The Monastic Landscape of Late Antique Egypt: An Archaeological Reconstruction. By **Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom**. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017. xxvii + 411 pp. $135.00 hardcover.

Egyptian monasticism is both familiar and unfamiliar, usually discussed in isolation and most often from the perspective of texts. Brooks Hedstrom's book challenges us to view late antique Egyptian society from a more integrated perspective, one that is instructive far beyond the bounds of Egypt: indeed, as she notes, Byzantine studies in general and Byzantine archaeology in particular are undertheorized and could gain from recent theoretical writings addressing themes ranging from landscape to space, settlement, and things.

To do this with the late antique monastic landscape of Egypt—and perhaps to engage the non-specialist reader—she inverts the normal order of presentation expected in an archaeological study. Rather than begin with a site-specific or object-specific analysis, she tackles the larger issues of perception first. She thus begins with a useful historiographic overview, beginning with the misperceptions of the nineteenth century. Early scholar-travelers marveled at the monumental masonry remains of Egypt of the pharaohs while disparaging the impoverished mudbrick hovels of their Christian descendants. Similar biased attitudes lay behind the perception of Egyptian monasticism: it was impoverished because of the ascetic zeal of its adherents. While attitudes have changed in the scholarship, popular perceptions have not.

For those (like myself) who study monasticism elsewhere in the Byzantine Empire, the wealth of data from Egypt comes as something of a shock. We are used to dealing with decontextualized monastic documents, such as the *typika* of monasteries that no longer exist, and physical remains for which there is no documentation, such as for the remains of the monasteries of Cappadocia. In addition to texts, Egypt preserved countless monastic sites, replete with manuscripts, ostraca, inscriptions, dipinti, graffiti, wall paintings, and countless objects of daily life. Nevertheless, scholarship still privileges the text, and one of this book's aims is to demonstrate how archaeology can be used as an antidote—that is, how it can be used to bring the imagined monastic landscape down to earth with facts on the ground.

Brooks Hedstrom emphasizes how texts and material remains can tell different stories—sometimes overlapping but often not. For example, much of our received impression of Egyptian monasticism derives from *The Lives of the Desert Fathers*, with tales of ascetic athletes living lives of impressive abstinence, rejecting the temptations of the world and choosing an eremitic lifestyle in the desert wilderness. This may hold true for early monasticism, which has left virtually no physical remains—indeed, the successful hermit leaves no trace—but the abundant physical remains are later in date. At Kellia (often taken to represent the paradigm of an early monastic settlement), for example, there is limited evidence from the fifth century, but considerably more for later growth and expansion, well into the ninth century. In contrast to the picture painted by the Desert Fathers, here and elsewhere there is evidence of wealth and prosperity. Little in the way of non-monastic construction can compete with the scale of the White Monastery at Sohag, for example, or the richness of the painted program at the nearby Red Monastery.

The book also demonstrates how a study of Egyptian monasticism has to be integrated with a study of settlement patterns in general. The architectural forms of secular

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0009640720000165 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and monastic settlements rely on the same technologies and spatial syntaxes, so that it is frequently difficult to determine if an excavated late antique settlement was a village or a monastery without detailed examination. Often the final determination depends on texts, inscriptions, and wall paintings. And often monasteries were integrated into the larger patterns of settlement—built as parts of villages, adjacent to them, or in easy travel distance from them. When Brooks Hedstom turns to looking at individual examples, the range and repertory of scale and setting can be dramatic—with large, well-visible establishments, such as Apa Jeremias near Memphis, standing in sharp contrast to smaller, isolated foundations hidden in the landscape, such as the Topos of Apa Phoibammon in the Rock.

Finally, Brooks Hedstrom offers an elegantly nuanced view of the relationship between monastic siting and the landscape. She emphasizes a preference, in many instances, for what she calls *underutilized* landscapes: abandoned sites that could be reclaimed or the reuse of quarries, tombs, and natural cavities. Brooks Hedstrom analyzes how these particular sites fit within larger theoretical perspectives of space, place and landscape. I occasionally grimaced at the frequent name-dropping of theorists and anthropologists, but this is a minor complaint for a study that is rich in both detail and perspective.

If there is a criticism to be aimed at this excellent study, it is in the use of illustrations. They are limited in number, poorly reproduced, often difficult to interpret, and not well integrated with the text. Plans are limited and usually presented without identification of components; many sites and spaces are described in detail but left unillustrated. I often found myself puzzling over a site description that one good illustration could have easily clarified. For a study of this richness, more and better illustrations are absolutely necessary. Their absence limits the value and accessibility of an otherwise commendable study.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640720000165

The Second Gift of the Nile: Monks and Monasteries in Late Antique Egypt. By **Ewa Wipszycka**. Translated by **Damian Jasiński**. Supplements to the Journal of Juristic Papyrology 33. Warsaw: University of Warsaw, 2018. xxvi + 565 pp. $85.00 hardcover.

In a brief review such as this, it would be easy to take for granted the exciting significance of a book in English about monastic Egypt by a scholar as respected as Ewa Wipszycka. *The Second Gift of the Nile* builds (by Wipszycka's explicit admission) on two of several previous major monographs—one in French and one in Polish—with adjustments, developments, updates, and fuller treatment of the Pachomian literature and of Shenoute (in some ways his successor, albeit settled somewhat north of the great Theban bend). Yet, here and there, Wipszycka does identify pathways for further or fresh inquiry.

A book of this nature from so authoritative a figure presents us with an invaluable summation of decades of research and food for thought about where to turn next. Immediately characteristic of the author is the division of the book (after an