their anticipated absorption into Justinian's revived empire, the historian sought to clarify the boundaries between the triumphant imperial house and the exotic *gens* subdued before him' (167).

Isidore of Seville's *Laus Spaniae*, which opens his revised version of the *Historia Gothorum, Wandalorum, Sueborum*, forms Merrills' third case study. This is by far the shortest passage of all those discussed by Merrills, but it is also the most intriguing one. As Merrills clearly demonstrates, the *Laus Spaniae* should be read with the so-called *Laus Gothorum* that concludes the *Historia*, and together they reflect Isidore's notion that 'the successful union of *Hispania* and *Gothia* could only take place under the benevolent aegis of the Catholic Church' (227). This was the leitmotif of Isidore's political ideology, and it recurs in his writings like a theme in an opera.

Bede is the most problematic example discussed by Merrills. Although he manages to demonstrate how the geographical introduction and some other geographical passages in the *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* reflect Bede's 'universal' vision of history, and hence contribute to the inclusion of Britain in the universal Church, Merrills is a bit too keen to cast Bede in the chorus of late antique historians, such as Orosius, Jordanes or Isidore of Seville. The claim that geography was central to Bede's narrative and that Bede's *Historia ecclesiastica gentis Anglorum* is 'the most accomplished union of historical and geographical themes in late antique writing' (309), seems to me an unnecessary exaggeration.

These reservations aside, *History and Geography in Late Antiquity* is an important book, clearly written, and full of thought-provoking ideas. Although I would have been more cautious as far as Bede's use of geography is concerned, Merrills' careful, perceptive and engaging discussions, as well as his firm grasp of the sources, both primary and secondary, make this book a major contribution to the study of late antique and early medieval historiography. Apart from being the first major study in the English language to tackle this issue, Merrills' book offers a fresh new look at some well-known and well-researched texts. Both students and scholars will find much that is valuable in this book, which deserves a very warm welcome indeed.

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Roger Bagnall (ed.), *Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007. XII + 464 pp. ISBN-13: 978-0-521-87137-2.

This book is the outcome of a symposium held in Dumbarton Oaks in 2004. An Introduction by Roger Bagnall (1-17) is followed by 20 contributions in 4 parts as well as by a short index (460-464). Some of the contributions include illustrations (see viii-xii for the list). Part I deals with 'The Culture of Byzantine Egypt'. It begins with 'Poets and Pagans in Byzantine Egypt' by Alan Cameron (21-46), who argues that there was no pagan resistance to Christianity in 5th century Egypt. There still were pagan philosophers, but no reliable evidence for militant pagans, with the only exception of the poet Pamprepius of Panopolis. The author examines in a critical way (perhaps too critical) an episode in the *Life of Severus* (patriarch of Antioch 512-518) by Zacharias Scholasticus, often adduced as evidence for the existence of an active pagan shrine as late as the 480's, and argues (27) that 'the one detail in Zacharias' account that rings true is the violence of the Christians'. As for 5th century Egyptian poets, none of them seems to have been a pagan, with the sole exception, once again, of Pamprepius. They wrote poetry imbued with pagan themes, but this was a matter of culture, not of religion. The predilection of members of their social class for mythological themes in the visual arts should be interpreted in the same way (for the use of such themes by artisans see Zsolt Kiss, 200-202). However, Christians with traditional cultural tastes ran the risk of being misunderstood as pagans. In 'Higher Education in Early Byzantine Egypt: Rhetoric, Latin, and the Law', Raffaella Cribiore (47-66) surveys changes in an educational system which was extremely conservative by modern standards. Latin language and Roman law were no doubt the most conspicuous innovations, but knowledge of Latin was rather limited. The author argues that students only acquired reading literacy in Latin, which may explain why no written exercises in that language have been discovered in Egypt. In 'Philosophy in its Social Context' (67-82), Leslie S.B MacCoull deals mainly with John Philoponus. The author rightly observes (79) that philosophical texts written in Byzantine Egypt 'benefit from being read with a papyrologist's eye'. On the other hand, evidence adduced as illustration of the economic and social context of philosophical pursuit is not always reliable or relevant. To give but one example, Ammonius is said to have taught philosophy already under Leo I (457-474) who, according to the author (68), created the *pater civitatis* ca. 465. Whatever the relevance of this municipal office to the subject, its creation predates the reign of Leo I, for it is attested in Egypt already in 450 (*CPR* XXIII, 32; see also Peter Van Minnen, 211). In 'Coptic Literature in the Byzantine and Early Islamic World', Stephen Emmel (83-102) offers a 'survey of what is known of Coptic literature only from manuscripts that are datable or assignable with reasonable certainty to the third through seventh centuries'. This well written survey will surely be welcome by laymen (such as the author of this review) and experts alike.

