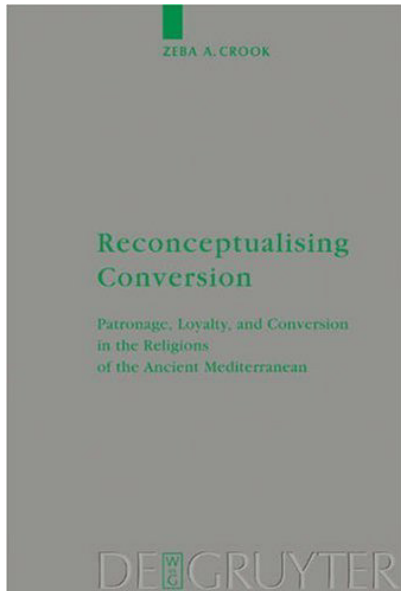


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Crook, Zeba A.

Reconceptualising Conversion: Patronage, Loyalty, and Conversion in the Religions of the Ancient Mediterranean

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This excellent study of Paul's conversion is the outcome of a dissertation written under the direction of John S. Kloppenborg from the University of Toronto. Taking note of the radically different cultural and social milieu of Paul from the modern one, Crook seeks to understand what happened to Paul, not from the psychologized, individualized perspectives of the Western, modern world but from the Mediterranean institutions of patronage and clientage. He argues that Paul's conversion must be situated in the extensively diffused practice of patronage and benefaction between humans that was in step with the equally pervasive awareness of patronage and benefactions between humans and their gods. Patronage defined a concrete relationship that was clearly marked by an exchange of goods and reciprocity between two or more parties. Paul's language of conversion, therefore, was composed of the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction.

Chapter 1 accordingly, explores the modern, Western tendency to cast Paul's conversion in the emotional terms of modern psychological proclivities, from A. D. Nock through to Jerome Murphy-O'Connor. Crook notes that personalities from the ancient world were not devoid of emotional expression but that they would not have manifested it in the way expressed by moderns. Their expressions of emotions were culture-specific.

Chapter 2 situates the discussion of conversion in the context of patronage and clientage. Crook extends the model to include human-divine interaction and what was exchanged between them. By locating patronage and clientage in the ancient model of exchange, Crook convincingly demonstrates that Paul, as a recipient of patronage from his deity, was under obligation to return loyalty and honor.

Chapter 3 spells out the rhetorical conventions of the rhetoric of patron and clientage: the call of the patron; the philosopher's teaching and delivery of that teaching as benefaction; the rhetoric of patronage, which includes three aspects, namely, prayer, praise, and proselytism; patronal *synkrisis* (the rhetorical trope of comparison) and life before and its improvement after interaction with a benefactor/patron; and the vocabulary of *grace* in the rhetoric of patronage and clientage. Given that grace is heavily infused with ethnocentric, theological overtones, Crook rightfully argues that the term should be translated as "benefaction," which, in turn, serves to shed light on Paul's relationship with his God. These conventions were designed to accomplish three goals: to give thanks to a patron; to offer praise to a patron; and to secure future benefactions from the patron.

Chapter 4 considers the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction in Paul's conversion passages. Focusing his study on five passages that are generally thought to refer to Paul's conversion (1 Cor 9:1, 16–17; 15:8–10; Gal 1:11–17; and Phil 3:4b–11), Crook points out that, despite what appears to be very little in the way of reference to Paul's conversion experience, Paul offers plenty of detail concerning his experience and understanding of conversion. Commentators have compensated for the apparent lack of detail by offering three interpretative practices: (1) they rely on the Acts of the Apostles for supplying the details of Paul's conversion experience; (2) they import a psychological cognitive framework in order to add detail to the picture; and (3) they suggest that Paul's lack of factual information about his conversion experience reflects his unwillingness to draw attention to himself, perhaps motivated by embarrassment or humility.

As Crook demonstrates, however, the descriptive elements of Paul's experience accord well with the patterns evident in the rhetoric of patronage and benefaction. In 1 Cor 9:1, 16–17, for example, the appearance of Jesus to Paul was a benefaction of God's and Paul's mission to the Gentiles was the appropriate expression of client reciprocity: "Paul undertook a mission to the Gentiles to spread the good news of benefactions in order to attract them to the new movement, and by doing so to increase the honour of God as the divine patron" (169). In Gal 1:11–17 Paul's rhetoric of patronage once more confirms the revelation of Christ as something received from his divine patron: it was a benefaction of God. Philippians 3:4b–11 presents a powerful example of patronal *synkrisis* that permits Paul to honor the patron and broker for the good effect of their benefactions (196). Crook concludes that the language of patronage and benefaction allows us "to understand Paul

and his religious experiences very nearly through his eyes, not through Luke's eyes, nor through the 'corrective lenses' of modern individualistic and psychologically framed spectacles" (197).

Chapter 5 rounds out the discussion by addressing the relationship of patronage, benefaction, and loyalty (*fides*) to conversion. Loyalty, avers Crook, was not a feeling but a set of behaviors. There were three types of loyalty that arose in relationship: imperial loyalty; manumission; and philosophical loyalty. Each of them required obligations of the client and ultimately informed the kind of loyalty required of Paul by his patron deity. His patron deity was asking something new of him, and his loyal compliance with every measure prescribed was what he required of Paul.

Reconceptualising Conversion represents a thoroughgoing revision of thinking and understanding of Paul's conversions and comes as a welcome corrective to the many psychologized, hopelessly ethnocentric studies of Paul's experience.