The Maeander Valley

This is a study of the long-term historical geography of Asia Minor, from the fourth century BC to the thirteenth century AD. Using an astonishing breadth of sources, ranging from Byzantine monastic archives to Latin poetic texts, ancient land records to hagiographic biographies, Peter Thonemann reveals the complex and fascinating interplay between the natural environment and human activities in the Maeander valley. Both a large-scale regional history and a profound meditation on the role played by geography in human history, this book is an essential contribution to the history of the Eastern Mediterranean in Graeco-Roman antiquity and the Byzantine Middle Ages.

Peter Thonemann teaches ancient history at Wadham College, Oxford University. He is co-author of the widely acclaimed first volume of the Penguin History of Europe, *The Birth of Classical Europe: A History From Troy to Augustine* (with Simon Price). *The Maeander Valley* was awarded the Hellenic Foundation’s 2006 Award for the best ancient/classical thesis in Hellenic Studies, and Oxford University’s Conington Prize for 2009.
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The Maeander Valley

A Historical Geography From Antiquity to Byzantium

PETER THONEMANN
Contents

List of maps and figures [page vi]
Preface [xiii]
Acknowledgements [xvii]
List of abbreviations [xviii]

1 The valley [1]
2 Hydrographic heroes [50]
3 The nature of Roman Apamea [99]
4 The fortress at Eumenea [130]
5 The pastoral economy [178]
6 The nobility of Mt Cadmus [203]
7 The rural economy [242]
8 The bounty of the Maeander [295]

Epilogue [339]
Bibliography [344]
Index [378]
Maps and Figures

Unless otherwise indicated, all maps and figures © the author.

Maps

1 The Maeander valley [page xxiv]
2 The lower Maeander valley in the thirteenth century AD [6]
3 Cities minting coins with maeander patterns (fourth century BC to first century AD) [34]
4 Southern Phrygia [51]
5 Dinar and the Dombay ovası [57]
6 Apamea-Celaenae and the sources of the Maeander; based on Hirschfeld 1875 [68]
7 Apamea and the commerce of western Asia Minor [102]
8 Eumenea and the upper Maeander valley; based on Drew-Bear 1978, Planche 40 [134]
9 Cistophoric mints, c. 181–133 BC [171]
10 The cities of Mt Cadmus; based on La Carie II, Planche LXV [204]
11 The estate of Andronikos Doukas in the lower Maeander valley; based on K. Lyncker’s map of southern Ionia (1908–9) in Philippson 1936 [260]
12 The Pyrgos estate in the early thirteenth century AD; based on Lyncker [265]
13 The Maeander delta; based on Lyncker [296]

Figures

1.1 The gorge of the Tabakhane Deresi and the plateau of Tralles-Andronicopolis (Photo: Sébah-Joaillier, 1900; Courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Istanbul (10.449)) [2]
1.2 The Maeander river near Tralles [3]
List of maps and figures

1.3 The site of Antioch on the Maeander (Photo © New York University Excavations at Aphrodisias) [8]
1.4 The site of Nysa [11]
1.5 The Maeander valley from Sultanhisar [12]
1.6 The Maeander plain near Koçarlı [13]
1.7 The site of Priene (Photo: W. Schiele, 1982; Courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Istanbul (R 20.632)) [14]
1.8 The gorge of the Tabakhane Deresi, looking south towards the modern city of Aydın (Photo: Sébah-Joaillier, 1900; Courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Istanbul (10.453)) [17]
1.9 Antioch, Gallienus (Æ); the bridge over the Maeander at Antioch, with stork and reclining river-god (SNG Von Aulock 2430 = BM 1979–1–1–1839) [26]
1.10 Naulochon, c. 370–350 BC (Æ); helmeted Athena/dolphin in maeander circle (BMC Ionia 202, no. 1) [35]
1.11 Priene, c. 350–340 BC (AR); helmeted Athena/trident in maeander circle (BMC Ionia 229, no. 5) [36]
1.12 Magnesia, c. 360–350 BC (AR); helmeted Athena/trident in maeander circle (SNG Von Aulock 2032) [36]
1.13 Magnesia, c. 210–200 BC (AR); mounted warrior/butting zebu in maeander circle (BM 1921 7–14–1) [37]
1.14 Priene, perhaps second century BC (AR); helmeted Athena facing/Nike crowning Athenopolis in maeander circle (BM 1991 1–30–8; Regling 1927: 30–1, no. 27) [37]
1.15 Magnesia, c. 188–170 BC (AR); Heracles/seated Zeus, maeander pattern below (Price 1991: 2060) [38]
1.16 Magnesia, c. 297–281 BC (AR); Alexander the Great/seated Athena, maeander pattern to l. (BM E.H. 291 n.18; Thompson 1968: type 106) [39]
1.17 Magnesia, c. 160–140 BC (AR); Artemis/Apollo in wreath, maeander pattern below (BMC Ionia 162, no. 36) [39]
1.18 Magnesia, 88–85 BC (Æ); Artemis/stag drinking from maeander line (CNG Electronic Auction 170 [2007] 89) [39]
1.19 Tralles, c. 170–160 BC (AR); cista mystica in ivy wreath/bow-case and coiled serpents, maeander line to r. (BMC Lydia 326, no. 4; Kleiner and Noe 1977: 61–2) [41]
1.20 Antioch, c. 167–133 BC (AR); Apollo/zebu reclining l. on maeander line (BMC Caria 14, no. 2) [42]
List of maps and figures

