A CHRISTIAN BUSINESS AND CHRISTIAN SELF-IDENTITY IN THIRD/FOURTH CENTURY PHRYGIA*

BY

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In her well-known monograph concerning early-Christian burial monuments from Phrygia, Elsa Gibson identified a group of thirteen monuments which are so similar in design and/or execution that they appear all to be products of a single workshop. She suggested also that the stonemason(s) who operated the workshop may have been Christians. There is no evidence which proves this directly, but several circumstantial factors tend to confirm Gibson's view. If the identification is correct, this would be one of the earliest known Christian businesses.

The precise location of the workshop cannot be determined. There is some uncertainty even about the locations where several of the monuments produced by the workshop first were discovered and/or recorded. For the most part, however, the thirteen surviving monuments seem to have originated within a zone about 30 km. long and stretching up the valley of the Tembris (modern Porsuk) River approximately between the modern Turkish towns of Aslanapa and Abiye. [see fig. 1] Presumably, the workshop itself was located somewhere within or nearby this product distribution area. The activities of the shop may be dated roughly by an additional, seemingly related monument [G16], which is inscribed with the year of the provincial era of Phrygia corresponding to A.D. 304/305. [see plate 1]

The economic relationships generated by the workshop define a discrete regional population including the stonemason(s), their customers, and their associates, i.e. colleagues, suppliers, etc. This study seeks to explore the nature and the limits of Christian self-identity within this population. The study is motivated by a desire to understand what Christianity meant to the average, "non-clerical" Christians of central Anatolia in this period.

Our only sources of information about the particular people associated with the workshop are the very carved stone burial
monuments which formed the basis of their relationship. As such, the study is concerned also with the interpretation and utilization of these sources, including both their representational and epigraphical components.

Twelve of the thirteen known monuments produced by this workshop [G3-G14] explicitly commemorate Christian burials, and the Christian character of the monuments/burials is made evident by approximately the same means in all twelve cases. Reportable variations appear to be (in almost every instance) not real variations at all, but data-gaps caused by damage to and/or fragmentation of the monuments. For example, eleven of the twelve carry inscribed epitaphs, which refer to the deceased as "Christians." Eight of these eleven [G3, G5, G7-G9, G12-G14] utilize the formulaic expression Χριστιανοί Χριστιανός, "Christians for