

Thompson, Dorothy J. *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. Pp. xiii, 342. 8 plates, 10 figures, 5 tables, index. \$37.50 (U.S.)

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Book Reviews/Comptes rendus

vaudeville houses to soon incorporate them into their bills, but by the 1920s vaudeville theatres were closing and converting to movie theatres. The vaudeville audience, like the performers they applauded, simply embraced the new technology. Sophie Tucker, Milton Berle, and George Burns and Gracie Allen all moved from vaudeville to movies and finally made the transition to television, a medium which seems to be the vaudeville of the post-war generation.

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Thompson, Dorothy J. *Memphis Under the Ptolemies*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988. Pp. xiii, 342. 8 plates, 10 figures, 5 tables, index. \$37.50 (U.S.)

The Greek papyri from Egypt provide an incomparable source of information about everyday life in the Greco-Roman period. Contracts, private letters and tax records can shed light on the past in a way that the work of the historical writers cannot. Regrettably few classical scholars have seen the rich possibilities of this kind of documentation as a window on the ancient world. Dorothy J. Thompson is one of a small number of ancient historians who has chosen Greco-Roman Egypt as an area of concentration, and her work stands as a model of the intelligent use of primary source material to construct historical analysis. Her first book, *Kerkeosiris: An Egyptian Village in the Ptolemaic Period* (Cambridge 1971), is unquestionably the best historical study of an Egyptian village that has been produced by a classical scholar. Her new book contains all of the virtues of the first, in terms of skilled interpretation of individual papyri and attention to minute points of detail, but moves beyond this sort of monographic approach to encompass a range of sources and methodologies which include archaeology, iconography, religion, epigraphy, literature,

anthropology and sociology. This book was deservedly the winner of the American Historical Association 1989 James H. Breasted Prize for the best book in English in any field of history prior to A.D. 1000.

Memphis proved to be a much more challenging site for study than Kerkeosiris. Although the latter was much smaller and less significant, several extant archives of papyri provided easily accessible raw material for historical inquiry. In the case of Memphis, on the other hand, the papyri are proportionately less numerous and more random; they therefore do not in themselves provide enough evidence to tell us all that we might want to know about Memphis in the Ptolemaic period. For this reason the author had to draw on a wide variety of sources for her study, and it is her dexterity in doing so that is one of the main strengths of this book.

Memphis, the modern site of Cairo, was after Alexandria the most important city in Ptolemaic Egypt. It is partially for this reason that relatively few papyri from the site are extant; it is one of the paradoxes of papyrology that the more successful a site was, the fewer of its documents have survived, since continuous habitation causes the destruction of the past whereas neglect and abandonment create ideal conditions for the preservation of papyri. The eight chapters of this book cover a number of topics in the social and economic history of Memphis. The importance of Memphis as a religious center of the country is the subject of a number of chapters (esp. 4: Ptolemies and Temples, 5: The Undertakers, 6: Apis and Other Cults, 7: Between Two Worlds: The Sarapieion). The role of Memphis in the Hellenistic and Roman worlds is the focus of the first (The Second City) and last (Roman Memphis: An Epilogue) chapters. The relationship between the indigenous inhabitants and the ruling minority, an inescapable issue in Egyptian history, is considered particularly in two chapters (3: Ethnic Minorities, 7: Between Two Worlds: The Sarapieion). Perhaps nowhere is the author's ingenuity at gleaning historical

information from assorted scraps of evidence more amply demonstrated than in the two chapters which deal with economic life; in the one (2: Economic Life in Memphis), documentation from the Pharaonic period to present-day Egypt is pulled together to assist in developing a picture of economic activity in the country during the Ptolemaic period. A more focused approach is taken in a chapter on an interesting archive of papyri belonging to a family of undertakers (Ch. 5: The Undertakers).

Memphis Under the Ptolemies is an outstanding example of classical scholarship at its best, distinguished by a synthesis of documentary expertise and historical imagination. Although it is written with full attention to papyrological detail so as to be indispensable to the specialist, it does not presuppose a knowledge of Greek, and thus would be equally informative to the nonspecialist.

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Martin, Virgil. *Changing Landscapes of Southern Ontario*. Erin, Ontario: The Boston Mills Press, 1988. Pp. 240. Illustrations.

There is a tradition within Geography and its systematic branches, Cultural and Historical Geography, which treats its subject matter in terms of the "evolution of landscape" or "the changing landscape." The tradition is holistic, seeing landscape as the expression of Man's values, or "ways and works," to use the Philbrickian terminology. Most working in this genre present their insights in simple descriptive prose, in the literature of the area and period and in the cartographic and photographic heritage.

The photograph is rarely central, functioning often as a sort of theatrical back drop against which the action is played. That is what