of some type of ritual, taking place not at the site of Special Deposit South but somewhere else (Chapter 13). The authors discount the possibility that the material comes from a funerary deposit, due to the absence of certain types of finds from Special Deposit South such as human bones and teeth—yet another difference from the disturbed Special Deposit North. The similarity between the materials from cemetery and non-cemetery rituals is particularly interesting and reveals a common 'ritual denominator' of practices and instruments. It also reveals the relative institutionalisation of such a system (cf. Kyriakidis 2005).

Gathering all this information together, Renfrew ingeniously proposes the possibility that Kavos was the epicentre of some type of alliance or *amphictyony* of neighbouring islands that felt the need to deposit here the remnants of the rituals taking place at their sanctuaries elsewhere. Being entirely clear that religion as such cannot really be traced through the material alone, but rather only the practice of ritual, Renfrew proposes a new way of looking at these small islands as a set of allied settlements under the leadership of Naxos (Chapters 22–23). This certainly is a plausible scenario, which, if true, could explain the military power of the Cycladic groups that managed to influence, colonise or dominate north and north-eastern Crete, the east coast of mainland Greece and parts of western Anatolia: all areas much more hospitable than the Cyclades and more likely to have been centres of greater populations. In the scenario proposed by Renfrew, rituals may have acted not only as the consequence of political and military integration between the islands, but also as the 'glue' that expedited further integration and the forging of a common ideology.

At least as important as the volume's fascinating and far-reaching conclusions for the archaeology, politics and rituals of the ancient Cyclades, however, are the highly detailed studies of the archaeological material, which will permit readers to test their own theories. It is through such exhaustive studies that progress is promoted. This is an essential volume for any archaeological library of import with an impressive host of authors who are to be commended for their high-quality work.

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Evangelos Kyriakidis
Classical and Archaeological Studies,
University of Kent, UK
(Email: e.kyriakidis@kent.ac.uk)

James C.R. Gill. *Dakhleh Oasis and the Western Desert of Egypt under the Ptolemies* (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph 17). 2016. xviii+483 pages, numerous colour and b&w illustrations, tables. Oxford: Oxbow; 978-1-78750-135-1 hardback £75.

The Western Desert, a sub-region of the Sahara, comprises some two-thirds of modern Egypt's land area and extends from the Mediterranean coast into Sudan in the south. This sprawling, rolling expanse is marked by sandstone hills and dunes, and pocked with a chain of topographic depressions that follow the line of a single aquifer that arcs through the desert, forming five major oases that have sustained human occupation since the Neolithic. These oases—Siwa, Bahariya, Farafra, Dakhleh and Kharga, running from north to south—have a long and complex history of interaction with the states established in the Nile Valley, but until recently, it was thought that one of the low points in their collective histories was during the period of Ptolemaic rule in Egypt (323–31 BC). This interpretation arose by way of a contrast with the picture of the subsequent Roman period drawn by scholars from the written sources. The latter had been taken to suggest a moment of renaissance, when the depressed oasis towns of the Ptolemaic period were reinvigorated by Roman interest in the trade networks of Egypt's peripheral deserts, both East and West, and a concerted effort to develop oasis agriculture.

The colour and contour of this Roman interest in the oases of the Western Desert has been provided by many decades of archaeological work, notably at Dakhleh Oasis where an Australian team has been labouring since the late 1970s. These excavations have produced a wealth of material evidence for Roman-era life in Dakhleh, but have had considerably less to say about the scale and character

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of Ptolemaic activity that, for the reasons outlined above, was thought to be minimal. The present volume, a modified version of the author's 2014 Monash PhD dissertation, goes a long way towards correcting the errors that underlay that earlier assessment, offering a critical new tool that should prevent any repetition of such problems in future studies.

The introductory chapter frames the problem by briefly outlining the history of archaeological research in the oases, with particular emphasis on Dakhleh, and summarising the historical evidence for the relationship between the oases and the Nile Valley in the Ptolemaic period. In the second part of the volume, Gill lays out the assemblage of Ptolemaic pottery from Mut al-Kharab (Chapter 2, Appendices 1 and 2), a sub-area of the larger Dakhleh project area and the probable site of a major Ptolemaic temple. In this district, pottery was found in stratified contexts along with *ostraka* of Ptolemaic date and other artefacts, and Gill carefully presents these archaeological contexts trench by trench.

His essential method is that of all good ceramicists—he dates his pottery through comparative work with Ptolemaic material recovered from well-dated loci in the Nile Valley, and looks to the documents and other objects found in association with the pottery for further refinement of his dating. In Gill's hands, the results produced by this mundane methodology are rather exciting, for he offers a substantial corpus of diverse Ptolemaic forms and wares from Mut al-Kharab (a notable achievement in its own right), which provides definitive proof that there was substantial activity in this area during the Ptolemaic period despite the absence of any associated architecture, and in contrast to the established narrative of Ptolemaic decline. Using this material as a starting point, he then offers an overview of the broader pottery traditions of the Dakhleh Oasis in the Ptolemaic era (Chapter 3). He characterises the fabrics, wares, decorative systems and forms that are typical of this period and offers specific parallels with material from the Nile Valley (Appendix 3).

In Chapter 4, he brings this new understanding to bear on the evidence collected during surveys conducted by the Dakhleh Oasis Project. These surveys were often cited as proof of the limits of Ptolemaic activity at Dakhleh because only 17 sites were thought to have material of this date; in contrast, Gill presents the reader with a catalogue of 72 Ptolemaic sites (Appendices 4 and 5)—the result of his more comprehensive knowledge of Ptolemaic pottery. This is a cautionary tale for survey archaeologists everywhere. Survey data are particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation when the pottery corpus for a region is not well understood; at Dakhleh, the Ptolemaic material was simply missed by scholars who were not particularly interested in problematising the received historical narrative.

