

HÉLÈNE CUVIGNY, *ROME IN EGYPT'S EASTERN DESERT* (ISAW monographs). Edited with an introduction by Roger S. Bagnall. New York: New York University Press, 2021. 2 vols. Pp. xxii + viii + 655, illus. ISBN 9781479810611. £108.00.

This two-volume corpus include forty-one articles published over a period of over thirty years, from 1986 to 2019, plus an introduction by Roger Bagnall, five indexes and bibliography. The volumes' structure is by topic, covering key areas of life in Egypt's Eastern desert: high administration, quarries, road system, military rations, business and prostitution, desert dwellers, religion and language. Most of the contributions have been published here in English for the first time, often with major updates in terms of bibliography and analysis. Based on Hélène Cuvigny's first-hand experience of the excavations at Mons Claudianus, they are often the result of fruitful collaborations with other papyrologists and archaeologists, including Adam Bülow-Jacobsen. As Bagnall in the introduction and Cuvigny in the conclusions observe, most of the documents found at Mons Claudianus are Greek ostraca, discarded material from rubbish dumps, which tell us about the road system and life in the forts (*praesidia*), but not about trade with the East, or village administration and agriculture. The forty-one chapters include editions or re-editions of ostraca as well as historical analyses.

Chs 1 and 41, both published in 2018, serve as general introduction and conclusion, while ch. 18 works well as conclusion to the first volume, as it offers a summary of the administrative structure and role of the forts. In ch. 1, C. clarifies the administrative framework of the Eastern desert, identifying two areas: north of the road from Koptos to Myos Hormos, dominated by the quarries of Mons Claudianus and Porphyrites; and to the south, called the Desert of Berenike, devoted to the road network that supported caravan transport between the Red Sea and the Nile Valley. In ch. 41, after providing a summary of the document types found in the Eastern desert, the author explains how such fragmentary evidence can be used to write history and uncover previously unknown aspects of ancient life.

Among the discarded material some important documents stand out, which shed light on key organisational matters, including monthly slips or *entolai* (ch. 10), *O.Claud.* inv. 1538 (ch. 11) and *O.Krok.* I 1 (ch. 26). The *entolai* (c. 1,200) were part of a system, put in place under Hadrian, for the maintenance of quarry workers at Mons Claudianus. Native workmen would write instructions to an agent, called a *kibariates*, who was entrusted to go to the Nile valley and carry out transactions on their behalf, such as buying foodstuffs or borrowing money. *O.Claud.* inv. 1538, dated to around A.D. 110, is a schedule of recipients of water for one day at Mons Claudianus, whereby the recipients are divided by rank, status and occupation, for a total of 917. It supplies the first numeric data on the workers in a quarry under the Principate, including 400 imperial employees and 60 soldiers (or 6.5 per cent of the total workforce). This document clarifies the role of soldiers in the quarries, mainly as supervisors in the organisation of water transport.

O.Krok. I 1 is a daybook which attests the existence of a postal service between forts on the road to Berenike (ch. 17). It summarises the arrival and departure of horsemen, who were responsible for the transportation of official mail, over a month and a half. In general, C. suggests, the postal ostraca show that the central administration relied on the forts for its communication with ports on the Red Sea.

C.'s studies offer unique insight into life in the forts and the impact of Roman rule, as seen in workforce organisation, settlement of families, prostitution, interaction with the indigenous population and religion. Two categories of labour in the quarries are identified: the *familiares*, imperial employees, mainly unskilled workers, and the *pagani*, highly skilled workers, such as stone carvers and blacksmiths, of native origin and free status, mostly from Alexandria and Syene (chs 1 and 9). The author observes how free miners and quarrymen in Dacia and Mons Claudianus received the same payment in money, suggesting, convincingly, that this can be taken as an example of the economic integration of the Empire (ch. 9).

One of the sites that stands out for the understanding of life in this part of Egypt is Kaine, on the right bank of the Nile (modern Qena), which C. shows was a settlement for families (ch. 14). While mining often involved the displacement of population (as in the case of Dacia), the author suggests that the government helped families settle as the closeness of relatives would improve the workmen's morale and hence their productivity.

