

by Gibbon and Montesquieu and his discussion of the playwright Sardou's *Théodora* are especially enlightening.

The greatest strength of this book is P.'s enviable knowledge of the vast primary and secondary literature on the period covering the lives of Theodora and Justinian. Given the limits of the evidence, however, it is rare that an unqualified statement can be made about Theodora at any point, even during Justinian's reign. Despite these evidentiary limitations, however, P. has managed to write a superb book that introduces novice and professional alike to one of the more fascinating women in Late Antiquity while also offering the reader the opportunity to create their own Theodora from his extensive presentation of the extant evidence. The book is well produced (I found only one glaring syntactical error, on p. 29), with generally adequate maps and images.

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## THE CONSTRUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY

FRANKFURTER (D.) *Christianizing Egypt. Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity*. Pp. xxii + 314, ill., map, colour pls. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2018. Cased, £30, US\$39.95. ISBN: 978-0-691-17697-0.

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This volume is the result of many years of work following the publication of F.'s *Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance* (1998). This earlier book discussed the survival of Romano-Egyptian traditions in Late Antiquity alongside 'new religious or institutional idioms like Christianity' (p. xiii). In this new book F. shifts the focus from Roman religion to Christianity, and no longer discusses the resilient survival of Roman traditions *alongside* Christianity, but the way in which Christianity established itself *through* a negotiation with traditional Egyptian language, material culture and rituals.

The book starts with a spell written by a monk in the seventh century AD (p. 1), which every Egyptologist will recognise as a traditional healing spell where Horus is identified with the suffering child and the magical effect is guaranteed by the intervention of Isis. The example is clever because it shows without need for complex explanations how the Christian monk 'borrowed' the elements of what he thought was still a powerful formula. Indeed, as F. points out in various parts of the book, the Egyptian gods in Christian spells and images are not to be considered as vestigial elements; their names and images still resonate in local communities a long time after the closure of temples, and they contribute to give power and authority to the Christian message.

Another essential point F. makes is that Christianity should not be considered as one coherent and cohesive religion that imposed itself from above, sometimes violently, through the authority of bishops and monks. In fact, according to F., Christianity is not 'one' at all, as it is understood, embraced and performed differently by distinct social groups, 'social spheres' or 'social sites'. F. presents five social categories in five chapters: the domestic sphere; the figure of the holy man; communities gathering around the Saint's shrine; the traditions of the workshop; and monastic scribes.

Each chapter offers detailed case studies of how traditional Egyptian texts, oral traditions, ritual gestures and material culture were remodelled to communicate a Christian message. Each social sphere had its own agents of syncretism who performed a sort of 'religious bricolage', creatively blending 'new' and traditional according to their own needs. The agents acted for themselves and their own family in the case of domestic religion, or for the needs and hopes of the community in the case of holy men. As a result, objects such as bread stamps with the face of Bes and naked female figurines, similar to the ones produced in the Roman period, were still actively used in Christian households. So, in relation to the domestic sphere, F. concludes that these late-antique objects with no Christian symbols were perfectly integrated into a Christian belief system and are not merely 'pagan survivals'. In the case of late-antique female figurines F. claims, perhaps a bit too confidently, that, despite their similarity to Pharaonic examples, these figurines 'clearly belong to a different era' (p. 60) as they are now produced by Christian sanctuaries, such as the one of Apa Mena (p. 166). As F. points out, they respond to very essential needs such as conception and healing, so I do not see the reason why they should be considered as far removed from Roman figurines in terms of scope and meaning, at least when used within the domestic sphere. The production of female figurines at the sanctuary of Apa Mena merely shows that the shrine's workshops had acknowledged the popularity of these figures. However, this case study does not mean that people gave an exclusively Christian meaning to them or stopped producing their own figurines because they purchased those from shrines (many handmade female figurines are indeed attested in late-antique Egypt).

The book is particularly precise when it comes to the subject of monastic scribes, showing F.'s obvious expertise in the study of religious texts and magical practice. A very interesting aspect of this discussion is how the scribes working in shrines and monasteries acquired the formulas of religious texts once preserved in the libraries of Roman temples, as well as writing down the oral tradition of Romano-Egyptian songs and lullabies (pp. 197–211). F. argues that monks also recognised the traditional performative aspect of magical texts and, in particular, they manipulated vowels and included para-alphabetic characters in Greek and Coptic magical texts (pp. 193–4). They also took over the popular Egyptian and Graeco-Roman tradition of oracles (pp. 212–18).

