

of the books. The third has two main topics: the palaeography, including a discussion of the number of scribes who wrote the Gospels, the use of colour, and paratextual features (super- and subscriptions, tailpieces, the Eusebian apparatus, *kephalaioi* and *titloi*). The fourth is called 'Scribes' but after a section headed 'Overview of scribal hands', it is devoted to 'unit delimitation', the *nomina sacra* and various abbreviations. A final chapter provides a summary of the author's findings. There are also five appendices. Appendix A provides concordances, giving for each page the contents and the several quire, leaf and page numberings that have been given to it, to which are added the author's own. The second lists orthographica in the Gospels. Appendix C describes the way in which measurements of physical elements such as leaves and columns were made. The fourth provides a concordance of the Eusebian apparatus as it appears in Nestle-Aland and Codex Sinaiticus. Appendix E lists places where larger sense units are marked by one or more of space, *ekthesis* and *paragraphus*. There is a bibliography, and a subject index. The book provides some useful data. For example, it produces evidence to suggest that two scribes were responsible for the Gospels, one copying the first two and the other Luke and John. I could wish that more time had been devoted to turning it from the genre of doctoral thesis to that of monograph, and that it had lost a hundred pages. It is to the carefully compiled lists that one will be most likely to go.

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From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt. Religion, identity and politics after the Arab conquest.

By Maged S. A. Mikhail. Pp. xiii + 429. London–New York: I. B. Tauris, 2014.
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The transition from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt is a trending topic in current scholarship – and rightly so, since this area has been neglected for a long time. Interest in Islam and Christian-Muslim interactions has been sky-rocketing since 9/11 and has stimulated research in many areas, and Egypt is no exception. The Arabs conquered the country in 641 and the Nile Valley's slow transformation from a predominantly Coptic- and Greek-speaking, Christian country into an Arabic-speaking, Islamic one began. The attraction of Egypt lies above all in the wide range of sources which can be consulted. Besides a literary tradition, archaeological remains, inscriptions and a huge (but still mostly unpublished) amount of documentary texts in Greek, Coptic and Arabic offer deep insights into the extent of change and continuity in early Islamic Egypt. The justifiably increasing specialisation renders it difficult to obtain an overview of the vast source material. Maged S. A. Mikhail engages in this arduous task for roughly the seventh to the tenth century.

Mikhail discusses a variety of aspects relating to the transition from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt. His focus is mainly on religion, language and identity. The argument is structured into twelve essayistic chapters which are backed up by rich endnotes. His conclusions are conveniently summed up in the last chapter. He emphasises his 'revisionist' approach, which means that he does not presuppose the existence of a 'Coptic' anti-Chalcedonian faction at odds with a 'Greek'

Chalcedonian one. This opposition was created in ninth- and tenth-century historiography, when the identifications of language with creed (Coptic/orthodox, Greek/heretical, Arabic/Muslim) were born. Mikhail's analysis of various sources (liturgy, historiography, papyri) shows that this view cannot be projected back on the earlier periods. The division arose because of the need to create 'clear boundaries within a social milieu that increasingly lacked visible markers' (p. 257).

The development of the Arab Muslim community is another focus of the monograph. Mikhail scrutinises how a primarily tribally organised community developed into an agrarian and predominantly urban one. The manifold socio-political changes of the eighth century played a crucial role in this process. Beginning with the ninth century a more unified, homogenous culture appeared in Egypt. Christians and Muslims lived in a multicultural society and not in two separate worlds. The development of church institutions and liturgy are also thoroughly discussed. Especially interesting is the analysis of the interactions of the Melkite and anti-Chalcedonian Churches with each other and with the Muslim government.

Unfortunately, the rich endnotes include many inaccuracies, and typos are not infrequent throughout the book.¹ Citations and references are also sometimes unreliable.² Here I will allow myself to comment on certain passages in Mikhail's argument which concern my own field of specialisation, papyrology. A more attentive look every now and then would have benefitted Mikhail's argument. Mikhail repeatedly refers to the 'accident of preservation' (for instance pp. 79–80, 99) in the case of papyri. This is a simplification of complex methodological issues. The 'taphonomy' of ancient texts is a complicated topic and what is preserved is certainly not random.³ Further, there are gaps in the bibliography: the *oeuvre* of the leading specialist on Greek papyri from early Islamic Egypt, Federico Morelli, is, for instance, almost entirely ignored. Mikhail's argumentation could have benefitted at several points from Morelli's scholarship. Also several minor misunderstandings concerning papyri can be found.⁴

