

cicle, the coverage goes from the root *a.h.r.* to the root *a.š.l.* Advantage has been taken of the opportunity afforded by fascicle-publication to revise and expand the last two pages of the previous fascicle (a fact indicated inside the front cover of this); among other benefits, this has led to the listing at the head of the long (pp.97-118) article *āharu* of its separate divisions and of some of its many sub-divisions. Some idea of the density of the coverage provided here may be gleaned from the fact that pages 91-129 are devoted to the root *a.h.r.* alone.

Part B, the Greek-Arabic Glossary, is seen here to be cumulative: this is excellent news for those who had feared that they might have to spend their declining years hunting through multiple issues of this part of the work for scattered references to a single word in the various fascicles (and evidence, if such were still needed, of the value of computers in this type of work); the Indices accompanying this section of the Glossary are similarly cumulative as well.

The covers of the succeeding fascicles should be kept as they are issued, at least for the time being, even if the separate fascicles are intended to be bound: this fascicle's cover constitutes an integral part of the work, as it contains important Addenda and Corrigenda to the List of Sources (here thus seen to be expanding), as well as Additional Abbreviations. So far at least the editors are maintaining an impressive rhythm of publication. It is to be hoped that this will be maintained throughout this valuable work.

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Philip Mayerson, *Monks, Martyrs, Soldiers and Saracens. Papers on the Near East in Late Antiquity (1962-1993)*, Jerusalem: The Israel Exploration Society in association with New York University, 1994, pp. ix + 371.

Nessana, in the north-western corner of the Negev desert close to the border with the Gaza Strip, was at the beginning of this century little more than sand dunes and heaps of rubble. Excavations conducted there by the Colt Expedition showed it to have been at one time a thriving town, one of a number strung out through the Negev and surrounding areas, on the edges of and actually inside the desert, serving at once the political, the economic and, especially, the religious needs of a larger, Christian society. The papyri found there in the course of the excavations have conferred on the town an exceptional degree of importance. This importance derives less from the character of the town itself or from any specific significance which it may have had in Late Antiquity, and more from the extreme rarity of such documentation in general, a rarity which attracts considerable scholarly (and occasionally more than scholarly) attention to the places where it is found.

Covering the period of the transition from Byzantine rule to that of early Islam, these papyri document the thriving life of a small Christian city almost in the desert in the sixth and seventh centuries, continue into early Islamic times, and, petering out in the eighth century, bear witness to the way in which the city was gradually abandoned under the rule of the Muslims.

Although the excavations were published, admirably, along with the papyri, both literary and non-literary, astonishingly little note has been taken of the potential which they offer for integrated study of the fascinating character of Christian life in these small desert cities and their painful adaptation to the coming of Islam, which led to their ex-

tion. The transformation wrought by Islam in the greater world removed these cities from the relative security of the inner edge of a great settled Christian empire: instead it placed them near the heart of an Islamic state with little interest in or need to care for the security of the area or the specific problems of its Christian inhabitants. Decline in Christian numbers, along with Muslim demographic expansion, also tended to decrease Christian activity within the empire in this area. The alteration in the conditions of their existence proved impossible for the inhabitants of these cities to control or to stand up to for long.

Philip Mayerson is one of those scholars who have recognised the significance and attempted to exploit the potential of these documents in their context. In this volume he has collected together forty articles published over the last thirty years. They come from a wide range of journals and other publications, and cover an equally impressive range of subjects, all within the general ambit of Late Antiquity. Many of them are concerned with Nessana directly, and many of the others deal with subjects closely connected with the world of which it formed a part. Thus there are articles which look at the literary and archaeological evidence for the ancient geography and history of southern Palestine, Sinai and the monastery of St. Catherine, while others study the provincial division of Palestine in the fourth century and after, urbanization and demography, and the relations between Saracens and Romans, and a number study individual linguistic and philological matters. And there is also Mayerson's intriguing examination of the history and identity of the island of Iotabe, published as recently as 1992 ("The Island of Iotabê - A Reprise").

