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**Christina Riggs (ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Egypt*. Oxford. Oxford University Press, 2012. Pp. xxi, 791. £95. ISBN 978-0-19-957145-1 (Hbk).**

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Many volumes pertaining to the history and culture of ancient Egypt focus on the Pharaonic period (c.3000-535BCE) leaving a void in the available knowledge of Roman Egypt. Christina Riggs aims to counteract this issue by bringing together various facets of Romano-Egyptian history and culture in the form of 45 papers written by different scholars. These papers are divided into seven thematic parts: Land and State, City, Town and *chora*, People, Religion, Texts and Languages, Images and Objects, and Borders, Trade and Tourism. This review will examine parts IV and VI which are focused on the 'Religion' and 'Images and Objects' of Roman Egypt respectively.

Part IV is the largest in the volume and contains 9 papers each devoted to a different aspect of religion in Roman Egypt. The topics covered by these papers are generalised, such as 'Egyptian Temples' by Martina Minas-Nerpel (p.362-381) and 'Christianity' by Malcolm Choat (p.474-492). However, as the book aims to fill 'considerable gaps' (p.1) in the available interpretations of Roman Egypt it is understandable that the various scholars provide a general overview of specific subject areas. David Frankfurter's paper, titled 'Religious Practice and Piety' (p.319-336), was a sensible choice as an introductory piece to the volume's 'Religion' section. It covers several aspects of religious practice in Roman Egypt including the worship in both the public and private spheres of society and how religion in Roman Egypt changed under the influence of Christianity. Readers of this volume may question why such a paper is included at all as it is certainly a condensed version of David Frankfurter's book *Religion in Roman Egypt* (1998), which is considered the definitive work on this specific subject area. On the other hand, to discount an expert of Romano-Egyptian religion would be problematic for

the volume's credibility and discount the valuable work already provided by David Frankfurter in this area of study. His paper and its presentation of the several topics mentioned above successfully provide a background on which the reader can build their knowledge of Romano-Egyptian religion when studying the other papers in the section.

One of the most thought provoking papers in the 'Religion' section of this volume is presented by Martin Andreas Stadler and focuses on the aspects of 'Funerary Religion'(p.383-397), which he explains as 'The Final Phase of an Egyptian Tradition' (p.383). The extent to which a 'funerary religion' even existed in ancient Egypt is widely debated by scholars and Stadler does not acknowledge this well-known debate anywhere in his paper nor does he attempt to further explain what funerary religion means within the scope of his research. The lack of these essential definitions makes it difficult for the reader to understand exactly what aspect of Egyptian religion or ritual is being presented and interpreted. Stadler states that 'Egyptian funerary religion overwhelmingly dominates our view of ancient Egypt throughout all periods of history' (p.383), but he does not offer any examples dating to before the Roman period. This is particularly difficult to comprehend as he notes that there were certainly changes to funerary religion in Roman Egypt, interpreting that this was due to a natural development (p.392). It is difficult to understand how the reader can accept this interpretation with no discussion of so-called 'funerary religion' prior to the Roman invasion. Although this could possibly be due to the constraints of dealing with a specific time period (Roman Egypt), by not discussing evidence from an earlier era his research is difficult to place within the ancient Egyptian chronology. Despite gaps in his content the architecture of Stadler's paper is clearly laid out and he successfully uses a range of sources, both of a textual and visual medium to demonstrate the variety of examples in which individuals interacted with funerary ritual.

By far the most valuable aspect of the volume's section on 'Religion' is the range of topics that are covered and also the suggested reading and detailed bibliographies that are provided by each individual contributor. Providing these details fits the style of the

volume and the papers within it as a general reference guide to readers and researchers. This style allows those studying a specific subject area to gain a comprehensive background before continuing their research by following the suggested reading and subsequently reaching their own interpretations.

The provision of detailed bibliographies and suggested reading is consistent throughout the volume including part VI titled 'Images and Objects'. Similar to the section relating to religion, the six papers that comprise this part are generalised and clearly aim to provide the reader with an overview into the visual sources of material culture that date to Roman Egypt. The issue with this section is the lack of cross-over between the papers, a problem which in fact runs throughout the volume but which is particularly prevalent here. It is certainly 'user friendly' to divide the large topic of Roman Egypt into themes, especially when the volume is aiming to be a general reference guide - however, this leads to a noticeable absence of connection between the various papers. This is in here as some papers focus on types of material culture – 'Pottery' by Jennifer Gates-Foster (p.648-663) – and others on a topic more suited to a section on religion or people – 'Mummies and Mummification' by Beatrix Gessler-Löhr (p.664-683). The first paper in the 'Images and Objects' section is titled 'Funerary Artists: the Textual Evidence' (p.597-612) and despite a previous paper focused on funerary practice and an entire section (of 7 papers) relating to texts and languages, there is no cross-over. This leads to a lack of coherence and consistency throughout the volume.

Christina Riggs has certainly taken advantage of the expansion of scholarship relating to Roman Egypt in recent years; an expansion which over the past two decades has been distinctly lacking (p.1). In bringing together experts from various fields of Egyptology Riggs has successfully created a general reference book, the one she wished she 'had found in the library' (p.1). Despite the absence of cross-over between papers (which can perhaps be overlooked due to the volumes generalised nature) there are many aspects of the volume which are wholly successful. Riggs presents a succinct introduction to the study of Roman Egypt followed by a historical overview of the period,

providing a firm background from which 45 papers, and the specific topics covered within them, can branch out. Several of the papers are interspersed with images (all of which are clearly captioned with a provenance and a date), a feature that is particularly useful when dealing with interpretations of visual evidence and material culture. A basic map highlighting key sites in Egypt during the Roman Period, a list of abbreviations and conventions, and an overall bibliography given by Riggs at the beginning demonstrate that this volume is highly useful to those readers delving into initial research, making the diverse study of the history and culture of Roman Egypt more easily accessible.