Prostitution appears to have been integral part of the social infrastructure in the Eastern desert as prostitutes were hired by soldiers stationed in the forts. Some documents, like *O.Krok.* II 267, illustrate how the procurers arranged monthly contracts and found clients among their networks.

Interpreting the Greek verb *κυκλεύειν* (*kukleuein*) as ‘rotating’, C. suggests that prostitutes ‘rotated’ among the soldiers during the month for which they were hired (ch. 24). As can be expected, prostitutes had to endure constant abuses, as we can see in a letter from Sarapias to her procurer Maximus (*O.Dios* inv. 439, second century). C. offers a most insightful discussion of this letter, in which we learn about Sarapias’ frustration as she had to defend herself from daily insults, thus getting a glimpse of the emotional state women would have experienced working as prostitutes in Roman forts (ch. 25).

The ostraca also allowed the author to explore the interactions with the indigenous population. Using evidence from the area surrounding Kaine and the desert of Berenike, mainly Krokodilo, C. notes how, under Trajan, desert dwellers were a threat in the desert of Berenike, but not at Mons Claudianus. Better relations between the Roman garrisons and the indigenous people, on the other hand, are recorded in the second decade of the third century, as can be seen in ninety-four orders for delivery of wheat to the *barbaroi* from Xeron, dated to the third century. Though we have no information about the circumstances of such distribution, this attests to the existence of more peaceful relations between the Romans and the native population, while also giving us an insight into the spoken language of the desert dwellers (ch. 27).

As in the rest of Egypt, the ostraca show that religion played a crucial role in the Eastern desert. C. observes how, under Roman influence, the cult of the god Pan was replaced by the Alexandrian gods, mainly Isis and Sarapis, by the end of the first century (ch. 29). An example is a shrine, in the fort of Dios, to Zeus Helios Megas Sarapis, a god who appealed to the Egyptian workforce, to the Greek managers and also to the few Romans, as he could be identified with Jupiter Optimus Maximus (ch. 31).

Two key points emerge from C.’s studies: the need and advantage of placing written documents at the centre of historical investigation; and the importance of the Egyptian evidence in elucidating aspects of Roman imperial history. The forty-one chapters show how the painstaking analysis of fragmentary texts can yield new data and allow fresh historical reconstructions, enabling comparisons with data from elsewhere, such as Vindolanda and Dacia. The thematic organisation gives the volumes a good level of internal coherence, although, given the nature of the publications, some repetition is unavoidable (e.g. on administrative structure and workforce organisation). The volumes display beautiful colour images and photographs along with detailed maps and tables, which make the material and technical data more accessible.

It is hoped that these volumes will stimulate interest in the study of more marginalised areas of Egypt, thus contributing to the reconstruction of a fuller picture of this Roman province as they reveal differences in administrative structures and ways of life with better-documented areas, such as the Fayum and Nile Valley. Recent works on peripheral areas include R.S. Bagnall and G. Tallet (eds), *The Great Oasis of Egypt: The Kharga and Dakbla Oases in Antiquity* (2019) and C.A. Hope and G.E. Bowen (eds), *Kellis. A Roman-Period Village in Egypt’s Dakbleh Oasis* (2022).

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RYOSUKE TAKAHASHI, *THE TIES THAT BIND: THE ECONOMIC RELATIONSHIPS OF TWELVE TEBTUNIS FAMILIES IN ROMAN EGYPT*. London: University of London Press, 2022. Pp. xii + 195. ISBN 9781905670918. £55.00.

Ryosuke Takahashi’s monograph is a revised version of his doctoral thesis submitted to the University of London in 2007. He examines the economic entanglements in a rural society of Roman Egypt by taking second-century A.D. Tebtunis as a case study. The ruins of this Egyptian village are famous for their extensive corpus of archaeological and papyrological sources, already studied by many scholars. However, T. is the first to conduct a systematic analysis of the economic relationships of twelve families who were based in Tebtunis.

In the introductory chapter 1, T. outlines the objective and structure of his book. His aim is threefold: exploring how local elites acted in rural areas, elucidating how families behaved in