

BAGNALL, ROGER S., ed. *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2007. Pp. xv + 464. Cloth, \$99.99. ISBN 978-0-521-87137-2.

This is a fantastic book. It is broad in scope and thoroughly detailed, brims with new insights into old problems, is loaded with suggestions for future research, and will serve as an entry-level text for the non-specialist, but will likewise encourage even experts to push the boundaries of their fields. Roger Bagnall has done a commendable job as editor.

The book is divided into four thematic sections (see below) and begins with Bagnall's Introduction (pp. 1–17), in which he addresses issues of chronology, terminology and the nature of the source material for the study of Byzantine Egypt, among other things. The book contains no general bibliography or list of works cited, as each individual essay concludes with a "References" section. Several essays are accompanied by (black and white) maps, illustrations and photos, which are generally useful and always accurately cited in the text. There is a general Index at the end of the volume (pp. 460–4).

Part I, "The Culture of Byzantine Egypt" (pp. 19–184), begins with Alan Cameron's "Poets and pagans in Byzantine Egypt" (pp. 21–46), an examination of (primarily) literary culture. Cameron suggests that the persistence of classical and classicizing themes in the Greek literature of the Byzantine period had more to do with the unwillingness of (mainly) Christian writers to break with tradition than with any sort of pagan agenda. Raffaella Cribiore's "Higher education in early Byzantine Egypt: Rhetoric, Latin, and the law" (pp. 47–66) follows and provides an admirable overview of the subject. Leslie S.B. MacCoull tackles "Philosophy in its social context" (pp. 67–82) in her contribution, which highlights the importance of Alexandria as an international philosophical school and the social value of the philosophical training of the day for Christians and pagans alike. In the following chapter, "Coptic literature in the Byzantine and early Islamic world" (pp. 83–102), Stephen Emmel delivers a useful survey of the surviving material, which is predominantly religious (Christian) in content, mainly comprised of translations from other sources and dominated by the works of Shenoute (AD 347–465), identified by Emmel as the sole great writer of Coptic literature. The next essay is Peter Grossman's "Early Christian architecture in Egypt and its relationship to the architecture of the Byzantine world" (pp. 103–36). Grossmann draws a distinction between the architecture of Lower Egypt in late antiquity, which tended to be receptive to external influences, and

that of Upper Egypt, which hewed more closely to existing traditions. Thelma K. Thomas' "Coptic and Byzantine textiles found in Egypt: Corpora, collections, and scholarly perspectives" (pp. 137–62) delivers splendidly on the promise of its title: the reader encounters a frank assessment of the earliest discoveries of and work on Coptic and Byzantine Egyptian textiles in the 19th century. Thomas proposes that the production and trade of textiles in the Byzantine period was pan-Mediterranean. The last essay in Part I, Françoise Dunand's "Between tradition and innovation: Egyptian funerary practices in late antiquity" (pp. 163–84), highlights the predominance of traditional Egyptian funerary practices in the Byzantine period. Dunand notes that it was not until the 4th and 5th centuries that the Egyptians adopted many of the funerary practices common in other Byzantine states.

The first of the seven essays in Part II, "Government, environments, society, and economy" (pp. 185–327), is Zsolt Kiss' "Alexandria in the fourth to seventh centuries" (pp. 187–206), a detailed treatment of a thoroughly Christianized city with a Christian government that nevertheless saw its share of violent clashes with religious minority groups (mainly pagans and Jews). Though the essay is otherwise dominated by the lives of the patriarchs, Kiss has repeated recourse to the archaeological evidence for Alexandria in the period. The next chapter, "The Other cities in later Roman Egypt" (pp. 207–25) by Peter van Minnen, forms a nice complement to Kiss; van Minnen's wide-ranging essay defies summary and should be required reading for anyone seeking a general overview of the nature of the evidence—primarily archaeological and papyrological—for Byzantine Egyptian cities. James G. Keenan takes us into the *chôra* with his chapter, "Byzantine Egyptian villages" (pp. 226–43). Here, firm conclusions are undermined by or impossible because of the chance survival of evidence, so Keenan wisely focuses on case studies. As he notes, papyri associated with Byzantine Egyptian villages tend to concern problems: unjust imprisonment, excessive taxation, agricultural disruptions and the like. In "The Imperial presence: Government and army" (pp. 244–70), Bernhard Palme sketches the civil and military organization of Byzantine Egypt, underlines as primary the security and police functions of the Egyptian army, and notes that much of the Byzantine military/political infrastructure was retained by the Arab invaders in the 7th century. Joëlle Beaucamp's "Byzantine Egypt and imperial law" (pp. 271–87) asks to what extent the legislation of Justinian was known and employed in Egypt. She concludes that in the course of the 6th century, law in Egypt became more markedly Roman, but that overall the fact that the Egyptians had idiosyncratic uses for Roman