The sixth and last chapter describes the way in which Christianity transformed the physical Egyptian landscape, by developing its own meaningful processional routes and monumental spaces, sometimes at the expense of Graeco-Roman or Pharaonic temples. However, churches, F. argues, were not built within temples with the intention of obliterating nor exorcising any previous tradition. On the contrary, these areas were chosen because of their importance, and the monumentality of the location gave prestige and relevance to the church in question. Undoubtedly, this chapter raises several questions that deserve more detailed discussion.

This book is certainly a must-read for researchers of Early Christianity, late-antique history and archaeology. It has beautiful colour images, a lengthy bibliography and precise references to primary and secondary sources, although strangely dates are not provided for papyri. It is also clearly a book for a narrow field of interested scholars, as it takes for granted a basic knowledge of the history and material culture of Roman and late-antique Egypt. Some historical background would have been a very welcome addition to widen its appeal so as to engage those studying religion and cultural studies more broadly.

F.'s book is largely theoretical, and its aim is not to give a historical precis of changes in late-antique Egypt, but rather to offer a new way of interpreting the Christianisation of its local communities, which it does successfully. Yet, F. says he wants to engage with scholars who study other areas of the ancient world as well, but I am not sure this book

will help with that noble aim. Importantly though, this book encourages the fruitful approach of studying the earlier centuries of Christianity/ies using a bottom-up approach, by looking at the agency of local communities, rather than taking at face value what later Christian Coptic texts presented as a modernising, culturally superior movement that was abruptly imposed from above.

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## COINS AND THEIR MEANINGS

IOSSIF (P.P.), DE CALLATAÿ (F.), VEYMIERS (R.) (edd.) *ΤΥΠΟΙ. Greek and Roman Coins Seen through Their Images. Noble Issuers, Humble Users? Proceedings of the International Conference Organized by the Belgian and French Schools at Athens, 26–28 September 2012.* (Série Histoire 3.) Pp. 526, figs, b/w & colour pls. Liège: Presses Universitaires de Liège, 2018. Paper. ISBN: 978-2-87562-157-3.

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This edited volume draws together the results of a conference exploring the ‘methodologies of reading images on coins while putting in the foreground the role of the “actors”’ (p. 11), namely the ‘issuer’ and subsequent ‘users’ of the coins. Consideration of these aspects has grown substantially in recent scholarship and adds vital depth to discussions on numismatic imagery. The 23 papers consider an impressive breadth of material and are accompanied by well-presented appendices. The articles are collated into sections focusing on broad methodological issues related to the study of imagery on coinage or into sections focusing on specific cases from Greek, Hellenistic, Punic, Republican and Roman imperial coinage. A final group of articles discusses imagery on coins and gems. The scope of this review only allows comment on a selection of the articles in this wide-ranging volume.

De Callataÿ’s introduction sets out a detailed discussion of the development of scholarship on iconography in numismatics and the recent resurgence of interest in it and its methodology (e.g. N.T. Elkins, S. Krmnicek [edd.], *Art in the Round: New Approaches to Ancient Coin Iconography* [2014]). De Callataÿ provides valuable background to the key issues engaged with throughout: the extent to which coins were intended to communicate with an audience and who chose the types, how types evolved over time and the reception of these images, including consideration of their relative comprehensibility and evidence for potential audience targeting (pp. 40–50).

M. Caccamo Caltabiano discusses the *Lexicon Iconographicum Numismaticae Classicae et Mediae Aetatis (LIN)* and its methodology. Her innovative methodology involves reading the iconography in a similar manner to verbal languages. In this ‘iconic grammar’ she distinguishes a common ‘denotative meaning’ for an image, which could then be supplemented by an object that adds ‘connotative meaning’ to it (p. 79). The *LIN* collates all coins on which a particular image features and seeks to reconstruct its ‘diatopy and diachrony, the definition of its meaning using an interdisciplinary and multidisciplinary approach, aimed at the integrated and overall reconstruction of the cultural context of its use’ (p. 78). Caccamo Caltabiano’s method considers the links between obverse and reverse, between principal and secondary imagery on the coin and any legends. She assesses the