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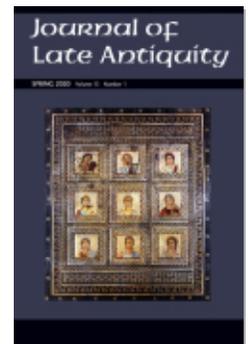
Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity by David Frankfurter (review)

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Journal of Late Antiquity, Volume 13, Number 1, Spring 2020, pp. 177-179
(Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/jla.2020.0004>



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to their Greek source, the editors have provided a helpful appendix that reproduces their Latin critical editions in parallel columns alongside the Greek text of Athanasius's account of Anthony's life reprinted from the Sources Chrétiennes edition of G. J. M. Bartelink published in 1994 (*Concordantia versionum cum textu graeco*, 187–336).

Christianizing Egypt: Syncretism and Local Worlds in Late Antiquity

DAVID FRANKFURTER

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2017.
Pp. xxii + 336. ISBN 978-0-691-17697-0

Reviewed by Aaltje Hidding
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This is an admirably well-written study of the complex progress of religious transformation in late antique Egypt. Interesting for students of Late Antiquity, early Christianity and Egyptian religion as well as for scholars studying religious transformation, the book proposes a new model for envisioning the ways in which Christianity developed as it integrated into late antique Egyptian society. Frankfurter has published extensively on Roman and Late Antique Egypt. Especially with his earlier book *Religion in Roman Egypt*, he has triggered debates about continuity and change in Egyptian religion as the Roman Empire became Christian.

Chapter 1 begins with a charm written by a monk in the seventh century (Berlin 8313b), dealing with Horus and Isis in order to heal abdominal pain. This charm allows Frankfurter to introduce various issues, such as the appearance of a magical text mentioning Isis and Horus in a Christian environment. Rather than viewing Egyptian elements found in

Christian contexts as “pagan survivals,” Frankfurter sees them as building blocks in the process of Christianization. He reintroduces the term “syncretism” for the continuity of religious practices in the domestic sphere (Chapter 2), homes of holy men (Chapter 3), sanctuaries (Chapter 4), workplaces (Chapter 5), monasteries (Chapter 6) and the landscape (Chapter 7).

The term “syncretism” locates religious transformation firmly in the social worlds of the believers. Referring to the term *habitus* as coined by Pierre Bourdieu (22, 72–73) and “habit memory” as used by cognitive psychologists (103), Frankfurter sees the use of certain charms, amulets and votive donations as traditional responses to common situations (Chapter 2). Their habit memories also prompted Egyptian holy men to perform healing rituals and to fulfill oracular roles (Chapter 3). They induced visitors of sanctuaries to continue to perform their traditional rituals, such as walking in processions, dancing during festivals and practicing incubation (Chapter 4). In workshops, client and craftsman conceptualized objects according to traditional iconographic strategies (Chapter 5). Scribes, too, continued to fulfill their roles as literate experts, writing charms, spells and oracular tickets. In contrast, Frankfurter argues that scribes did not rely on habit memories but consciously used archaic literature to create new Christian texts (Chapter 6). In the final chapter, Frankfurter suggests that long after the temples had fallen out of use monks created a new Christian landscape by demolishing these places (Chapter 7).

Although the term “syncretism” provides us with a useful term for a society's encounter with a different belief

system, some loose ends can be observed in Frankfurter's methodology. When incorporating a new set of ideas into an existing religious tradition, syncretism is not the only factor in play. In studying the human mind, cognitive scientists indeed examine "habit memory," but they also take into account "factual memory" (memories of the facts that form our general knowledge of the world) and "personal memory" (memories of events we personally experienced in the past). The most important reason for this division is that people with different types of brain damage may lose one type of memory and yet retain others.

Frankfurter's exclusive focus on habit memories leads him to the conclusion, for instance, that images of the *mater lactans* have their roots in some universal habit memory: they are found throughout the Mediterranean world since the Bronze Age (166–67). Similarly, he compares practices such as the depositing of votive objects at the sanctuary of Isis in Egypt with examples from other ancient and modern cultures (128). Although cognitive scientists would agree that some human habits are universal, we are left wondering how these habit memories were integrated into the ideological framework of Christianity (122).