1.21 Antioch, c. 167–133 BC (AR); Apollo/zebu standing l. in maeander circle (Lanz 125 [2005] 382) [43]
1.22 Antioch, c. 167–133 BC (AR); Zeus/eagle in maeander circle (BM 1976–9–22–2) [43]
1.23 Antioch, c. 167–133 BC (AR); Zeus/eagle in maeander circle (BM 1987–6–8–1) [43]
1.24 Antioch, second-first century BC (Æ); Apollo/eagle on maeander (BMC Caria 15, no. 9) [44]
1.25 Magnesia, c. 300 BC (Æ); mounted warrior/zebu walking r. on maeander line (BMC Ionia 163, no. 40) [45]
1.26 Apamea, first century BC (Æ); Athena/eagle on maeander, pilei of Dioscuri to l. and r. (BMC Phrygia 78, no. 52) [48]
1.27 Apamea, first century BC (Æ); city-goddess/Marsyas on maeander (BMC Phrygia 78, no. 49) [48]
2.1 Synnada, first century BC (Æ); helmeted bust/owl on amphora (BM 1920–5–16–92) [56]
2.2 Synnada, first century BC (AR); cista mystica in ivy wreath/bow-case and coiled serpents, owl on amphora to r. (BMC Phrygia 392, no. 1) [56]
2.3 The Dombay ovası [58]
2.4 Reeds in lake Aulutrene [59]
2.5 The springs at Eldere [60]
2.6 Apamea, Septimius Severus (Æ); Athena with pipes, looking r. into lake Aulutrene; Marsyas behind rocks at l. (BMC Phrygia 97, no. 164) [64]
2.7 Hierapolis theatre frieze; Apollo with lyre; Athena with pipes, looking r. towards a personification of the Maeander [65]
2.8 Apamea, Gordian (Æ); Artemis Ephesia, surrounded by personifications of the four rivers of Apamea (SNG Von Aulock 3508; RPC vii.1 699) [69]
2.9 The sources of the Maeander, looking south-west from the village of Buluç Alanı [71]
2.10 The Laugher and the Weeper [72]
2.11 The source of the river Marsyas (Photo: Gertrude Bell, 1907; courtesy of the Gertrude Bell Photographic Archive, Newcastle University) [73]
2.12 The yayla at the Orgas springs [74]
2.13 The milk of Endymion: the travertines at Hierapolis (Photo: Gertrude Bell, 1907; courtesy of the Gertrude Bell Photographic Archive, Newcastle University) [76]
List of maps and figures

