

Jewish Diaspora. One is entirely archaeological—‘Aspects of Everyday Life in Roman Palestine with Special Reference to Domicile and Ritual Baths’ (Eric Meyers, Chapter 12). Two are based mainly on epigraphic evidence—‘Synagogue and Community in the Graeco-Roman Diaspora’ (Tessa Rajak, Chapter 3) and ‘Synagogue Communities in the Graeco-Roman Cities’ (Anne Fitzpatrick-McKinley, Chapter 5). Five have a literary focus—narrow in the case of ‘The Hellenistic City of Jerusalem’ (Lester Grabbe, Chapter 1), ‘The Jews in the Hellenistic Cities of Acts’ (Fearghus Ó Fearghail, Chapter 4), and ‘The Essenes in Greek Sources—Some Reflections’ (John Dillon, Chapter 8), but wide ranging in John Barclay’s ‘Apologetics in the Jewish Diaspora’ (Chapter 9) and Jonathan Dyck’s ‘Philo, Alexandria and Empire: The Politics of Allegorical Interpretation’ (Chapter 10). The remaining three papers—‘Population and Proselytism: How Many Jews Were There in the Ancient world?’ (Brian McGing, Chapter 6), ‘Jewish Calendar Reckoning in the Graeco-Roman Cities’ (Sacha Stern, Chapter 7), and ‘Ethnic Continuity in the Jewish Diaspora in Antiquity’ (Gideon Bohak, Chapter 11)—defy easy categorization.

Notwithstanding the diversity of the contents and their mismatch with both the title and the introduction, this collection is not without value. With one exception, the contributions are of a high quality. Those interested in studying the Jews in the Graeco-Roman world will find much in the individual essays that is both informative and stimulating. The volume, taken as a whole, provides a useful addition to the earlier collections of seminar and conference proceedings noted at the beginning of this review.

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THE DEMOGRAPHY OF EGYPT

W. SCHEIDEL: *Death on the Nile. Disease and the Demography of Roman Egypt*. Pp. xxx + 286, maps. Leiden: Brill, 2001. Cased, €73. ISBN: 90-04-12323-7.

In this engaging book, Scheidel aims to bring together the study of ancient demography and the medical history of the Roman world, which until now have been studied separately and using different approaches. But this is not an easy task. The study of population structures in the ancient world is notoriously difficult due to our lack of precise evidence. On the other hand, highly theoretical approaches, which depend more on methodology than evidence, are surely as unreliable.

However, evidence from Egypt, especially that provided by census returns, has been used with great effect recently in demographic study, and it is to this that S. turns. His focus is the underlying factors affecting demography—death and disease—and their effects on mortality rates and patterns, age structure and life expectancy, and population size and demographic change. The book is divided into three large chapters treating these issues; the author’s findings are supported by copious figures and tables, two appendices offer detailed treatment of months of death recorded in epitaphs and the recording of exact ages in census returns, and are followed by a very full bibliography.

Chapter 1 is founded upon the substantial body of evidence provided by Greek and Coptic funerary epitaphs recorded on inscriptions and mummy labels. Despite an uneven geographical distribution of this evidence, S. is able to provide a convincing picture of the age-specific incidence of deaths, which unsurprisingly is high in the lower

end of the age scale, especially in the 0–9 and 20–29 years categories. Distinct patterns can be found in the seasonality of deaths, with May to August being the most heavily represented for those under 20 years, and the winter season the most attested for adults. Having established these patterns, the remainder of the chapter is devoted to answering why they occur. Central is the ‘shifting ecology of disease’, which is not only seasonal, but also caused by mutation of viruses. No doubt, living conditions and environment played a major rôle too. S. offers a survey of ancient views on climate and disease in Egypt, before discussing a variety of diseases in great depth. The seasonal patterns of disease tally well with S.’s findings on patterns in death. Comparable evidence with more recent periods of history shows large shifts in disease patterns, and S. doubts the applicability of demographic models based on comparable evidence.

Chapter 2 explores why seasonal mortality variation was so pronounced across different age groups. His treatment begins, as it should, with evidence, which here takes the form of information on age distribution provided by census returns. He then discusses models for life tables, and sets his findings against comparative evidence. But he does this with admirable sensitivity, and resists the temptation to fit his evidence into these models. Indeed, he challenges the applicability of life models and their use in ancient demographic study, and concludes that where ancient evidence departs from these models, the reasons are because of different ‘mortality regimes’ in the ancient world. There are dramatic differences between urban and rural populations. There are problems with the exclusion of information about juveniles in the census returns, which makes it difficult to reach sound conclusions on matters such as sex selection, but S. is cautious in his treatment. His conclusions are important—the environment of cities was more unhealthy than villages, and in a highly urbanized province like Egypt, this is significant. The demographic shape of urban environments was determined by mortality. S.’s methodology is impressive in that he is confident enough and willing to question the validity of models, which in turn gives the reader confidence in his book. He is also keenly aware of the skewing of our evidence—the Fayum is often over-represented.