law did not make them different from provincials elsewhere in the empire. Todd M. Hickey's "Aristocratic landholding and the economy of Byzantine Egypt" (pp. 288–308) has as its focus the great estates of Byzantine Egypt and papyrus archives that seem to indicate that landholding and land use varied from place to place. Part II closes with T.G. Wilfong's treatment of "Gender and society in Byzantine Egypt" (pp. 309–27), which includes a helpful survey of past scholarship on the subject and identifies a number of new avenues for investigation.

Part III, "Christianity: The Church and monasticism" (pp. 329–433), kicks off with Ewa Wipszycka's "The institutional church" (pp. 331–49). Wipszycka highlights two important characteristics of the Byzantine Egyptian church, the primacy of the bishop of Alexandria and the lack of metropolitan bishops, and returns again and again to the effects of the monophysite/Chalcedonian divide on Egypt's Christian population. In "The Cult of saints: A haven of continuity in a changing world?" (pp. 350–67), Arietta Papaconstantinou provides a chronological survey of the evidence for saints' cults from the middle of the 5th century onward, traces the gradual rise to predominance of monastic cults starting in the 6th century, and outlines a number of important characteristics of the cults. Chapter 18, "Divine architects: Designing the monastic dwelling place" (pp. 368–89), addresses two major questions: where Egyptian monks lived, and what kinds of living environments they constructed. The author, Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, suggests that over time monastic communities located themselves further and further away from inhabited communities, while at the same time remaining in close contact with these communities in a number of ways. The next chapter, "Monasticism in Byzantine Egypt: Continuity and memory" (pp. 390–407) by James E. Goehring, contrasts the ascetic ideal presented in Byzantine literature with the realities of the ascetic life illuminated by documentary evidence and archaeology. Goehring sees a number of divergences between the two, but stresses that the ascetic ideal—renouncing all property and wealth—remained constant over time. The last essay in Part III is Elizabeth S. Bolman's "Depicting the kingdom of heaven: Paintings and monastic practice in early Byzantine Egypt" (pp. 408–33). Bolman argues that Byzantine Egyptian architecture and artwork reflects the fact that visuality was integral to the spiritual work of Egyptian monks. Images of (e.g.) holy men, martyrs and Christ in (primarily) oratories were meant to help monks focus on the eternal world of the spirit.

The book closes with Part IV, the Epilogue, which contains one chapter: Petra M. Sijpesteijn's "The Arab conquest of Egypt and the

beginning of Muslim rule" (pp. 437–59). Sijpesteijn identifies three major problem areas for those who would seek a history of Egypt under the Arabs: the motivations behind the conquest of Egypt, the characteristics of Muslim rule, and the extent of Arabization and Islamization in Egypt. The overall message is that many long-held beliefs about Egypt under the Arabs need revisiting, that much of the evidence for the period has been underutilized, and that a tremendous amount of work remains to be done.

Let me stress again that this is a thorough, stimulating and satisfying book, which will be of interest to a wide readership of students and experts. Bagnall and his talented crew have done the scholarly community a great service in compiling *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300–700* and lighting the way for future study of this fascinating time and place. [[1]]

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[[1]] The book is amazingly free of errors. I include the few that I found for the sake of completeness: p. 221, paragraph 2, line 12: dittography of "that"; p. 242, in the entry for "Mayerson, P." (line 38): read "ἀμπελουργός"; p. 401, n. 64: read "II.15"; p. 437, paragraph 3, line 1: superfluous comma after "years"; p. 458, in the entry for "Morelli, F. (2000)" (line 3): read "κλήρωσις." □