A discussion about factual memory could have provided the reader with an explanation. In late antique Egypt, Christians listened to sermons in their local church, celebrated feast days together and would thus have had a significant body of shared knowledge of scripture and doctrine ("factual memory") alongside practice ("habit memory"). Frankfurter rightly stresses that the Christianization of Egypt was not a top-down process, imposed through the authority of bishops and monks, but developed differently

in various social spheres. His explanation of this process, however, restricts itself to syncretism. Frankfurter does divide up the term as manifesting itself in the "landscape," "gesture" (culturally ingrained habits or "habit memory") and "agency" (deliberate decisions taken in regard to religious practises) (20–24). It remains nevertheless unclear how new factual memories were created to explain the new meanings of certain habit memories.

Furthermore, an examination of personal memory may have prevented Frankfurter from confusing the social worlds in which particular habit memories were performed. For although he duly acknowledges that oracular tickets found at sanctuaries differ from miracles described in hagiography (189), he still uses literary, papyrological and archaeological sources alongside each other without distinguishing the very different contexts in which they came about.

Despite, for instance, the problematic nature of hagiographical sources for reconstructing religious history, Frankfurter still uses them to illustrate non-Christian religious practices. This has been one of the main points of criticism of his *Religion in Roman Egypt* and it is problematic in this book as well. For as a result, the fifth-century speeches of Shenoute and six- and seventh-century hagiographical texts about "pagan" practices lead him to the conclusion that non-Christian families guarded their religion against Christian public hegemony (44–47). The ideological tension that Frankfurter discerns between the religious world at home and that of ecclesiastical institutions (48) thus is based on a Christian worldview. In a similar vein, his conclusion that the sanctuary of Isis in Menouthis remained a rival of the

sanctuary of John and Cyrus in the fifth century rests on a series of sixth-century homilies (134–35) and his suggestion that monks “might well have responded with an iconoclasm” when confronted with “pagan” beliefs in spirits at ancient temples (241–42) is based mainly on reactions by monks as described in hagiographical literature. As recent scholarship has demonstrated, this literature does not necessarily reflect reality.

In the afterword, Frankfurter returns to the theme of syncretism. Using this new approach, he is able to move away from the idea of conversion and towards the ways in which people interacted with these new ideas. His conclusion that their habit memories helped Egyptian Christians to formulate new stories in correspondence with their *habitus* is valuable, though he does not make full use of cognitive science in order to strengthen his argument. A stronger methodological approach would have made this well-written book an even better read.

Monasteries and the Care of Souls in Late Antique Christianity

PAUL C. DILLEY

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017.

Pp. xii + 350. ISBN: 978-1-107-18401-5

Reviewed by Caroline T. Schroeder
(University of Oklahoma at Norman)

In his compelling and meticulously researched monograph, Paul Dilley brings a fresh analysis of early Christian monasticism, one which I expect will influence most future studies in this area. *Monasteries and the Care of the Soul* centers “heart-work”: the “cognitive disciplines” that “trained *embodied* minds” through monastic practices such as prayer, scriptural exercises, repentance, and the very

ritual of committing to the monastic life (15). Applying insights about the mind from cognitive theory, the author asks how monastic disciplines helped to shape the late antique mind (and thus, late antique life). Dilley focuses on Egyptian communal monasticism, particularly sources from the Pachomian Federation and Shenoute’s Federation, but includes in his analysis a wide-ranging set of material from Syria, North Africa, Palestine, Italy, Gaul, and elsewhere in Egypt.

The book itself is well-organized and beautifully written, with clear prose, helpful introductions for each section, and conclusions for each chapter. The Introduction provides an overview of early monasticism as well as Dilley’s method. The author builds on aspects of cognitive science to create a “cognitive historicism” (10). Dilley considers three key monastic cognitive disciplines (“study, meditation, and recitation of Scripture” [15]), as well as metacognition (knowledge and thinking about the process of cognition). In doing so, he develops a new monastic “theory of mind” (14).

The book contains three parts: Evaluating Postulants, Cognitive Disciplines, and Collective Heart-work. Part I contains two chapters on the entrance and ascetic formation of new monks. Augustine’s reflections on two dilemmas in examining postulants launch this unit: Is an aspiring monk’s “social background” a reason to “suspect their motivations”? How can the examiner “determine a postulant’s character,” especially their “propensity for sin and capacity for obedience?” (37–38) The first chapter on “Discerning Motivation” is subtitled “Status and Vocation.” It breaks down motivations—and monastic leaders’ perceptions of such motivations—by gender, legal status, and life stage, including children and older