2.14 The petrifying stream of the Ak Su [79]
2.15 Old Woman’s Milk: the travertines of Kakhk cave [81]
2.16 The site of the church of St Michael at Colossae [82]
2.17 Apamea, Severus Alexander (Æ); ark of Noah, dove above, Noah and wife to I. (SNG Von Aulock 3506) [88]
2.18 Apamea, Hadrian (Æ); Marsyas seated in cave; around him, five kibotoi (BM 1911–10–10–15) [90]
2.19 Apamea, Hadrian (Æ); similar (BMC Phrygia 96, no. 155) [90]
2.20 The fourth- or fifth-century basilica above the source of the Marsyas [92]
3.1 The acropolis of Apamea [100]
3.2 An ox-cart, near Afyon, c. 1900 (Photo: G. Berggren, courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Istanbul (400+R 30.977 Repro)) [104]
3.3 Apamea, first century BC (Æ); Zeus/Artemis Anaitis; Maiphernes egeogistes (BMC Phrygia 83, no. 84) [106]
3.4 Apamea, AD c. 54–9 (Æ); Nero and Agrippina/eagle; Marius Cordus, koinon Phrygias (BMC Phrygia 94, no. 143; RPC i 3136) [109]
3.5 Apamea, AD c. 60 (Æ); Nero/Marsyas; Vettius Niger, koinon Phrygias (SNG Von Aulock 3490; RPC i 3137) [109]
3.6 Apamea, AD 202–9 (Æ); Caracalla and Plautilla/eagle; Artemas, koinon Phrygias (BMC Phrygia 99, no. 172) [111]
3.7 Apamea, Philip I (Æ); Demos/Tyche; Pelagon, panegyriarch (BMC Phrygia 90, no. 123) [111]
3.8 The site of Chonae, at the foot of the Honaz Dağı [125]
3.9 Maeander decoration on the outer gate of the Ak Han near Denizli, 1250s AD [127]
4.1 The pass at Çapalı, looking west into the southern part of the Dombay ovası [132]
4.2 The Ak Dağı and Işıklı Göl, looking south-east from Sarıbaba tepesi [135]
4.3 The north-east flank of the Maeander plain [137]
4.4 Sarıbaba tepesi [137]
4.5 Işıklı and the Maeander plain [138]
4.6 The Kınıf Boğazı ravine [142]
4.7 The Ak Göz springs, looking towards the Ak Dağı [144]
4.8 Eumenea, second–third century AD (Æ); Demos/river-god Glaucus, three carp fish below (SNG Von Aulock 3587) [144]
4.9 The Hellenistic fortification wall on the peak of Sarıbaba tepesi [146]
List of maps and figures

4.10 Akköprü and the Maeander [148]
4.11 Stretch of Roman road at Yeniköy [150]
4.12 Yuvaköy milestone [151]
4.13 The crag of Akkale [160]
4.14 Ruined wooden bridge near Han Derbent [165]
4.15 Dionysopolis (?), c. 168–166 bc (AR); cista mystica in ivy wreath/bow-case and coiled serpents (BM 1897–1–4–91) [172]
4.16 The Çal ovası, near the site of ancient Dionysopolis [175]
5.1 The site of Philadelphia, modern Alaşehir (Photo: G. Berggren, c. 1900; courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Istanbul) (323+R 29.531 Repro) [179]
5.2 A buffalo-cart on the Çine Çayı (the ancient river Marsyas) (Photo: Gertrude Bell, 1907; courtesy of the Gertrude Bell Photographic Archive, Newcastle University) [183]
5.3 Colossae: funerary relief of a swine-merchant (MAMA VI 50) (Photo: MAMA VI, pl. 10) [184]
5.4 The mausoleum of Flavius Zeuxis (AvH 51) [189]
5.5 Funerary banquet-relief from Sarayköy (Attouda?), with sheep and sheepdog under the table (Pflühl and Möbius 1977–9, II 473, no. 1973) (Photo: Pflühl and Möbius, Taf. 283) [191]
5.6 Funerary stele from Aphrodisias: the shepherd Epagathos, with his two sheepdogs (Laph2007 13.204) (drawing: W. Reichel, reproduced in Robert, OMS vi 7) [192]
5.7 Vineyard in the Çal ovası, near Mahmutgazi [194]
5.8 Yüriks seen by Freya Stark near Aphrodisias in 1952 (Photo: Stark 1954, facing p. 208) [200]
6.1 The Antonii of Laodicea [207]
6.2 The site of Heraclea under Salbake (modern Vakf köyü) [219]
6.3 Heraclea, Antoninus Pius (Æ); Heracles standing (BMC Caria 120, no. 25) [223]
6.4 Heraclea, Marcus Aurelius Caesar (Æ); Asclepius, seated to l. (SNG Von Aulock 2551) [223]
6.5 The site of Attouda (modern Hisar) [228]
6.6 Attouda, first century bc (AR); city goddess/Apollo standing l. (BMC Caria 62, no. 1) [229]
6.7 Plarasa-Aphrodisias, first century bc (AR); veiled Aphrodite/eagle on thunderbolt (BMC Caria 26, no. 9) [229]
6.8 The Carminii of Attouda [231]
6.9 The stadium at Aphrodisias, looking north-east towards Mt Cadmus [232]
List of maps and figures

