

Byzantine, Islamic and Norman periods, this appears subservient to the written documents which, especially until c 1200, are exclusively literary. The problem relates mainly to limited publication of most (quite numerous) archaeological investigations conducted over recent decades, these often coming in advance of development or as part of the restoration of medieval monuments, and so following no clear research agenda. In addition, the archaeology of the built environment is little practised in Palermo, meaning that its medieval civilian architecture is almost totally unexplored. These circumstances illustrate that our understanding of the material past of Palermo is still likely to depend on important new discoveries, as can be gleaned from essays recently published in proceedings of the conference *Les dynamiques de l'islamisation en Méditerranée centrale et en Sicile: nouvelles propositions et découvertes récentes* (ed A Nef, with F Ardizzone, 2014).

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*Cyprus and the Balance of Empires. Art and Archaeology from Justinian I to the Cœur de Lion.* (American Schools of Oriental Research, Archaeological Reports 20; Caari Monograph Series 5). Edited by Charles Anthony Stewart, Thomas W Davis & Annemarie Weyl Carr. 22 × 29 cm. xviii + 268 pp, 138 colour and b&w pls and figs, 1 table. Boston, MA: The American Schools of Oriental Research, 2014. ISBN 978-0-89757-073-2. Price: £48.00 hb.

Until recently, studies of Cyprus in the late antique and medieval periods were often sidelined, despite the wealth of archaeological data. This collection of 12 papers, deriving from a conference held in 2010, goes a long way to highlighting the island's important role in these periods, not just as a conduit for the spread of ideas, but as an instigator of change. Papers by Procopiou, Rauthman, Parani and Papacostas in particular note that the archaeology, art and architecture and everyday material, indicate commonality with traditions from surrounding areas, but stress the importance of looking at Cyprus as innovative in its own right. Many of the papers tackle large surveys of material and issues such as past archaeological research (Davis and Stewart), Christianity in Cyprus (Rapp), Lead coins and seals (Metcalf), Byzantine architecture (Stewart), Icons (Sophocleous) and Saints and sacred topography (Papacostas) — very fitting for an island that has seen so many archaeological surveys. These review papers are balanced with presentations of new and unpublished data which challenge old perceptions, as for sites such as the basilicas at Agioi Pente Yeroskipou (Michaelides) and Katalymata ton Plakoton (Procopiou). The excellent thematic unity is in part due to the focus on research questions centring on the importance of the range of different contexts (political, research, geographical and historical), as outlined in the Preface.

Rapp's discussion of Christianity in Cyprus reveals the importance of the cult of the saints in emphasising local pride. What emerges out of this paper and those of Rautmann, Mansouri and Papacostas is the dichotomy between the view of Cyprus as 'provincial' by scholars and the very real evidence for its power and exertion of independence in this period. Papacostas makes striking points by examining the data for saints from internal and external perspectives: he suggests that local cults like those of saints Barnabas and Epiphanius were more popular with foreign rather than native pilgrims. Rautman's detailed analysis of the Troodos meanwhile provides excellent context for the late antique data through exploration of survey evidence; the abundant resources of the island are flagged and the organisation of the countryside made apparent; nonetheless, the need for excavation data on top of the survey evidence is emphasised. Fortunately, in some cases, this call is already being answered — and successfully — as shown by Procopiou's fine synthesis of recent investigations at Katalymata ton Plakoton, offering shrewd analysis of the excavation results in terms of the function of basilica space. In similar vein, other papers (eg Parani) stress the need for excavation to support evidence for a revival of towns in the middle Byzantine period. Weyl Carr provides good historical context for the Komnenian painting and populates this with painters and monks, not simply the iconography.

Beautifully and extensively illustrated throughout, the strengths of this collection lie in the impressively long periods covered and the inclusion of binary approaches such as urban/

rural life (Rautman), interior/exterior view of the islands (Papacostas) and religious/secular life (Parani). Much recommended.

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*A Rural Economy in Transition. Asia Minor from Late Antiquity into the Early Middle Ages.* (The Journal of Juristic Papyrology, Supplement XVIII). By A Izdebski. 17 × 24 cm. 261 pp, 9 colour figs, 24 b&w figs and tables. Warsaw: University of Warsaw/Raphael Taubenschlag Foundation, 2013. ISBN 978-83-925919-8-6. Price: €75.00 hb.

This book is without question innovative, contributing significantly to our knowledge of economic history from Late Antiquity to the Early Middle Ages. The geographical focus is the hinterland of Konya and adjoining regions that are compared and contrasted (both historically and methodologically) with other areas of Asia Minor, such as Bithynia, Paphlagonia and Cappadocia. The volume places economic issues (ie the evaluation and quantification of agricultural production and its effects on landscape transformation) at the heart of historical debate, emphasising the contributions of material sources and archaeometric analysis (palaeobotanical and palynological) for defining the spaces of the economic change. The author defines the transition period as starting in the 6th century but spreading unevenly in geographical space throughout the 7th.

The book is divided into two parts. In the first, Izdebski analyses those sources traditionally used for indicating changes in occupation and landuse of a given area: ceramic distribution, frequency and types; and continuity/gaps in site and church activity, based on archaeological and survey projects. Data are considered mainly for tracing lines of development through time and space. The author presents a complex structure in Late Antiquity, if with regional and sub-regional variations, with villages as the basic socio-economic units but with heightened fortification building during the Early Middle Ages. The transformation of the landscape is argued to start fully in the 6th century and continuing across the entire 7th.

The book's second part details work by numerous teams (local and international) in the study territory. After a precise explanation of palaeobotany, of both its methodology and its significance in providing accurate ecological data, the author underlines the wealth of these data types here, built up since the 1960s. The evidence shows how this macro-region gradually lost the socio-economic homogeneity typical of Late Antiquity, 'global' and centralised through productive systems revolving around villas. During the 6th century, a completely different agricultural landscape emerges, featuring wide uncultivated spaces. Unlike the 5th century, still characterised by rural expansion, from the 6th century the landscape witnesses a different kind of agriculture, one privileging livestock breeding, grain cultivation and a productive re-use of marshy areas. Certainly, some disintegration of the late antique system can be linked to strategic-military issues, as in the later militarised Arab-Byzantine border area. In this case the archaeological and palynological data yield evidence of a systematic abandonment of rural areas, which affects Konya and Beyşehir, and stretches to the Pontic mountains in the north, confirming the hypothesis that the entire south east of Anatolia was scarcely populated. Only well protected areas (probably peripheral in the previous period), such as northern Bithynia and Paphlagonia, show contrasting tendencies, ie signs of settlement and landuse continuity. Elsewhere, only with stability in the 9th century were conditions available for the site re-occupation and agricultural renewal.

A significant contribution here is the abandonment of the paradigm based on the binary opposition 'site/no site' for evaluating variations in rural landscapes, within which it is impossible to delineate the precise process of transformation of agricultural areas without stratigraphic excavations, as demonstrated for Sagalassos and Balboura. Instead, the complexity of landscapes becomes the basic unit of investigation, revealing how fundamental it is to understand past ecological aspects to reconstruct historical processes and the complex interactions between human groups and their natural environment in key time periods.

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