In 'Early Christian Architecture in Egypt and its Relationship to the Architecture of the Byzantine World' (103-136), Peter Grossmann insists on the decisive influence of the architecture of Constantinople on the construction of churches and secular monuments. On the other hand, this influence is not manifest in monastic and domestic architecture (for monastic architecture see also Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, 368-389). Next comes Thelma K. Thomas' 'Coptic and Byzantine Textiles Found in Egypt: Corpora, Collections, and Scholarly Perspectives' (137-162). Once again, a layman such as the author of this review should be grateful for a well-written survey. Francoise Dunand concludes the first part with archaeological and literary evidence for funerary practices, and especially for mummification ('Between Tradition and Innovation: Egyptian Funerary Practices in Late Antiquity', 163-184). Despite criticism by important figures such as Athanasius of Alexandria (bishop from 328 to 373), mummification was the norm in Byzantine Egypt. Dunand argues that Christians felt they were entitled to practice it because of the ambiguity of Paul's words on body and rebirth (*First Epistle to the Corinthians*, xv, 35-54).

Part II is devoted to 'Government, Environments, Society, and Economy'. It begins with two contributions on municipal life. The first one, 'Alexandria in the Fourth to Seventh Centuries' (187-206), by Zsolt Kiss, deals with the ever-growing archaeological material for this period, and especially with its value as evidence for Christianity and paganism. In 'The Other Cities in Later Roman Egypt' (207-225), Peter Van Minnen begins with the scanty evidence for the physical appearance of provincial cities, and then moves to administration and society. Due to the preservation of a large number of documentary papyri, early Byzantine municipal life is better known in Upper Egypt than anywhere else, yet the evidence is far from even. It comes from only a few cities, and it derives from three kinds of archives (private, civic and state), whose respective importance changes from case to case. The question is whether cities differed as much as the evidence does. Figures for various categories of artisans suggest that social composition was roughly the same in two cities (Arsinoe and Hermopolis), while it was different in the village of Aphrodite (see table on 222). By and large, the author of this review approves of Van Minnen's arguments and conclusions, but it is difficult to follow him when he says (219): 'The multiple offices of the fourth century and generally the increasing informal power structures in late antique cities allowed the central government to ignore the cities per se altogether'. According to Van Minnen (214), 'Later Roman Egypt was a world of cities'. In part, this is due to the fact that evidence for villages is scanty after the 4th century. This is the subject of James G. Keenan ('Byzantine Egyptian Villages', 226-243). The author discusses some pieces of evidence, including a still unpublished codex (*P. Lond. Copt.* 1075) with a wealth of information on the village of Temsu Skordon (Hermopolite nome). He then moves to Aphrodite, 'the only shot for a book-length study of a Byzantine Egyptian village'. He argues (237) that, just as in the case of cities, evidence for Aphrodite is 'tainted with an elite bias', and makes some suggestions which may help scholars to avoid this bias in future research.

