The recently discovered History of the Episcopate of Alexandria implies an early and swift expansion of Christianity along the main traffic arteries of Egypt and confirms indirectly the anecdotes narrated by Eusebius about thriving Christian communities in the Egyptian hinterland from the times of Demetrius (189-232) on. The scattered and late papyrological evidence for Christians seems to tell a different story, however. Have we potentially overlooked something?

While most research has focused so far on the papyri from Oxyrhynchus, the Arsinoite nome is by far the most richly documented region of Egypt during the first three centuries of Roman rule. Where, if not there, should we look for evidence for the earliest stirrings of Christianity in rural Egypt? This paper discusses evidence from the Arsinoite for the spread of Christianity, local Christian leaders, the many facets of Christian identity, and the part Christians played in the fabric of the province’s social and political life.