

Compte rendu

Jean GASCOU, *Fiscalité et société en Égypte byzantine*. Bilans de recherche 4, Association des amis du Centre d'histoire et civilisation de Byzance, Paris (2008). Pp. 484, pll. 40. ISBN 978-2-916716-15-2. € 40.

This massive, well-produced, and pleasingly affordable volume collects a selection of 23 articles, long and short, that Jean Gascou has published over the third of a century from 1972 to 2005 on subjects concerning the administration, economy, society, and culture of Egypt from the fourth to eighth century. They have been attractively reset for typographic uniformity (but with original pagination indicated in the margin), and the plates originally attached to the articles have been reprinted on good paper. Although many originally appeared in widely distributed journals, others come from volumes less readily available and will be all the more welcome in their new form. The author has made a certain number of changes or retrospective comments, some very important. Constantin Zuckerman and Denyse Vaillancourt, who (the preface tells us) are responsible for the conception and realization of the volume, deserve the gratitude of all interested in late antique Egypt.

The choice of articles to be included was Zuckerman's work. If one examines it against a more (but not entirely, see below) comprehensive list of Gascou's publications, in the *Bibliographie papyrologique*, it is evident that Zuckerman prefers the Gascou of the 1980s to that of the 1990s. Although the rate of publication in these two decades was identical, the eighties (1981-1990) outweigh the nineties by 13 to 2 in this volume (the flanking decades are represented more or less in proportion to the number of articles published). It is true that some of the most significant work Gascou did in the nineties concerned Syria in the third century rather than Byzantine Egypt (i.e., the publications concerning the Euphrates dossier), but that is not sufficient explanation. It would be ungrateful to complain that the volume is not double the size, of course, but it could easily have been such without any loss of focus, interest, or quality.

That point is not entirely idle. It is tempting to treat a review of a volume like this as if it ought to be a retrospective review of a lifetime of scholarly work. Indeed, its author has, albeit with good humor, given way himself a bit to this temptation in the preface (« Me voici donc, avec ce volume, relégué dans l'histoire d'une discipline »). The volume is not at all a bad microcosm of that œuvre, but it must be remembered that fewer than a third of Gascou's published articles appear in this volume, and we may, after all, hope that he will write many more. It also gives no sense of the author's epigraphical and even archaeological side. And it is essential to point out that the cover blurb, describing the book as « vingt-trois études de papyrologie byzantine », somewhat misrepresents even the work contained in its covers. These articles are as much historical as papyrological. The

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reader can, moreover, observe how many non-papyrological sources, mainly late antique authors, appear in the source index. Gascou's knowledge of the authors of the period is remarkable. And in fact there is a significant body of published work on Christianity, largely concerning literary sources, represented here only by XIX, « Les privilèges du clergé d'après la 'lettre' 104 de S. Basile ». Fortunately, some of this work is available for download at <http://hal.archives-ouvertes.fr/>.

What is the purpose of volumes like this ? When I was doubting whether to publish the first of the Variorum volumes gathering some of my own articles, I asked a number of friends and colleagues if they thought it would be useful. Their reaction was that it would be, mainly because these were so scattered that a collection would be convenient, and reviewers have shared that opinion. But that end could probably better be served today by putting all (or almost all), rather than a selection, of the articles on line for free download. A more cogent reason in the case of a great scholar like Gascou is that it is pedagogically useful to be able to tell a student to read the collected articles in such a convenient form – there can be no more « I can't find that article » excuses. I remember my own gratitude for the appearance of the first volumes of Louis Robert's *Opera Minora Selecta* when I was a graduate student, and the role they played in my education. Gascou's volume has as well the significant added value of the updating that I have already mentioned. Readers will be well advised to consult all of these articles in the form published in this volume. Apart from those mentioned below, I would signal particularly the updates on IV and V, brief but helpful. The closing addendum on III offers a characteristically wry perspective on the highly influential article on the *bucellarii*. The extremely full source index will also be enormously useful to the working scholar ; I have already found it helpful.

To summarize, let alone discuss, all of these articles here would be of limited use and, for the reasons I have given, out of place. But a brief description of the contents may be helpful. First, 9 articles are devoted to the edition of papyrological texts : IV (Apollonos Anô), V (Monastery of Apa Apollôs), X (ostracon from Thebes), XII (Hermopolite accounts), XIII (cadaster of Aphrodito), XIV (a loan, jointly with K. A. Worp), XV (« table budgétaire » of Antaiopolis), XVII (oilworkers' ostraca archive from Aphrodito, also jointly with Worp), and XX (a decision of the military governor of the Thebaid). Of these, XIII and XV are particularly important, both because of their inherent centrality for the study of sixth-century Egypt and because they have been corrected and updated, sufficiently so that XIII now appears solely over Gascou's signature (the first edition was signed jointly with L.S.B. MacCoull).

Another 4 contain critical work or reeditions of texts, always in the service of new historical information to be elicited : VII (*P.Laur.* IV 172 and military taxes, with Worp), VIII (*P.Mich.* XIII 665), XXII (*P.Mich.* III 160), and XXIII (*P.Bour.* 19). Two are extended reviews : XI (on *CPR* IX) and XVIII (on my *Egypt in Late Antiquity*). (VI is also in essence a detailed review of part of a book).

The remaining 8 are more synthetic or thematic : I (the collegial character of the pagarchy), II (the institutions of the hippodrome), III (the *bucellarii*), VI

(taxation after the Arab conquest), IX (« Les grands domaines »), XVI (Egyptian documentary codices), XIX (privileges of the clergy, mentioned earlier), and XXI (private petitions). Of these, by far the longest and best known is IX, on the large estates. But the study of documentary codices was hardly less important in its own sphere, even if it has not given rise to so much debate. IX has not been substantially revised here, in part perhaps because something so fundamental to the scholarship of late antiquity in the last quarter century no longer belongs solely to its author. Gascou's more recent thoughts on the subject can instead be found in XXI (pp. 444 ff.). That seems to me an appropriate way of handling this matter.

Running through the entirety of Gascou's work is a determination to place the study of late antique and Byzantine Egypt in the larger context of the early Byzantine world – the empire and its public institutions, the economy, the church, society. In his hands the papyri, inscriptions, and authors are illuminated by this context and in turn contribute to forming that larger picture. His learning and analytic powers are made more accessible with this fine volume, which should be on the shelves of everyone interested in the world it concerns.

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