

# Review

LOUISE BLANKE and JENNIFER CROMWELL (EDS), *MONASTIC ECONOMIES IN LATE ANTIQUE EGYPT AND PALESTINE*. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xvi + 396; illus., maps, photos. ISBN 9781009278973 (hbk), £123.95; 9781009278942 (pbk); 9781009278959 e-book.

*Monastic Economies* appears at a particularly vibrant moment in monastic studies. Previous publications by editors Louise Blanke and Jennifer Cromwell are outstanding examples of this recent wave of scholarship. B.'s recent book *An Archaeology of Egyptian Monasticism* (2019) provided a refreshing and detailed study of the White Monastery Federation. C. boasts an influential record of work on Coptic documentary papyri. Together, they have compiled a collection of essays that illuminate early monasticism in two regions often studied separately. The volume is not comparative, but rather a series of local or specialised studies, which, like individual tesserae in a mosaic, illuminate discrete elements of a wider swath of monastic history.

Ch. 1 serves as the Introduction, where the editors set out the stakes for the research in the book. They underscore the importance of economics for understanding monasticism, especially monasteries' roles in local and regional networks. This chapter dismantles common tropes about the isolation of monks and challenges scholarly claims of monasteries as economic 'parasites', financially dependent on elites, the church and government. B. and C. explain the importance of papyrology, archaeology and material culture studies more broadly for a field often dominated (in English-language scholarship, at least) by literary and textual studies. They also argue for the benefits of studying these two regions together: studies in one region can illuminate the other when there are gaps in the other's historical record; differences between Egyptian and Palestinian monasticisms bring to the fore the diversity of monastic economies. In all these endeavours, the volume succeeds.

The subsequent twelve essays are divided into three sections, the first being 'The Monastic Estate'. Basema Hamarneh's chapter traces the extensive economic connections that Arabian and Palestinian monasteries had with their surrounding areas, focusing on monks' property, donations to monasteries, pilgrimage and agriculture. Isabelle Marthot-Santaniello's essay 'From Byzantine to Islamic Egypt' traces the size and influence of land-owning monasteries with ties to Aphrodito. Challenging previous scholarship, Marthot-Santaniello argues that most monastic estates had declining economic influence by the eighth century. Tomasz Derda and Joanna Wegner examine archaeology and Greek papyri in 'The Naqlun Fathers and their Business Affairs'. Some (many?) monks at Naqlun possessed financial wealth and interacted with other individuals and institutions in the region. They caution that the Naqlun monks may not have been typical of individuals in other lavra-type monasteries, again highlighting monastic diversity and importance of local studies.

Part II contains five essays on 'The Production and Consumption of Food and Material Goods', some of which encourage readers to consider monasteries as akin to large households. Dorota Dzierzbicka's contribution examines wine production and consumption in Egypt. Monasteries used wine for liturgy, payments in kind, health care and meals. Institutions such as the Apa Apollo Monastery at Bawit owned vineyards, often with tenants leasing the land. Monasteries also procured wine via purchases or as payments on loans they had provided. Darlene L. Brooks Hedstrom's essay 'Cooking, Baking, and Serving' presents an archaeological analysis of 'kitchens, bakeries, courtyards, and refectories', demonstrating the extensive monastic relationship with food and dining despite hagiography's emphasis on fasting (153). At Kellia and Naqlun, individual dwellings contained kitchens. Bread ovens and stoves have been found in enclosed kitchens, bake houses and open-air courtyards. At the coenobitic Monastery of Jeremias, ovens were located near communal spaces (the church, refectory and infirmary), as well as in residential areas. Gábor Kalla's contribution presents a thorough site plan and history of the complex at Tell Bi'a in (Syria) before delving into the details of the elevated kitchen (with ovens for leavened bread and flatbread) as well as the water supply and storage systems required for cooking. Kalla argues for Egyptian and Nubian architectural parallels that may indicate interactions with Egyptian monasteries. Mennat-Allah el Dorry's chapter examines dung production and usage as fuel for fire. Using archaeological evidence from pharaonic through Roman times, literary references and nineteenth- to twentieth-century ethnographic studies, Dorry documents the collection, drying, storage and use of dung as well as its status as a commodity. Andrea Myers Achi explores

monastic book production through a study of 47 manuscripts affiliated with the St Michael monastery in the Fayum. It had a wide network of monks, clerics and lay people involved in producing books and donating books or supplies. Achi examines both the spiritual and financial value ascribed to books and book making.

Part III concerns the economics of monastic 'travel, pilgrimage, and donations' (269). Through an examination of P.Ness. III 79, Daniel Caner argues that monasteries received two distinct types of donations: offerings (*prosphorai*), which were gifts for specific purposes, and blessings (*eulogia*), which were unrestricted gifts. In an essay on Deir Anba Hadra, Lena Sophia Krastel, Sebastian Olschok and Tonio Sebastian Richter document workshops for the production of staples (bread and castor oil for lamps) sufficient for monastic use but likely not for trade. Inscriptions indicate the monastery's landholding was sufficient for an annual crop donation to support Aswan's poor. Later inscriptions suggest an organised spiritual economy of pilgrimage. Davide Bianchi's 'The Monastic Landscape of Mount Nebo' examines the economy of Sinai monasteries, from terraced agriculture, wine crushers and ovens, to donations from pilgrims, lay people and the bishop of Madaba. Finally, Paula Tutty analyses letters from the Hathor monastery and the Nag Hammadi library's cartonnage to understand monastic travel.

More of the essays address Egypt than Palestine or Asia, but the regions' geographies, surviving sources and archaeology may mean that is almost to be expected. Scholars of each region as well as researchers in ancient economics or in the methods of archaeology and papyrology will find great value in this book. Monastic historians specialising in literary sources most certainly should read it. The editors are to be commended for producing a volume that contributes to a deeper understanding of the material conditions of late antique monastic life.

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