6.10 Mt Cadmus, seen from the site of Trapezopolis [240]
7.1 The lower Maeander flood plain and the southern foothills of Mt Mycale [243]
7.2 The Maeander flood-plain below Priene [267]
7.3 The north shore of Lake Bafa [268]
7.4 The fortress of Sabas Asidenos on the acropolis of Priene-Sampson [271]
7.5 The modern village of Domatia [274]
7.6 The Byzantine fort at Atburgaz (Malachiou?) [275]
7.7 The Cihanoğlu fortress at Cincin [276]
7.8 The fortifications on Ikizada (Duo Bounoi) on Lake Bafa [278]
7.9 The heights of Mt Mycale [279]
7.10 The northern flank of Mt Mycale and the Batinetis [282]
8.1 Theodore Wiegand at Priene (Photo: Marie Wiegand, 1900; photo courtesy of Deutsches Archäologisches Institut, Abteilung Istanbul (7245)) [298]
8.2 Pelicans in Lake Bafa [301]
8.3 Wild horses near Priene; in the background, Mt Mycale [304]
8.4 Water-meadows around Myus, looking north towards Mt Mycale [305]
8.5 Ferry-crossing on the lower Maeander, near Myus (Photo: Wiegand and Schrader 1904: 8 Abb. 3) [309]
8.6 Rescript of Justinian to Didyma (Justinianopolis) [310]
8.7 Spring floods at Miletus (April 1907); in the foreground, the theatre of Miletus; in the middle distance, the village of Balat (Photo: Gertrude Bell, 1907; courtesy of the Gertrude Bell Photographic Archive, Newcastle University) [317]
8.8 Fishing boats in the Karina gölü [320]
8.9 The Karina gölü [323]
8.10 Fisherman’s reed hut on the north shore of Karina gölü [327]
8.11 The Maeander river, seen from Mt Mycale (Photo: Wiegand and Schrader 1904: 9 Abb. 4) [335]
Preface

Men and women make their own history, but they do not make it just as they please. They make it not under circumstances that they have chosen themselves, but under conditions inherited from the past and imposed on them by the material world. The most fundamental of these conditions is the physical environment in which people live. Geology, botany and climate offer possibilities, and impose limits; how people respond to those possibilities depends on a wide range of social factors, including the personalities and choices of individuals. Uncovering this dialectical relationship between men and women and their environment over time is the proper task of historical geography.

This book is a study of the historical geography of the valley of the river Maeander in western Asia Minor. Its main contention is that the economic relationships, social structures, cultural identities, and ritual behaviour of the human communities of the Maeander valley in Graeco-Roman antiquity and the Byzantine middle ages were specifically and contingently affected by the fact that those communities were situated in a particular physical space, a valley fringed by mountains on either side, with a major perennial river running down the middle of it to the sea. After describing the physical space itself (Chapter 1), I focus on six separate aspects of the relationship between the peoples of the Maeander and their local environments: sacred geography (Chapter 2), markets and mobility (Chapter 3), mental maps and conceptual boundaries (Chapter 4), pastoral dynamics (Chapter 5), elite behaviour and interaction (Chapter 6) and the productive rural landscape (Chapter 7). In the course of these six chapters, we shall also travel slowly down the course of the river, from its source at Apamea-Celaenae (Chapters 2–3), through the upper Maeander valley (Chapter 4) to the Çal highlands and the plain of Denizli (Chapters 5–6), and into the lower Maeander floodplain (Chapter 7). The final chapter (Chapter 8) is an extended description of dynamic interaction between men and women and their landscape, focused on the changing responses of the inhabitants of the lower Maeander valley to the advance of the delta front (itself the result of human activity), from the Hellenistic period to the present day.
Simultaneously, I aim to present the human geography of the valley from three different spatial viewpoints. From a vertical perspective, I shall argue that the Maeander valley is a broad flat thing: a floodplain enabling maximal internal mobility, which has historically been characterised by highly intensive and socially fragmented agricultural exploitation. This agricultural economy was at all times closely integrated with higher-altitude pastoral zones in the mountain ranges flanking the valley to north and south (Chapters 1, 5, 6 and 7). Second, from a latitudinal (north–south) perspective, I shall argue that the Maeander valley is a long thin thing: a space which has historically been characterised by intense horizontal communication and interaction, in which certain distinctive social and economic structures were shared by several different places along the riverine strip (Chapters 2 and 3). Third, from a longitudinal (east–west) perspective, I shall argue that the Maeander valley is a thing with clearly defined ends: at its eastern end, it served historically as a boundary point defining the limits of two distinct ecological zones (western Asia Minor and inner Anatolia), and at its western end, it acted as a funnel of transition and exchange between the Asia Minor peninsula and the wider Mediterranean world (Chapters 4, 7 and 8).

