

However, even the sternest critic must concede that St. has successfully not only staked out the territory for further scholarly argument, but also set a standard for the kind of scholarly engagement that may advance it: conversant in many scholarly disciplines and idioms (various philologies, ancient history, patristics, and Judaic studies, to name but a few), conscious of their strengths, yet alert to their limitations and prejudices.

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William Harmless, *Desert Christians. An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004, xxiv + 488 pp. ISBN 0-19-516223-4 (pb.)

Why waste words? — this is a thoroughly admirable book. William Harmless — noted for his previous study on Augustine (*Augustine and the Catechumenate* [1995]) — has produced a volume as readable as it will be useful. Writing under the influence, almost inspiration, of Derwas Chitty's seminal study *The Desert a City*, the author has produced a very different work, both in feel and in its structure, but which complements the earlier masterpiece. It is difficult to imagine a future course syllabus or a graduate reading list on monasticism in the early Church which does not feature this new volume prominently.

Harmless organizes the book's thirteen chapters in five principal parts: [1] The World of Early Monasticism; [2] Antony and Pachomius; [3] The Desert Fathers; [4] Monastic Theologians and [5] Reflections. The opening chapters (1-2) are very much intended as background, discussing the origins and growth of Egyptian Christianity as well as the major theological and ecclesiastical developments of Christianity during the fourth and fifth centuries; the closing chapter (13) presents reflections and varied theories on monastic origins. The heart of the book is chapters three through thirteen with their discussion of the seminal figures and texts in the world of early monasticism. The centerpiece of the entire structure is the third section dedicated to the *Sayings of the Fathers (Apophthegmata Patrum)* — three masterful chapters which take the reader to the very heart of the experience and the spirituality of the Egyptian desert. At the conclusion of each of the book's chapters, in addition to the voluminous endnotes on the text, are a detailed, up-to-date bibliography and appendices taking up specific points of interest and problems in the study of the literature.

Indeed, with a book so wide in its range of competence and authority, it may seem somewhat churlish to tarry here on those matters which lie outside its purview. This note of ingratitude, however, is motivated by the volume itself: a work entitled 'Desert Christians' and subtitled 'An Introduction to the Literature of Early Monasticism' encourages the reader to expect an introductory account of the early monastic phenomenon in all its geographical breadth. In fact, as noted already in the preface, the volume concentrates heavily, indeed almost exclusively, on Egyptian monasticism and its literature. Discussions of figures and literature outside the Egyptian orbit are restricted largely to phenomena and texts which have been introduced for comparative purposes. Once again, the work's subtitle could have remedied this misunderstanding easily.

That having been said, there is more than ample room to delight in what the volume does offer the reader. Harmless is a careful yet deeply enthusiastic guide to both the texts and the figures who populate and stand behind them. While the body of the book's chapters is of a consistently high level, it is frequently the appendices, often agonizingly brief, where Harmless presents the reader with some of the most intriguing problems and subtle analyses. Among the noteworthy achievements of the volume as a whole is the thoroughgoing integration of current, innovative research by both French and English-speaking scholars.

As a broad introductory survey, this work should not really be expected to have a central 'theme' or 'thesis' as such, but there are two emphases which underlie Harmless's overall treat-

ment of the evidence. One is the simple enjoyment of good (and often not so simple) stories. Harmless values the *Desert Fathers* for their love of such stories and does his utmost to impart this feeling to the reader. The other is his deep conviction, somewhat hesitatingly discussed in the preface, that the stories and sayings and thoughts born in the desert are not of historical interest alone but contain (in the words of Derwas Chitty) 'something pungent for our own lives'. The reader can only be grateful that this commitment inspired the author to such an accomplished and unassuming piece of scholarship.

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Robert Bedon et Ella Hermon, 'Concepts, pratiques et enjeux environnementaux dans l'Empire romain', *Caesarodunum* XXXIX, Université de Limoges-Université Laval, Centre de Recherche en Interactions Société-Environnement, Centre de Recherche André Piganiol. Presses Universitaires de Limoges, Limoges 2005. 400 pp., ISBN 2-84287-358-0.

Ce volume renferme les conférences données au colloque 'Concepts, pratiques et enjeux environnementaux dans l'Empire romain' organisé en 2004 à l'Université Laval de Québec par la professeure Ella Hermon, titulaire de la chaire de recherche du Canada en interactions société-environnement naturel dans l'Empire romain. Ella Hermon est une spécialiste des problèmes sociopolitiques de la République romaine. Elle applique depuis quelques années les grilles de compréhension de la 'Nouvelle histoire de l'environnement' et élabore les concepts d'analyse du monde romain, de la nature des systèmes de régularisation de la longue durée.

Les conférences s'articulent autour de trois pôles principaux de réflexion: tout d'abord, définir les concepts de la gestion des ressources naturelles, leur évolution diachronique et leur utilisation dans la réalité de l'Empire romain. Puis sont étudiés les enjeux interactifs et la gestion des ressources naturelles à travers le prisme des 'frontières et écosystèmes' et des 'catastrophes naturelles'.

Il est clair que le chercheur formé à la réflexion fondée sur des concepts plus classiques, issus de la science allemande du XIXe siècle et revus au cours du XXe, peut être dérouté au premier abord. Mais, rapidement, l'impression d'étrangeté fait place à un intérêt très vif pour cette 'modernisation' du débat.

En effet, la qualité des interventions qu'il faudrait pouvoir citer, celle d'Hermon elle-même sur la conceptualisation, celles de Witold Wolodkiewicz sur les problèmes de l'eau, de Jean Peyras sur les frontières et de François Favory sur le corpus gramatique, entre autres, montrent les pistes fécondes de cette recherche. Les articles de Mireille Corbier sur les disettes, de Moshé Fischer sur les inondations à Yavneh-Yam et de Geoffroy Kron sur les méthodes romaines d'agriculture intensive sont l'illustration de cette recherche qui analyse les données de l'Antiquité avec les outils de la réflexion moderne.

La conférence de Martine Chassignet sur la gestion des catastrophes naturelles chez Tite-Live montre aussi les limites de cette grille d'interprétation, qui se doit de donner des pistes mais, en aucun cas, ne peut remplacer unilatéralement les autres réflexions sur le monde romain.

Il faut remercier Ella Hermon d'avoir donné aux spécialistes de l'Antiquité la possibilité de disposer d'un outil de travail qui leur permettra de nouvelles approches de notre connaissance du monde romain.

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