

Christianity in the epigrams of Palladas of Alexandria

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Palladas of Alexandria, who probably lived around the end of the 4. c. CE and many of whose epigrams are preserved as a part of the so-called Greek Anthology, is an enigmatic and marginal figure. He probably witnessed some of the most dramatic clashes between pagans and Christians in 4.-century Alexandria and the final defeat of the school of the Serapaeum followed by the official triumph of Christianity as the state religion of the late Roman Empire. However, his attitude towards both Hellenic tradition and Christian faith and his possible taking of sides in their conflict is far from unambiguously clear. Some of his works reflecting the new state of affairs in the ancient city of Alexander the Great admit more than one interpretation and have been approached differently by various modern researchers. The current presentation introduces the scholarly debate and takes a position in it which does not try to restore the real biographical facts behind Palladas' constructed poetic persona. It rather sees his poetry as a distanced commentary on contemporary phenomena from a self-described marginal vantage point which may or may not reflect his actual social status. In the world in which Palladas lived, different communities were consolidated around high-placed representative intellectuals such as bishops, philosophers and rhetors. They relied for the definition of their sense of identity and continuity as much on corpora of canonical texts as on their constant re-actualisation through commentaries. The process was similar for Jewish and Christian Biblical exegesis, for church sermons, street preaching, philosophical diatribes and the public declamations of rhetors. This gave characteristic nuances to the social stance of the late antique public intellectual. Palladas assumes the peculiar role of one such kind of intellectual to comment on current events and the actors taking part in them.