This approach, which takes perceived and material space seriously as a field of natural contingency, should not be confused with environmental determinism. Under imposed and inherited circumstances, men and women make their own history; human events within any given environment are not merely surface agitation, froth raised up by deep and determinate natural currents. Just as the behaviour of human communities is necessarily shaped and limited by environment, so the environment itself has been constantly and repeatedly reshaped by human behaviour, most visibly in the case of the malleable and unstable wetlands of the Maeander delta zone (Chapter 8). I shall argue throughout this book that the Maeander valley of antiquity and the middle ages can usefully be treated as a geographic, social and conceptual unit (a ‘region’); but this ‘regionality’ is itself a human construct, not an essential and inherent quality of the landscape, patiently waiting to be mediated through human activity (Chapter 1).

The action of nature on societies, wrote Vidal de la Blache, is best regarded as a kind of imperceptible and complex interference, the results of which accumulate slowly over time. Roughly speaking, the chronological span of this study extends from the Macedonian conquest of Asia in the late fourth century BC to the twilight of Byzantine rule in Asia Minor in the late thirteenth century AD. These chronological boundaries reflect the limits of my historical competence, rather than any informed conviction that the Turkish conquest of western Asia Minor brought such radical structural
changes to the human geography of the Maeander valley that it would no longer be helpful to make systematic comparisons with earlier periods. The adoption of a long time-frame, combined with a synchronic rather than narrative mode of presentation, brings with it the risk (as will already be clear from the summary description of the book’s contents) of reducing a highly fluid and contingent environmental dialectic to an unchanging web of geological and social constants. It is all too easy to slip from the dynamic temporality of ‘long duration’ into the frozen inertia of ‘non-time’, from which data can then be indiscriminately cherry-picked across the millennia to illustrate the innate characteristics of a hypostasised ecological ‘base’ (Jameson 2009: 532–45). I regret that the inadequacy of the evidence often makes such cherry-picking unavoidable; in such cases, I have tried to make the procedure explicit.

Needless to say, throughout the period covered by this book, the human communities of the Maeander valley were to a greater or lesser degree integrated into larger productive, ideological and political systems. Their history was not a purely local history. Indeed, in many respects the material and social circumstances of the people of the Maeander were effectively indistinguishable from those of any other part of the ancient and mediaeval east Mediterranean world. The cities of the Maeander valley possessed theatres, public buildings, magistrates and a water-supply, and were conquered from time to time by Hellenistic kings; the rural population cultivated wheat, vines and olives, and concealed as much of their livestock as they could from tax-assessors. The problem is particularly acute during the first three centuries AD, when the Roman empire constituted and perpetuated itself through a normative pan-Mediterranean homogeneity of material culture and cultural artefacts: a ‘first globalization’, which saw a universal flattening of local distinctions across the whole of western Eurasia. As a result, the greater part of the surviving documentary and archaeological material for the human communities of the ancient and mediaeval Maeander valley, while often of potential cumulative or comparative value to historians of the wider Graeco-Roman or Byzantine world, does little to illuminate the particular spatial dynamics that I have tried to describe in this book.

