

cal occurrences of the various (sub)themes, i.e., how often they occur, where they occur, what scenes precede or follow them, and so forth.

Chapters IV to VII examine the decorations on the west wall of the Giza cult chapels. These include occurrences and co-occurrences of the (sub)themes, their location, and the relationships between them. Detailed occurrences of the various (sub)themes are presented in graphs, and percentages of the combinations of these shown in additional charts. A more exhaustive catalogue would be hard to find. A similar presentation is repeated for the decorations on the false door (chapters VIII to XI), the entrance jambs and thicknesses (chapter XII), and the north, south, and east walls (chapters XIII, XIV, and XV, respectively). Chapter XVI then presents the interaction of all these (sub)themes on the various walls, with more scrupulous statistical analyses of their frequency of occurrences, co-occurrences, deviations within the frequency of occurrences, and so forth.

Chapter XVII brings all of this material together in a lucid and discerning presentation of the author's conclusions. As he sees it, the realization by the elite tomb owners that the provisioning of their *ka* might not last forever led to a diminishing faith in the continuity of the daily offerings, which occasioned a gradual increase of scenes that were considered to be helpful in guaranteeing the food supply on a non-active basis (p. 336). Thus, such (sub)themes as no. 10 (piles of food) and no. 11 (the non-ideographic offering list) were used with greater frequency, as were images of food production such as butchering scenes (no. 9) and the depiction of the tomb owner sitting before a table of offerings, in the act of consuming food (nos. 3, 40, and 41; the first was placed on the west wall while the other two are found on the false door panel). Here, the author quite rightly stresses the importance of the dependence on what might be called "magic" in the whole process of supplying the deceased's *ka*, since even actual food deposited on an offering table had to be magically consumed by the *ka* after traversing the false door from the next to this world. As a corollary, this decreased faith led to fewer scenes showing the deceased as a living person on the west wall. As the author puts it succinctly, the themes on the west wall went from a "here" aspect to one of a "hereafter" (p. 339). The false door also saw some transformations. As the need for this magic increased, the offering list started to become so large that it had to be moved away from the panel and subsequently transferred to the west wall.

As for the north and south walls, these increasingly showed the non-professional aspect of the tomb owner's life, such as scenes showing him hunting in the marshes (no. 17). However, some of the (sub) themes on the east wall, such as the boat scene (no. 70), may have changed from indicating a daily life to a funereal one. Similarly, it is possible that the palanquin scene (no. 71) also had a funereal context, as the tomb owner may have been shown visiting and supervising the construction of his tomb. All these conclusions are then briefly summarized and discussed in two short overall examinations of all the decorated parts of the chapel at the end of the chapter.

Although not an easy read by any means, the book is clearly written and well worth persevering through all those charts and graphs. The author offers some keen observations that are firmly based on hard data, and for this he must be thanked.

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Triangular Landscapes: Environment, Society, and the State in the Nile Delta under Roman Rule. By KATHERINE BLOUIN. Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy. Oxford: OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS, 2014. Pp. xxv + 429, illus. \$150.

This book is a revision of the author's Ph.D. dissertation. It begins by noting the "major reorganization of the Nile Delta" (p. 1) from seven branches to two over the course of the first millennium of this era. The major research questions—how did humans contribute to this process? how did it happen, and why did it happen when it did? how did it impact the Delta communities?—prepare us for a mere hydrographical study.

But Blouin delivers more. Her focus is on the Mendesian Nome, which is, as she notes, “one of the few Deltaic zones documented by a significant papyrological corpus” (p. 4). The center of this corpus is the carbonized archives from Thmuis (CAT). The archives fit her research agenda perfectly, documenting the transfer of the nome capital from Mendes to Thmuis; the depopulation of regional villages; and the revolt of the so-called *boukoloi* in the late second century AD. To my mind, the result is a sophisticated papyrological social history. In her words, it is a work of new environmental history, a field characterizing “relationships between humankind and its surroundings in terms of reciprocity” (p. 7).

She divides the book into four major sections. The first section places the Mendesian nome in its wider hydrological and historical context. Blouin summarizes the nature of risk stemming from the Nile flood and the various risk management strategies used in response since the beginning of Egypt’s known history. In the Delta, human response to local conditions gave rise to a “more dense and complex hydrological network than has traditionally been assumed” (p. 27). Blouin argues that this is important context for what she calls the “gradual bipolarization of the Delta’s hydrography under Roman rule” (p. 28).

A chapter on the evidence includes a survey of 1) the Mendesian archaeological remains: meager, in my opinion, but still forthcoming, including through an excavation under Blouin’s direction; and 2) the papyrological evidence, including the CAT, “the only group of papyri ever found in the ruins of a Roman metropolis’ public archive” (p. 45). The contents are fiscal reports, land surveys, and tax registers from the late second to the early third century AD. A chapter on the nome in the pre-Roman period includes a discussion of the decline of Mendes “to the benefit of Thmuis” (p. 90). The switch in centrality from one site to the other was not simply administrative or arbitrary, but directly tied to the eastern migration of the Mendesian branch of the Nile. Lack of a resulting crisis “demonstrates the resilience of the society and administration to the fluctuations” (p. 103).