Some questions of detail: on p. 93 Mikhail claims that 'most Coptic-speaking Muslims encountered in documentary texts were first-generation converts'. This sentence is backed up by n. 78 (p. 312) which simply refers to P.Ryl.Copt. 324, 346, two letters addressed by Muslims to Christians. Such a strong claim would need more solid argumentation than these two references, which in fact are not even relevant to the question. Both texts come from an administrative context,

¹ See, for instance, p. 102 n. 119 (p. 315) 'spatkoptische'; p. 188: 'ἐν τοῦτο νικά'.

² See, for instance, p. 163 nn. 17–19 (p. 341): P.Oxy. is in fact P.Lond; p. 383; CPR VIII is in fact CPR II.

³ R. S. Bagnall, *Everyday writing in the Graeco-Roman East*, Berkeley–Los Angeles–London 2012, 27–53.

⁴ For instance Mikhail gives the impression on p. 82 n. 11 (p. 305) that Qurra b. Sharīk sent letters in Coptic to Aphrodito, but we only have Greek and Arabic texts from his chancelry. Coptic was never an official administrative language in Egypt. On p. 138 he remarks 'al-'āmil, from ἀμολίτης'. This etymology is not straightforward and it may well be the other way around: see H. I. Bell's n. on P.Lond. 4.1379.

and their similarly structured address is common in letters issued by Arab officials (both letters are erroneously referred to as ‘personal correspondence’ on p. 104). These letters tell us nothing about the language or ethnicity of the senders, since they must have been written by their secretaries (P.Ryl.Copt. 346 even begins with a cross). So there is no way telling whether they were Egyptian converts or Arab Muslims.⁵

The claim on p. 95 that ‘the 705 Arabizing edict led Christian elites to adopt the [Arabic] language and to teach their children as preparation for securing administrative appointments and the possibility of social mobility’ and later ‘Christian elites along with their children acquired proficiency in the Arabic language during the first half of the eighth century’ is heavily debatable. As the author himself admits (p. 81), the effect of this edict is not immediately visible in the sources. Similarly, on p. 153, Mikhail states that ‘in 99/718, however, an administrative reform replaced Coptic officials in rural districts with Muslim personnel ... this reform inevitably weakened local notables, such as the *lashane*’. This is generally true, but Muslim officials appear only seldom appear at the village level in the eighth century. This edict probably did not have an immediate effect either.

On pp. 181–2 Mikhail argues that Egyptians had no problems with switching to Muslim rulers from their former Christian emperors in prayers and everyday formulas. But the fact that Coptic documents contain oaths by ‘the health of our lords [who] rule over us’ can also be interpreted as a conscious avoidance of mentioning the Arab rulers, especially since official texts sometimes include similar formulas referring to the health of the ‘amīrs’ (for example P.Laur. 3.112–17).

Despite these minor remarks, Mikhail’s monograph is an important contribution to the study of the transition from Byzantine to early Islamic Egypt. The main merit of the book is that it places the historical developments of seventh–tenth-century Egypt in a modern framework. His interdisciplinary approach is also certainly to be praised. Nevertheless, despite the often convincing argumentation and stimulating ideas, this book should be read with some caution due to its not infrequent inaccuracies. For an introduction to the problems of the transition from Byzantine to Islamic Egypt it should be certainly studied in tandem with Petra Sijpesteijn’s recent *Shaping a Muslim state: the world of a mid-eighth-century Egyptian official* (Oxford 2013).

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⁵ A similar claim is to be found in connection to Rashīd b. Khaled on p. 104. The relevant note (n. 130/ p. 316) refers to three texts, of which the third, P.Ryl.Copt. 306 is a paper document and is therefore probably much later than the dossier of Rashīd b. Khaled. On his person and dossier see K. A. Worp, ‘Studien zu spätgriechischen, koptischen und arabischen Papyri’, *Bulletin de la Société d’Archéologie Copte* xxvi (1984), 99–107 at pp. 100–1 and, more recently, G. Schenke, ‘Rashid ibn Chaled and the return of overpayments’, *Chronique d’Égypte* lxxxix (2014), 202–9 at p. 204.