Chapter 3 tackles the notoriously difficult issue of population size and how demographic patterns change through time. There has been much debate on the size of the population of Roman Egypt (discussed by S. on pp. 184–6), and useful comparison can be made with evidence from nineteenth century Egypt. What S. offers that is new is a treatment of the effects of disease, endemic and epidemic, on populations, using comparative evidence from Egypt and elsewhere. He also delivers a valuable section on agriculture in Egypt, placing his discussion within the context of population size, and the striking point is its unchanging nature.

Perhaps one aspect of relevance, which might have been developed further, is the issue of the effects of hard labour on mortality rates and population size, for much of the agricultural population was involved in this. There is evidence in papyri and ostraca (at Mons Claudianus, for example) of ailments caused by such labour and living in desert environments. Unfortunately archaeological evidence—largely human bone assemblages—from Graeco-Roman sites does not at this stage provide enough material for proper analysis, but studies of Graeco-Roman mummies may reveal much of interest.

This is a very good book, on a very interesting and important subject. It is refreshing in both its approach and coverage, and one certainly feels that although this is not a book about papyrological evidence, S. is informed and comfortable with it. It is well presented, and footnotes take complicated and technical discussion and citations out of the main text, which makes the book an engaging read. There are salutary

lessons to all about the nature and applicability of our evidence. The temptation to gloat about copious documentation from Egypt is roundly put down by S.'s estimate, for census returns, that they have survived at a ratio of 1 to 80,000 (p. 142). His subject is a very difficult one, but S. offers an excellent and convincing series of arguments, and always with due regard for the problems thrown up by our evidence and the limitations of models for its interpretation.

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EGYPTIAN CITIES

R. ALSTON: *The City in Roman and Byzantine Egypt*. Pp. xvi + 479, maps. London and New York: Routledge, 2002. Cased, £75. ISBN: 0-415-23701-7.

Alston's book is an ambitious one. The nature of cities, their administration and culture, lies at the very centre of our understanding of Roman Egypt. Tacitus (*Histories* 1.11) claims that Egypt was ignorant of civil government (or civic life), and this is important to the traditional view that Egypt as a province was 'different'. As Bowman and Rathbone have pointed out (*JRS* 82 [1992], 108), the absence of town councils or of movement towards municipalization in the Roman sense would have made Egypt peculiar. But in this, and in notable contributions by Naphtali Lewis, the Romanity of Roman Egypt has been championed.

A. considers his subject in five large chapters, covering the period from the annexation of Egypt in 30 B.C. to c. A.D. 640. This is a huge undertaking, encompassing several massive changes in cultural, social and religious life, administrative organization, and documentary practice. A. chooses to approach his subject thematically, rather than chronologically, moving from a general discussion of cities and space (Chapter 2), through chapters based on spatial criteria: houses (Chapter 3), streets, districts, and neighbourhoods (Chapter 4), the 'city' (Chapter 5), and the city, region, and world (Chapter 6). All of this is supported by a large number of figures and tables, and a very full bibliography.

Chapter 2 is mostly concerned with theory, and therefore its value depends on one's opinion on the rôle of theory in historical research. It is to some extent a paradox that, with considerable amounts of documentary evidence at his disposal, A. leans to this more theoretical approach, which might not endear his book to papyrologists. Most will find this chapter heavy going, and it may have been better to fit theoretical arguments into the body of the book in pursuance of particular points rather than isolate it as an excursus. One comparison is missing: A. builds his vision of the city into this theoretical background, through cosmology, autobiographical accounts of industrial cities in Northern England, and the like, but he fails to set the Roman city in Egypt into its Egyptian context, which is arguably more important. The reasons why there was a great difference in the urban space of Pharaonic cities, such as Amarna, and cities of later periods might tell us much about differences or continuity in culture.

In Chapter 3, A. begins with a brief discussion of papyrological evidence. This is not soundly done; there is no thorough discussion of survival patterns of papyri, their chronological distribution, or problems of interpretation. It is important that readers appreciate the limitation of A.'s evidence. Oxyrhynchus and Karanis certainly form the core of our evidence for cities and towns in Egypt, but they are not necessarily typical. Once removed from the general into the specific, A. seems more comfortable, and