also gained citizenship upon their husbands'/fathers' return to civilian life. Rome and Parthia reached a peace settlement in A.D. 66; Rome, therefore, withdrew its legions from Cappadocia at that time.[15]

Acts 2:9 indicates Parthians (Jews or proselytes) witnessed the miracle of Pentecost together with residents of Cappadocia, Pontus, Asia, and others. The New Testament makes no other specific reference to Parthia.

Cappadocia proved to be a great laboratory for witnessing the efficacy of the gospel of Jesus Christ to penetrate hearts conditioned to resist change by a harsh and relatively isolated environment. The Jewish Diaspora planted Jewish communities in Cappadocia. This result of God's judgment on His people's disobedience centuries earlier provided the basis for the expansion of the gospel in the Roman Empire. Perhaps that first seed of God's grace germinated in a Cappadocian heart in Jerusalem on Pentecost and transplanted itself amidst a people of volcanic crags, feudal lords, and horses. The seed grew slowly, silently, with its flowers blossoming and fruit ripening in the fourth century through the actions and words of the Cappadocian fathers.

1. Raymond Van Dam, *Becoming Christian: The Conversion of Roman Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), 1; Raymond Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow: Roman Rule and Greek Culture in Cappadocia* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002), 21; Raymond Van Dam, "The Disruptive Impact of Christianity in Late Roman Cappadocia" in *The Making of Christian Communities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages,* Mark Williams, ed. (London: Anthem Press, 2005), 16; Jack Finegan, *The Archeology of the New Testament* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1981), 20, 83.
2. Van Dam, *Becoming Christian,* 1-2.
3. Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow,* 13.
4. Ibid.
5. Ibid., 13-15.
6. Ibid., 1.
7. Van Dam, "The Disruptive Impact," 8.
8. William Emmett Gwatkin, Jr., "Cappadocia As a Roman Procuratorial Province" in *The University of Missouri Studies,* H. M. Belden, ed. in chief, vol. 5, no. 4 (Columbia, MO: The University of Missouri, October 1, 1930), 5-16, 19; "Cappadocia" in *The Anchor Bible Dictionary* (ABD), David Noel Freedman, ed. in chief, vol. 1 (New York: Doubleday, 1992), 870-872.
9. Ibid., 17-19; Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow,* 24-25.
10. Finegan, 83; Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow,* 24-27.
11. Gwatkin, 19; Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow,* 15.
12. Van Dam, *Kingdom of Snow,* 15, 16.
13. ABD; Jesse Curtis Pope, "Parthians" in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible,* David Noel Freedman, ed. in chief (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2000), 1010.
14. Gwatkin, 30.
15. Ibid., 44-45, 55.

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