Review

ANDREW CONNOR, *CONFISCATION OR COEXISTENCE: EGYPTIAN TEMPLES IN THE AGE OF AUGUSTUS* (New Texts from Ancient Cultures). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2022. Pp. xiii + 224: illus., facs., map, plan. ISBN 9780472133222 (hbk), 9780472220656 (ebook). £71.00/$75.00.

Andrew Connor investigates the historical narrative concerning Roman treatment of Egyptian religion in the years following Octavian's conquest of Egypt. This narrative centres on the alleged confiscation of property belonging to the Egyptian temples by the Roman authorities. The author argues convincingly that no such confiscation happened and that temples were not made compliant by removing their land holdings, a procedure that supposedly contributed to the collapse of Egyptian religion.

After the introduction, the book is structured in two parts. Part I, ch. 2 comprises the examination of the available texts said to reference the confiscation of scared land. Ch. 3 looks at how the priests phrased the rhetoric of loss and chaos. Ch. 4 offers an interpretation of the references in priestly petitions to conflict between the temples and the Romans regarding sacred land. In Part II, the author turns to the wider context of Roman behaviour: ch. 5 considers the possible Roman motivation for confiscation. Ch. 6 investigates how confiscation could have worked in practice. Ch. 7 explores the question of why the confiscation narrative made such inherent sense to the scholars who established and accepted it in the early twentieth century.

Temple building was the most monumental, and thus visible, expression of the authorities' commitment in Egypt. If the Romans had indeed confiscated temple property, it would have had serious, far-reaching implications, which, according to C., cannot be observed in the documents. He therefore refutes the confiscation theory. His book is based mainly on a new interpretation of *P.Tebt.* 2.302 (71–72 C.E.), the key document for the confiscation theory. It was excavated by Grenfell and Hunt at Tebtunis during their 1899–1900 season and published by them in 1907. In an appendix, C. presents the Greek transcript as well as Grenfell and Hunt's English translation. He shows that, from this one fragmentary document, they extrapolated a country-wide confiscation of temple land. He explains that the British historians were affected by their own colonial perspective towards Egypt. If examined without imposing the views of the early twentieth century, the papyrus shows a localised property dispute, not an attestation of a province-wide policy. To describe the relationships between the Egyptian priests and the Roman state, C. explores the linguistic and socio-cultural contexts through a range of further documents, mostly Greek and some Demotic. His logical arguments offer an insight into the negotiations of Egyptian priests with the Roman administration concerning their property.

The book takes a welcome interdisciplinary approach, considering both Roman understanding and priestly expectations. It does not, however, look at the temples themselves, which would have strengthened C.'s points. The question of how many Egyptian temples were constructed or decorated under Octavian-Augustus is not posed. From the very beginning of their rule in Egypt, Roman emperors continued the gigantic temple construction and decoration programme that the Ptolemies had initiated (see e.g. Hölbl, *Altägypten im Römischen Reich* (2000–5)). The interaction between Egyptian deities and humanity's protagonist, the emperor in the role of the Egyptian pharaoh, was central to the development of the province, at least in the understanding of the Egyptian priests, and emphasises the temples' far-reaching socio-cultural importance and financial needs. C. correctly sees the Egyptian priests not as 'clueless victims of a wily empire' which stripped them of 'vibrancy' (185). Indeed, their vibrancy becomes apparent through the highly intellectual language and a vastly expanded hieroglyphic writing system that scholar-priests of the Graeco-Roman period developed for the temples.

Egyptian temples were constructed and expanded on a large scale into the second century C.E. and to a much lower degree into the third. Their walls were decorated under Ptolemaic and Roman rule on an unprecedented scale with ritual scenes and inscriptions that provide manifold insights into the religious thinking of the priests, cult topography, mythology, etc. The reign of Augustus exemplifies the pattern of royal involvement in such constructions. Under his rule, more temples were initiated and decorated than under any other Roman emperor. His fictitious role of a cultic pharaoh in the temple decoration was sufficient for the priests and did not threaten his republican claims.

Decisions to build and decorate temples were, to some extent, driven by the priests and native élite, whose life focused on the temples, but the question of whether, and to what extent, ideological and financial considerations of the entire empire played a role in decision-making in and for Egypt still needs to be explored. Egypt was not only the obvious source of many products the empire needed, but also a highly important interface for trade with territories beyond, such as India and Africa. Decisions in and for Egypt thus had wider implications that could attract the emperors' attention. C. makes it clear that the Roman imperial forces did not go out of their way to confiscate sacred land holdings. On the contrary, Egyptian temples thrived architecturally and intellectually during the first centuries of Roman rule, for which they needed financial resources.

To conclude, C.'s carefully researched book provides a fresh understanding of the key document *P.Tebt.* 2.302 and its property dispute, which does not attest province-wide policy, but a localised quarrel. By explaining in detail why he is refuting the confiscation narrative, he has contributed a vital basis for further interdisciplinary explorations of Roman Egypt.

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