The book’s second section surveys the Mendesian landscape under Roman rule. Two chapters focus on topography and administrative geography and Roman land categories. Blouin attempts to estimate the total number of villages in the nome, their population sizes, and the total population for the nome. The ranges are unsatisfying, but confirm the general impression (p. 125) that population densities were lower in the Delta than the Nile valley. While the representativeness of papyrological data is never certain, “the large number of attested land categories, toparchies, and villages encourages [Blouin] to think that the available data is representative” (p. 139) of the nome’s main characteristics in the second half of the second century AD. An extensive survey of the land categories shows “the quantitative predominance of cereal culture” as opposed to vineyards or pasture “in the nome, a phenomenon which agrees with Egyptian evidence in general” (p. 155).

Risk management is a perennial interest in studies of the ancient economy and fiscality. The state’s introduction of a new approach to non-flooded land—the removal of state inspections and the requirement that owners declare this status themselves—shows “an evolution in the way the Roman administration envisaged the fluvial risk in the province” in which “a greater part of the fiscal responsibility . . . was transferred to taxpayers” (p. 160). Ultimately, under Diocletian, the Roman state divorced its tax assessments from the hazards of the Nile flood, causing “a greater ‘imperialization’ of Egyptian fiscal practices.” This put an end to a centuries-old “balance between needs and limitations” in which everyone sought to “conciliate a recognition of the fluvio-agrarian hazards with a maximization of the profitability of local micro-ecologies” (p. 169).

The third section focuses on society, the state, and the land, a variation of the book’s subtitle, *Environment, Society, and the State*. These are the three intersecting factors at play in the triangle of the Nile Delta, and at the heart of the word-play in the book’s main title, *Triangular Landscapes*. As we have seen, the Mendesian nome had “a pre-eminence of cereal culture” (p. 187), despite the fact that “Mendesian wine production benefited from an international reputation” (p. 183). Given the importance of wheat cultivation, crop diversification typically appears on land not suited to wheat. This is “economic rationalism” that is aimed at maximizing output (p. 193). This means that the less land one owns, the lesser the likelihood some of it will be used for something other than wheat. The rich are therefore in a better position to protect themselves against risk through diversification than the poor (p. 199).

The rest of the section focuses on marginal land. Semi-arid, wet, and submerged lands prove to be considerably important to the region's agrarian regime. Marginal land was more likely to be private land, testimony to the Roman state's attempts, "through a variety of fiscal incentives, to delegate the farming of marginal parcels to private landholders" (p. 210). Again, Blouin sees economic rationalism at work: state attention to unproductive land "presupposes a long-term, profit-oriented conception of agricultural management" (p. 215).

The fourth section focuses on the region in crisis. Blouin treats two phenomena in two chapters, *anachôrêsis* and the *boukoloï* uprising. The first phenomenon, taxpayers fleeing from their land, was common enough in Egypt generally, but "reached extreme proportions in the Mendesian Nome in the second half of the second century AD" (p. 243). The papyri recording tax moratoria show at least twenty villages in the region suffering from depopulation in this period.

When Roman officials start to feel the impact of the first wave of depopulation in the early 160s, they respond by removing the prevailing regime of collective responsibility for village taxes, "seemingly with the aim of preventing further desertion" (p. 250). This seems to have been ineffective. Several more waves of depopulation hit later in that decade and early in the next. Clues as to cause are few, but in one case we see explicit reference to "the pestilential situation," an apparent reference to the Antonine plague (p. 255).

A taxpayer in flight is no longer a taxpayer, but a rebel. Enter the *boukoloï*, peasants who have turned to a "desperate form of mobility," an "extreme survival strategy" (p. 260). Most attention to the revolt of the *boukoloï* ("herdsmen") in the second half of the second century has focused on literary accounts. Blouin's contribution focuses on *P.Thmouis* 1, allowing her to place the revolt in the context of "long-term socio-hydrological pressures and Roman-period agro-fiscal dynamics" (p. 269).

Who were the *boukoloï*? The papyrological evidence refers to the "impious Nikôchites," inhabitants of Nikôchis, which Achilles Tatiûs identifies "as the most important settlement of the region and the bastion of the insurgents" (p. 276). Villages targeted by these rebels were in the wetter areas of the nome. Blouin reminds us of a "derogatory discourse" stemming from "a representational scheme associating wetlands and protest" (p. 285) going back to the Pharaonic era. But we are not really dealing with the romanticized semi-nomadic herdsmen that some of the sources portray. The rebels are simply "sedentarized villagers who normally lived off cattle breeding, hunting, fishing, and other agricultural and commercial activities, but who, in the face of economic ruin, chose the path of violent sedition" (p. 295).

Blouin concludes by returning to her claim that the region's considerable hydrological changes in the Roman period "generally seem to have been dealt with resiliently" (p. 296). Here, the *boukoloï* are in essence the exception that proves the rule. Environmental changes and economic pressures can combine to squeeze taxpayers so hard that they have no other choice remaining to them but desperate revolt. This conclusion is satisfying, and completely believable.

Readers may leave wondering about more general lessons. Does the Mendesian Nome's hydrological uniqueness mean that these pressures and their accompanying social threats are absent elsewhere in Roman Egypt? Or does its agrarian regime—clearly similar in some ways to parts of the Nile valley—mean that Rome's Egyptian peasants faced these pressures on a constant basis up and down the entire province? Blouin plays it safe: she offers only a very interesting regional history, and does not make any more general claims.

The book includes five maps, including three of the Mendesian Nome, fourteen figures, twenty-eight tables, two appendices, and a glossary. The first appendix is a convenient checklist of all published papyri dealing with the Mendesian nome. The second appendix is more substantial, a thirty-five-page reference guide to "Mendesian Fiscality in Roman Times," a compilation of all of the taxes levied in the region and the government agencies responsible for them.