Several of the papers deal with agricultural matters, and grow out of his initial interest in such subjects as illustrated by the discoveries at Nessana. A number of the papers are concerned, less prosaically, with the historicity of events described in parts of various ancient texts: for example, in "The Desert of Southern Palestine According to the Byzantine Sources" Mayerson argues for the overall historicity of Nilus' account of his son's capture and subsequent adventures, and his own successful discovery of him later as a sexton. Mayerson rejects the fairly standard view of this text as largely literary fancy overlaid on a generally factual background (though he allows that there may be some literary invention involved in certain parts of the account), and prefers to see it as substantially true. His conclusions from this position are nevertheless broadly conservative: he sees in the text a reliable and useful source, less for the lives and adventures of Nilus and Theodoulos and more for travel routes and conditions in the desert of the period. Few will wish to argue with this. Fewer still will take issue with his eminently sensible, and clearly set out, views on the demography of southern Palestine and the Negev in Late Antiquity ("A Note on Demography and Land Use in the Ancient Negev"): here he argues for a narrow and cautious interpretation of the little evidence that we have. Very low, and unpredictable, rainfall placed great constraints on the degree to which populations could grow or even sustain themselves. He is surely right to suggest that the population figures must have been very small.

In a longer piece ("The First Muslim Attack on Southern Palestine [AD 633-634]") the early Muslim attacks on southern Palestine are studied. Here Mayerson attempts to marry the literary evidence with his expertise in the geography of the area. I am not entirely convinced by his suggestion (see especially pp. 56 and 64 of the new pagination in this volume; and at p. 63 n. 29, Mayerson's hint at a possibly derogatory use of the term "eunuch" seems misconceived) that the accounts offered by Theophanes and Nicephorus Constantinopolitanus of the death of someone called Sergius refer to two distinct events

and people, but here as elsewhere his reconstruction overall is careful and marked by a rare attention to the detail of the sources. In another short piece (“*P. Ness. 58* and two *Vaticinia ex eventu* in Hebrew”) Mayerson elegantly combines Hebrew sources with material from the Nessana papyri to bring into higher relief our emerging picture of Umayyad settlement policy.

All the articles in this volume are concerned with the frontier area between the world of Byzantine Late Antiquity and that of emergent Islam. In this difficult terrain Mayerson moves easily, concerned above all to stress elements of continuity, both chronologically and spatially. Students of Late Antiquity and the early Islamic period will be grateful to the publishers, as well as to Mayerson himself, for rescuing these articles from the relative obscurity of their initial scattered publication and bringing them together in a single volume. Their publication in this volume offers more than simply the sum of their forty parts: it shows far more strongly than the individual articles could do how much the sources which we have for the period, especially in Greek and in Arabic, have to offer for the understanding of a still greatly under-explored period. The problems of adaptation and change involved in the birth of Islamic society in the Near East are still far from adequately studied and continue to provoke scholarly discord. Mayerson himself recognizes this, and expresses the hope that this publication will serve not only to increase interest in the subjects treated but also to provoke discussion and challenge to his conclusions.

The article are arranged in roughly chronological order of their appearance, rather than being grouped by subject, but there is a useful thematic introduction which contextualises both Mayerson’s developing interests and the subjects of the papers themselves. Mayerson’s preferred weapon is the short article on a limited point that illuminates broader issues. Few of these pieces go beyond ten pages in length, only two breach the score, and one is as short as a single page.

The manner of presentation of the reprints has both advantages and disadvantages: it is good to have the articles in a form of reproduction that retains the original pagination (though a new numbering of the pages has also been added), but it is less pleasing to the eye to find that, because of the great variety of the original publications, the fonts in which the articles appear change continually. And there is no index. But these are quibbles, when there is so much else to delight.

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P.Sta.Xyla. The Byzantine Papyri of the Greek Papyrological Society, volume 1, edited with translations and notes by Basil G. Mandilaras, Athens: The Greek Papyrological Society, 1993, pp. 204

Longtemps la Grèce n’a pas joué un grand rôle dans le progrès des études papyrologiques⁷ ni par le nombre et la richesse de ses collections des papyrus,⁸ ni par l’abon-

⁷ Sur la papyrologie en Grèce voir I.F. Fikhman, *Vvedenie v dokumental’nyu papirologiyu (Introduction à la Papyrologie documentaire)* (Moskva 1987), 41-42 et la littérature y citée.

⁸ Sur les collections des papyrus en Grèce voir: B. G. Mandilaras, “Papyrological Studies in Greece”, *Proceedings of the Sixteenth International Congress of Papyrology. New York, 24-31 July 1980* (Chico 1981), 690-696 (ASP 23); *idem*, “Some Papyrus Fragments of the University of Crete”, *Concilium Eirene XVI. Proceedings of the 16th International Eirene*