In his last two chapters, Gill broadens his view and moves beyond Dakhleh to evaluate the impact of this new understanding of the Ptolemaic pottery on the broader region. Chapter 5 offers short but informative summaries of Ptolemaic remains at the other Western Desert oases. While in some cases he re-evaluates published pottery data to offer new insights, in most instances he does not have access to unpublished data and has to rely on the conclusions offered by the excavators about the nature and extent of the Ptolemaic evidence. Given the radical changes in the picture at Dakhleh in the light of Gill's study, it seems fair to assume that a re-examination of this material is now warranted. A systematic catalogue of the sites discussed is presented in a separate section (Appendix 6).

The conclusion (Chapter 6) is in some respects the most interesting part here to the non-specialist reader, providing a broader discussion of the impacts of Gill's observations on our understanding of the nature of Ptolemaic settlement and economy. His primary conclusion is that the Roman boom in the Western Desert is a mirage; the population of the oases was already growing in the Ptolemaic period, and that these changes are best contextualised as part of a broader state initiative to develop marginal regions, particularly in the third century BC. Joe Manning and others, myself included, have made this point for Upper Egypt more broadly as well as the Eastern Desert, so Gill's observations offer a welcome and substantiated elaboration on this position.

This volume makes a significant contribution on the archaeology of the Dakhleh Oasis. More importantly, however, Gill's study provides a manual for others working in the wider region who will now be able to recognise and characterise their own Ptolemaic pottery, or who will be able to say with certainty that it is indeed absent. This is, one hopes, simply the first step in articulating a corpus with more developed sub-phases and regionally

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specific observations beyond those offered in this volume.

Jennifer Gates-Foster
Department of Classics,
University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, USA
(Email: jgatesfoster@unc.edu)

Mounia Chekhab-Abudaya. *Le qṣar, type d'implantation humaine au Sahara: architecture du Sud Algérien* (Cambridge Monographs in African Archaeology 91). 2016. xiv+340 pages; numerous colour and b&w illustrations. Oxford: Archaeopress 978-1-78491-347-2 paperback £50.

Topping a low hill, circled by walls and culminating in a tapering minaret, the *qṣar* (pl. *qusūr*) is the castle of the Sahara. They are found between southern Morocco and Siwa in Egypt, and range in size from tiny defended buildings to large towns of over 25ha. In this book, Chekhab-Abudaya examines a subset of these structures, those of south-west Algeria, where the towns of the Mzab inspired Le Corbusier's Notre Dame du Haut at Ronchamp. The book combines a detailed discussion and well-illustrated catalogue of the chosen sites with a long historiographical analysis of the class. The author skilfully dismisses a number of easy oppositions—between nomads and sedentary occupation (or semi-nomadic and semi-sedentary occupation)—and takes a holistic view of the oasis culture of the Sahara, balancing the ecological constraints with those deriving from its very specific history.

The question of their origin and distribution is interesting, and has been treated by scholars for over a century. Chekhab-Abudaya treads carefully through this abundant bibliography, quoting at length rather than paraphrasing. What is not entirely clear is her own point of view. Even though the conclusion of her analysis is entitled 'Le *qsar*, forme d'urbanisme du dār al-Islām', she does not actually argue that its origins are Islamic; indeed, she is well aware of the work of David Mattingly in the Fezzan, where numerous pre-Islamic *qusūr* are found. This could have been pushed much further by citing the work of the UNESCO Libyan Valleys Survey, which identified large numbers of square, fortified, courtyard buildings constructed from the third century AD onwards, and clearly related to the Roman *quadriburgia* (Barker *et al.* 1996). The fact remains, however, that there is more to it than that: multiple influences are at play. Here, the absence of the Libyan bibliography is an issue; recent work by the University of Rome La Sapienza has resulted in the publication of two major prehistoric sites, Aghram Nadhariff and Fewet, where the circular defensive walls are created by the exterior walls of the houses, arranged concentrically just as they are in the Mzab (Liverani 2005; Mori 2013). Chekhab-Abudaya's ignorance of the Italian work in Libya is a general problem, particularly when that of Barbara Barich is omitted from the prehistoric summary—but then publications on the rest of the Maghreb are regularly ignored in Libya.

The internal layout of the *qusūr*, with their dendritic structures and complex zoning by family, is clearly related to other 'Islamic cities' (a concept the author rightly distrusts), while the form of the houses with their square patios derives from Arabian models. The position of the market at the periphery of the *qsar* is, however, very Berber (or Amazigh): the market, as a place where external people can penetrate the town, is regarded as potentially polluting, and in the Kabylie region, markets are usually placed entirely outside the settlements.

The most interesting observation Chekhab-Abudaya draws from her material is the clear distinction between the Ibadi settlement of the Mzab, where the mosque is found at the heart of the town, its minaret the highest point, and those *qusūr* where a defended *qasba* acts as the keep in a castle, a built expression of seigneurial power. In contrast, in the Ibadi towns of the Mzab, there is no apparent hierarchy, and a complex legal code stops any building from dominating its neighbour. This is characteristically Amazight: a cultural code of equality between families played out in the built environment. Fission, rather than hierarchy, is the standard response to conflict. In the Mzab, it resulted in five separate *qusūr* (and a World Heritage Site). In this sense, we may see the way in which Amazigh culture influenced Kharijism: while the original capital of the Ibadis at Tihert (north-west Algeria) had a building plausibly interpreted as the *qasba* of its founder, Ibn Rustum, by the time Ibadis settled Jerba (Tunisia) and the Mzab, such constructed representations of power seem to have entirely disappeared.

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