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David Frankfurter. *Religion in Roman Egypt: Assimilation and Resistance*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. Pp. 314. No Price Listed.

[1] Specialists in classical and early Christian studies will welcome this new study of the religious environment in ancient Roman Egypt. While cast in the form of a long monograph, the book could just as easily serve as a handbook for scholars interested in the details of Egyptian religion leading up to and during the period of Christianization. So rich, in fact, is the detail that the reader is, at times, pressed to keep track of the guiding thesis that Frankfurter draws through the entire work. The patient reader, however, will discover interesting and challenging arguments, not only about the transformation of the religious environment of Egypt, but also about the way in which religious change takes place in human culture.

[2] According to Frankfurter, contrary to much received wisdom, the Christianization of Roman Egypt was not accomplished by the overthrow of traditional religion. Traditional religion, rather, lingered long into the Christian period and exerted a major influence upon the development of Egyptian Christianity. In fact, the author suggests, it is not unfair to say that the traditional culture absorbed Christianity rather than the other way around. Hence, we should no longer speak of the "decline of paganism" and the "triumph of Christianity;" the situation is much more complex than such rhetoric suggests. Frankfurter presents the basic outline of this thesis in the introductory chapter.

[3] In the six chapters that follow the introduction, Frankfurter departs from the more theoretical material of the introduction and launches into a detailed study of both the features and pervasiveness of traditional religion. Chapter two - Religion and Temples - makes a strong case that traditional temples and their associated cultural practices lingered for years despite Christian attempts to eradicate them. Chapter three - The Local Scope of Religious Belief - offers detailed and interesting descriptions of a variety of local Egyptian deities and the cults associated with them. The reader emerges from this chapter with a much-expanded understanding of the variety and complexity of Egyptian religious practice. The fourth chapter - Mutation of the Egyptian Oracle - traces the gradual replacement of

"regional" and "transregional" oracles with the prophetic voice of Christian ascetics. The fifth chapter explores the relationship between magicians and priests and the gradual ascription to the Christian priesthood of some characteristics formerly associated with traditional magic. Chapter six details the importance of the "Scriptorium" in the success of Christian monasticism in Egypt; Christian monks took up tasks and roles formerly carried out by traditional priests.

[4] In the final chapter - *Idiom, Ideology, and Iconoclasm: A Prolegomenon to the Conversion of Egypt* - Frankfurter discusses the final, at times violent, ascendancy of the Christian Church. While noting that in the fifth century the differences between Christian ideology and Egyptian traditional religious sensibilities finally resulted in an iconoclastic overturning of the visible symbols of the latter, he insists that, at a deeper level, the cultural patterns of the old order continued to endure.

[5] Throughout the book Frankfurter attempts to shore up his arguments with examples drawn from contemporary culture. For example, he looks briefly at nineteenth century cargo cults for insights into the iconoclasm of late antique Egypt (see p. 280). These efforts at comparative anthropology are interesting, but at times the selection criteria is not evident, and the overall effort at comparison seems forced.

[6] Nevertheless, Frankfurter's book offers rich fare to the reader willing to wade through the sea of detail. Its rich documentation and careful argumentation will assure it a place in research libraries and on the shelves of specialists.

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