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Antonia Tripolitis. *Religions of the Hellenistic-Roman Age*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2002. Pp. 165 \$16.00 (Paper).

[1] Antonia Tripolitis has written a book whose scope is broad not only in terms of chronology but also in terms of geography. Beginning with Alexander of Macedon's victory over the Persians in 331 B.C. and tracing the history and development of religious and philosophical cults / schools, trends, beliefs, and practices up through the end of the 4th century when Christianity became the official religion of the Roman empire, Tripolitis treats her subject matter in a careful and systematic manner. Her book is a welcome addition to the study of religion in the Roman empire, especially since it focuses not on traditional Roman religion but instead on the new cults and philosophies that were introduced into the Roman empire from the east, and their influences from the hellenization of the world by Alexander.

[2] The book is comprised of five chapters, plus an introduction and a summary. She first examines the Hellenistic-Roman World, with its various Mystery cults (Demeter, Dionysos, Isis, Cybele) and philosophical schools (Stoicism, Epicureanism, Middle Platonism). In the following three chapters she focuses on particular religions: Mithraism, Hellenistic Judaism, and Christianity. Finally, she examines Gnosticism.

[3] Tripolitis begins with a historical survey of the Hellenistic-Roman world before moving on to an examination of the Hellenistic Mystery cults. This is the most disappointing of the five chapters, as the author generalizes about the waning interest and confidence in traditional cults and gods in the fourth century B.C. Archaeological evidence at cult sites does not support this view, as she herself concedes, but then she claims that the ordinary man did not place his hope in the ancient gods, and hence, there is greater participation in the mystery cults at this time. This is unpersuasive. First, the mystery cults of Demeter and Dionysos had been popular for centuries and do represent hope in the ancient gods. Second, an increase in membership into these cults does not necessarily indicate a lack of worship in the more traditional cults, and in fact, the archaeological evidence points the opposite way. When Tripolitis focuses on the individual mystery cults, she competently traces the origins of the cults, their rise, and their popularity during various times from their inception through, in some cases, the 4th century. My concern with her discussion of the mystery cults

is that she omits a lot of recent scholarship on these cults (e.g., where is K. Clinton's work on Demeter?). Most of the bibliography for this chapter dates from the 1950s-1970s with few works published past 1990.

[4] The next three chapters treat individual religions: Mithraism, Hellenistic Judaism, and Christianity. For Mithraism Tripolitis gives a brief history of the deity, his major functions, the spread and appeal of this cult, the various steps in initiation into it, and its decline and disappearance. She nicely collects and interprets the iconography of this cult, which left behind few literary remains.

[5] Her discussion of Hellenistic Judaism begins with a historical survey of the Jewish diaspora and the hellenization of it, before examining specific authors who helped hellenize Judaism (e.g., Philo of Alexandria and Aristobolus). She ends this chapter with a discussion of the development of the synagogue. One of Tripolitis' strengths throughout the book is her ability to summarize lucidly an author's main theories, to discuss their greatest contributions in their field, and to trace the historical influence of these ideas. This is particularly evident in this chapter.

[6] The chapter concerning Christianity begins with a discussion of primitive Christianity and its growth and spread. She carefully examines the various terms in Hebrew and Aramaic that the Christians translated into Greek, and their significance in the new religion, as well as how Paul shaped early Christianity. She then traces Christianity's beliefs and practices as a community within a larger context and the problems that arose early on for the Christians. The second century witnessed a number of anti-Christian polemics as well as apologies, and Tripolitis summarizes and analyzes each side effectively. Her treatment of Christianity's development into a systematic religious philosophy includes very good summaries of the main contributions of authors such as Clement of Alexandria and Origen, and their legacies.

[7] The final chapter before the summary discusses Gnosticism, its nature, beliefs, historical origins, main principles, and primary systems. Again, some of the main proponents and major works of this philosophy are presented in a systematic, clear way.

[8] The main strengths of this book are Tripolitis' summaries of the main tenets of various religions and philosophies, their historical developments, the important authors or proponents of the religions or philosophical schools, her discussions of significant books or works of literature, and the tracings of the religions' rise and demise or success. Tripolitis has written a book aimed at the general reader, with few footnotes, that presents easy to understand arguments and summaries of not only religious trends but also philosophical ones during the Roman empire.

[9] A few criticisms that I have with the book should not detract from its value. I find the introduction, summary, and first chapter the weakest parts of the book as Tripolitis attempts to give broad interpretations of the beliefs held by the common man in the Hellenistic world, and Alexander's purpose in conquering so many lands. Alexander's conquests seem to have been motivated more by military aspirations (see E. Borza) than an attempt to unite the world and shape it. In addition, I find it misleading to give broad generalizations such as, "The Hellenistic-Roman age was an era of insecurity and anxiety" (2). I have more criticisms about the first part of the book when she discusses Hellenistic religions, such as when she

claims that the traditional cults fell out of favor (2). Such broad generalizations can mislead; cults need to be examined by one location at a time at a fixed date. When she finally focuses on the various religions and philosophy during the Hellenistic-Roman times she is much more focused, specific, and less prone to errors.

[10] Another general criticism that I have is that much of the material used by Tripolitis is old. Few books are as recent as the 1980s or 1990s, and much important new material has not been incorporated into this book.

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