Bernhard Palme deals with 'The Imperial Presence: Government and Army' (244-270). Documentary papyri offer unique evidence for early Byzantine administration, and balance the negative picture given by other sources. The author argues convincingly (254): 'The topos of a pompous bureaucratic apparatus, which ruthlessly exploited the population, is no more or less true or false than for the preceding centuries'. In 'Byzantine Egypt and Imperial Law' (271-287), Joëlle Beaucamp deals with another aspect of 'imperial presence'. Papyri show that new laws were known to exist and even had some influence on everyday life. This conclusion is all the more important, as most of the evidence refers to private law, where the interest of the state in enforcing its own regulations was less keen than in the case of public and administrative law. The economic role of Egyptian aristocrats has been much discussed over the last years. This is the subject of Todd M. Hickey ('Aristocratic Landholding and the Economy of Byzantine Egypt', 288-308, based in part on his still unpublished dissertation[1]). His attitude is rather conservative. Thus he concludes his discussion of a property in the Hermopolite nome documented by *P. Bad.* IV 95 (early 6th century) by arguing (304): 'It would be wrong to suggest that the property was managed like a proto-capitalist enterprise: there clearly were steps that the owners could have taken had they wished to increase their profits but the impression that one gets from the documentation [...] is that the desire for a secure income was more in balance with that for expansion and gain'. Part II concludes with 'Gender and Society in Byzantine Egypt', by T.G. Wilfong (309-327).

The subject of part III is 'Christianity: the Church and Monasticism'. It begins with a survey of 'The Institutional Church' (331-349), by Ewa Wipszycka, who insists on what was peculiar to Egypt. Then comes 'The Cult of Saints: A Haven of Continuity in a Changing World?' (350-367), by Arietta Papaconstantinou, based in part on an earlier monograph.[2] The author insists on the evolution of a religious phenomenon often considered immune to change, and shows how a markedly urban cult was gradually taken over by monasteries. This was by no means the only change. The three following contributions deal with various aspects of monasticism. In 'Divine Architects: Designing the Monastic Dwelling Place' (368-389), based in part upon a still unpublished dissertation,[3] Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom discusses various aspects of 'monastic space' (monasteries and cells): the use of natural dwellings, such as caves, the reuse of temples and graves, and the construction of monasteries. In 'Monasticism in Byzantine Egypt: Continuity and Memory' (390-407), James E. Goehring discusses the ideal of monastic poverty, and argues (400): 'Although some prospective monks surely gave up their property to varying degrees, [...] both the extent of the disposal and the degree of unanimity on the topic found in early literary sources is in fact literary'. He then adds (402) that 'one might ask as well whether Antony's sale of his inheritance is in fact a literary construct'. However, Antony (ca. 251-356) is said to have disposed of his property in a way which did not follow closely the guidelines given in the *New Testament* (e.g. *Matthew* xix, 21; *Acts* iv, 32-37), a sufficient reason to argue that Athanasius' well known account (*Vita Antonii*, 2-3) is *not* a literary construct.[4] In 'Depicting the Kingdom of Heaven: Paintings and Monastic Practice in Early Byzantine Egypt' (408-433), Elizabeth S. Bolman argues (410) that 'a specific mode of visuality was constructed as a vital part of that most intensely artificial and carefully structured way of life, monasticism'. Paintings in monastic oratories and cells in the early Byzantine world are very rare outside Egypt, yet the author believes (426-430) that they were widespread even before Iconoclasm, and that Egypt was not unique in this respect. The only contribution to part IV is Petra M. Sijpesteijn's 'The Arab Conquest of Egypt and the Beginning of Muslim Rule' (437-459).

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[1] T.M. Hickey, *A Public 'House' but Closed: 'Fiscal Participation' and Economic Decision Making on the Oxyrhynchite Estate of the Flavii Apiones* (diss.), University of Chicago 2001; forthcoming as *Economic Decision Making and Fiscal Participation in Late Antique Egypt. The Apion Estate at Oxyrhynchus*, Walter De Gruyter, 2008.

[2] A. Papaconstantinou, *Le culte des saints en Égypte. Des Byzantins aux Abbasides*, Paris 2001.

[3] Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom, *'Your Cell Will Teach You All Things': The Relationship between Monastic Practice and the Architectural Design of the Cell in Coptic Monasticism, 400-1000* (Diss.), University of Miami 2001.

[4] See A. Laniado, 'The Early Byzantine State and the Christian Ideal of Voluntary Poverty' (forthcoming).

Egypt in the Byzantine World, 300-700 is warmly recommended to every student of Late Antiquity.

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