Endogenous social analysis is necessarily incomplete. But in describing the workings of (say) the Roman empire, we can and should aspire to go beyond the universal terms and categories licensed by the ruling power itself. Historical geography has the potential to offer subaltern perspectives on the history of pre-modern imperial states, asserting as it does the primacy of the lived experiences of particular people in actual places. A meaningful
dialectical historical geography of any given region must, therefore, primarily be driven by internal, not external problematic. Since there is no way of judging a priori how the dialectic between environment and culture was played out in a specific geographical space in a particular historical period, the historical geographer necessarily begins by following his or her nose, and proceeds by describing and analysing things that look interesting. This is not to suggest that we should return to a naive historical inductivism. As David Harvey has warned, the geographer’s intense concentration on actual spaces and places can all too easily lead to a depoliticised and antiquarian particularism: ‘the temptation then exists to abandon theory, retreat into the supposed particularities of place and moment, resort to naive empiricism, and produce as many ad hoc theories as there are instances’ (Harvey 2001: 118). The formation of simplifying and generalising models, whether of global economic systems, institutional conditions, or state ideologies, is always a necessary condition for understanding the particular. But the converse is also true. The intensive description and critical analysis of small regions, valleys, plateaux or coastal plains, with the aim of uncovering and mapping the distinctive reciprocal influences of their human communities and their particular environments, is the only possible way of integrating a spatial dimension into the essentially – necessarily – undifferentiated models of the pan-Mediterranean historian. I hope that this study will therefore be of some use as a contribution to the wider historical ecology of western Eurasia during the sixteen centuries covered by this book. The ancient or mediaeval world is said to work like this: but what does it look like from here?

Peter Thonemann

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Abbreviations

AASS  Acta Sanctorum

AE    Année épigraphique

AvH   C. Humann et al., Altertümer von Hierapolis; Berlin, 1898

Bank Leu  Bank Leu (auction catalogues)

BE    Bulletin épigraphique, annually in REG

BM    British Museum: post-BMC accessions

BMC   A Catalogue of the Greek Coins in the British Museum, London, 1873--; individual volumes identified by region, e.g. BMC Phrygia


Cat. W. de Molthein  V. Renner, Catalogue de la collection des médailles grecques de M. Walcher de Molthein; Paris, 1895

CID   Corpus des inscriptions de Delphes

CIG   Corpus Inscriptionum Graecarum

CIL   Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum

CNG   Classical Numismatic Group (auction catalogues)

Coll. Wadd.  E. Babelon, Inventaire sommaire de la collection Waddington; Paris, 1898


DACL  Dictionnaire d’archéologie chrétienne et de liturgie

Dölder, Regesten  F. Dölder, Regesten der Kaiserurkunden des oströmischen Reiches von 565–1453 (5 vols.); Munich and Berlin, 1924–65


FGrHist  Die Fragmente der griechischen Historiker

GM Winterthur  Griechische Münzen in Winterthur
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Helios</td>
<td><em>Helios Numismatik</em> (auction catalogues)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.Alexandria Troas</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
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<td>I.Assos</td>
<td>R. Merkelbach, <em>Die Inschriften von Assos</em>; IGSK 4; Bonn, 1976</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.Delos</td>
<td><em>Inscriptions de Délos</em></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.Didyma</td>
<td>A. Rehm, <em>Didyma II. Die Inschriften</em>; Berlin, 1958</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.Heraclea</td>
<td>L. Jonnes, <em>The Inscriptions of Heraclea Pontica</em>; IGSK 47; Bonn, 1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I.Ilium</td>
<td>P. Frisch, <em>Die Inschriften von Ilium</em>; IGSK 3; Bonn, 1975</td>
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<td>I.Kibyra</td>
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<td>I.Laodikeia</td>
<td>T. Corsten, <em>Die Inschriften von Laodikeia am Lykos. I</em>; IGSK 49; Bonn, 1997</td>
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<td>I.Magnesia</td>
<td>O. Kern, <em>Die Inschriften von Magnesia am Maeander</em>; Berlin, 1900</td>
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I.Sestos  J. Krauss, Die Inschriften von Sestos und der thrakischen Chersones; IGSK 19; Bonn, 1980
I.Smyrna  G. Petzl, Die Inschriften von Smyrna (2 vols. in 3); IGSK 23–4; Bonn, 1982–90
I.Strat.  M. Ç. Şahin, Die Inschriften von Stratonikeia (2 vols. in 3); IGSK 21–2; Bonn, 1981–90
I.Sultan Da˘gı  L. Jonnes, The Inscriptions of the Sultan Da˘gı. I; IGSK 62; Bonn, 2002
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IG  Inscriptiones Graecae
IGBulg.  Inscriptiones Graecae in Bulgaria repertae
IGCAM  H. Grégoire, Recueil des inscriptions grecques-chrétiennes d’Asie Mineure; Paris, 1922
IGCH  M. Thompson, O. Merkholm and C. M. Kraay, An Inventory of Greek Coin Hoards; New York, 1973
IGLS  Inscriptions grecques et latines de la Syrie
IGUR  L. Moretti, Inscriptiones Graecae Urbis Romae (4 vols.); Rome, 1968–90
IJO  D. Noy et al., Inscriptiones Judaicae Orientis (3 vols.); Tübingen, 2004
ILS  H. Dessau, Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae (3 vols. in 5); Berlin, 1892–1916
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Imhoof-Blumer, LS  F. Imhoof-Blumer, Lydische Stadtmünzen; Genf and Leipzig, 1897
Imhoof-Blumer, MG  F. Imhoof-Blumer, Monnaies grecques; Paris, 1883
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<th>Abbreviation</th>
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<tr>
<td>ISE</td>
<td>Iscrizioni storiche ellenistiche</td>
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<td>Fritz Rudolf Künker GmbH &amp; Co. (auction catalogues)</td>
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<td>Lanz</td>
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<td>Laurent, Corpus</td>
<td>V. Laurent, <em>Le corpus des sceaux de l’Empire byzantin</em> (2 vols. in 5); Paris, 1963–81</td>
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<tr>
<td>LBG</td>
<td>Lexikon zur byzantinischen Grätität</td>
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<tr>
<td>LGPN</td>
<td>A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names</td>
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<td>LIMC</td>
<td>Lexicon Iconographicum Mythologiae Classice</td>
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<td>MAMA</td>
<td>Monumenta Asiae Minoris Antiqua</td>
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<td>Michel, Recueil</td>
<td>Ch. Michel, <em>Recueil d’inscriptions grecques</em>; Brussels, 1900</td>
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<td>Milet</td>
<td>Milet. Ergebnisse der Ausgrabungen und Untersuchungen seit dem Jahr 1899; Berlin, 1906–</td>
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<td>NZ</td>
<td>Numismatische Zeitschrift</td>
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<td>Patmos</td>
<td>Βυζαντινά Έγγραφα τῆς Μονής Πάτμου (2 vols.); Athens, 1980; Α’ – Αὐτοκρατορικά, ed. E. Vranousi; Β’ – Δημοσίων Λειτουργίων, ed. M. Nystazopoulos-Pelekidou</td>
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<td>PIR²</td>
<td>Prosopographia Imperii Romani, 2nd edn</td>
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<td>PLRE</td>
<td>A Prosopography of the Later Roman Empire</td>
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<td>PME</td>
<td>Prosopographia Militariarum Equestrium quae fuerunt ab Augusto ad Gallienum</td>
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<td>RC</td>
<td>C. B. Welles, <em>Royal Correspondence in the Hellenistic Period</em>; New Haven, 1934</td>
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<td>RDGE</td>
<td>R. K. Sherk, <em>Roman Documents from the Greek East</em>; Baltimore, 1969</td>
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<td>RE</td>
<td>Pauly’s Real-Encyclopädie der classischen Altertumswissenschaft</td>
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<td>RIB</td>
<td><em>The Roman Inscriptions of Britain</em></td>
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<td>RMD</td>
<td>Roman Military Diplomas</td>
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<td>RPC</td>
<td>A. Burnett and M. Amandry (eds.), <em>Roman Provincial Coinage</em>; London and Paris, 1992–; i: <em>From the Death of Caesar to the Death of Vitellius</em> (44 BC–AD 69); ii: <em>From Vespasian to Domitian</em> (AD 69–96); vii: <em>De Gordien Ier à Gordien III</em> (238–244 après J.-C.) 1. Province d’Asie</td>
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<td><em>Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum</em></td>
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<td>SNG</td>
<td><em>Sylloge Nummorum Graecorum</em></td>
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<td>TAM</td>
<td>Tituli Asiae Minoris</td>
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<td>TIB Galatien</td>
<td>K. Belke, Tabula Imperii Byzantini 4. Galatien und Lykaonien; Vienna, 1984</td>
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<td>K. Belke and N. Mersich, Tabula Imperii Byzantini 7. Phrygien und Pisidien; Vienna, 1990</td>
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<td>TLL</td>
<td>Thesaurus Linguae Latinae</td>
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<td>TT</td>
<td>G. L. F. Tafel and G. M. Thomas, Urkunden zur älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig (3 vols.); Vienna, 1856–7</td>
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<td>Xénophon</td>
<td>D. Papachryssanthou, Archives de l’Athos xv. Actes de Xénophon; Paris, 1986</td>
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<td>ZfN</td>
<td>Zeitschrift für Numismatik</td>
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Map 1. The Maeander valley