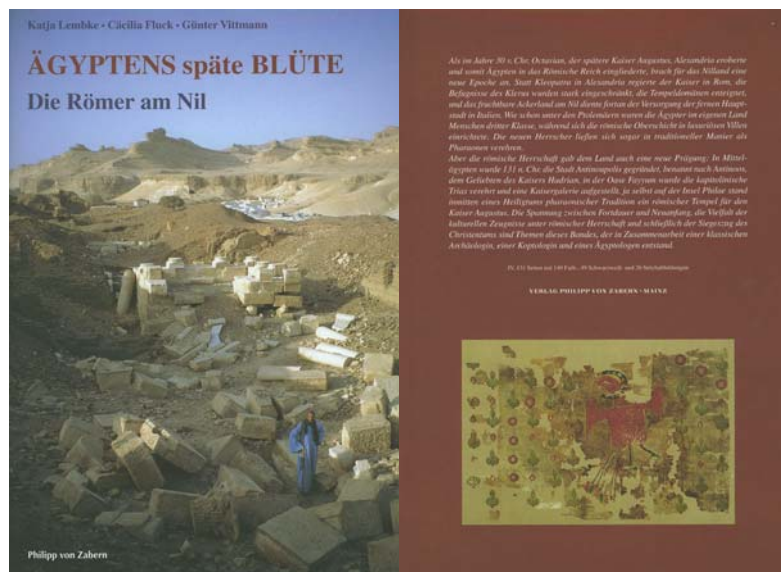


Lembke, K., C. Fluck & G. Vittmann. 2004. *Ägyptens späte Blüte. Die Römer am Nil. – Mainz, Philipp von Zabern (Sonderbände der Antiken Welt)*

Review of J. Moje



The present book, a co-production of three Egyptologists resp. Coptologists, was conceived as an overview of Egypt in its latest period of antiquity, the Roman occupation from 30 BC up until the Arab Conquest in the 7th century. At the beginning there is a map, clearly marked with all the villages, towns, oasis and routes mentioned in the text, for the most part showing both old and recent names.

The introduction (p. 3) presents the construction of this volume and introduces the beginnings of Roman interest in Egypt, with particular emphasis on the famous Kleopatra and Marcus Antonius. The first chapter (p. 4–12) outlines the history of Egypt after the death of Kleopatra VII. Lembke compares the first ‘strong men’ of the two foreign occupations, Alexander the Great and Octavian/Augustus, where she sees significant distinctions between these two leaders. On the one side there was Alexander, who was accepted by Egyptian priests and crowned as pharaoh (it was also his own desire!), on the other side she describes the military occupation of Egypt through the Romans, who had no understanding for the Egyptian religion and traditions, frequently only regarding them with contempt. Octavian saw Egypt as a new and lucrative province for the benefit of the *Imperium Romanum*. Particularly because of its wealth, Egypt held an exceptional position until the imperial crisis in the 3rd century, after the reign of Caracalla. In addition, in the administration, the local *stratego*i lost their control over the military, which was now exercised by Roman officials. All this was intended to minimize the risks caused by the accumulation of too much power in one person. The economic power of Egypt was the most important one in the *Imperium*, this province became the biggest ‘granary’ for Rome and the whole *Imperium Romanum*. But, for the ‘normal’ Egyptians, workers, peasants in the country etc., not very much had changed. The eyes of many historians (even Egyptologists) are frequently focused on the preserved monuments and documents, which are more often related to the social strata associated with higher status individuals. The Egyptian *nedjes* was not involved in politics and religious *dilemmata* of the upper and priests’ classes.

Some emperors had special interests in Egypt and its traditions. The first *imperator*, who is seen to be worshipped as a god, is Gaius (Caligula), who took over the Egyptian role of the pharaoh as god Horus on earth. But Gaius never saw himself as a successor of the Egyptian pharaohs. He was not adored in the Egyptian tradition, but used the Egyptian ideology only for the godlike super elevation of his own person, which was never possible in Roman traditions.

The Flavians, Vespasianus and his son Titus, accepted the Egyptian traditions to a much higher degree. The former visited the Serapis temple in Alexandria, and the latter took part in the cultic inthronisation of a new Apis bull in Memphis when he was crown prince. This influenced Italy with an interest in Egyptian religion. Under Domitianus, a huge Egyptian style sanctuary was built for the worship of Egyptian gods in Benevent, 200 km south of the capital, and at the same time the *Iseum Campense* in Rome was completely re-erected after its burn-down.

The next important event was the visit of emperor Hadrianus 130/1 AD. On this journey, Antinous, the friend of Hadrianus, died in the Nile, and Hadrianus founded a new town to his honour, Antinoupolis. That was the fourth settlement in Egypt with Greek municipal laws (following Alexandria, Naukratis and Ptolemais) and

the first and only Roman foundation in Egypt. In this period books concerning Egyptian matters were prohibited. This seems to be the beginning of decline of hieroglyphs, a script (and language), which the Romans were not able to control.

During the 3rd century, the history of Egypt was determined by several revolts and the lost of Lower Nubia. The emperor Diocletianus was the last Roman ruler to visit Egypt. The Thebais was separated from the rest of Egypt in order to control the continuous rebellions in southern regions. At the beginning of the 4th century, under Maximinus Daia, the last hieroglyphic cartouches of a contemporary ruler were carved in a temple. Following these events, Egypt's exceptional status was completely lost, and in 395 AD, after the division of the imperium in West and East Rome, Egypt belonged to East Rome, the later Byzantine imperium. The development and expansion of Christian religion, especially the prohibition of pagan cults 391 AD and the division of the empire, hastened the decline of ancient Egyptian religion and traditions. This period can be defined as the definitive end of the special Roman province *Aegyptus*.

The second chapter (p. 13–25) deals with the Roman view of Egypt. Egyptian culture radiated a huge attraction on the Roman conquerors. Lembke divided this into three phases. The first is the phenomenon of Egyptomania at the beginning of imperial times. Particularly in early Augusteian reign, images of the Nile played an important role in Italian wall paintings. Examples are the 'House of Augustus', the 'House of Livia' or the *Aula Isiaca*, all on the Palatin.

The second phase is the political legitimisation of the Flavian Dynasty after 69 AD by means of Egyptian cults. Domitianus, in particular, used Egyptian religion for the vindication of his own reign. In his period fell the building of the sanctuary of Benevent and of the *Iseum Campense*.

In the third phase, in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, Egyptian cults, mostly connected with Isis, spread all over the *Imperium*, not exclusively in Italy. On the other hand, in parallel to the spread of Egyptian ideas, the Roman view of the Ptolemies remained a very negative one, caused by the disastrous economic situation at the beginning of Roman rule. The Hellenistic kings were seen as decadent and incompetent in political affairs. Also the animal cults were not accepted by the Romans, being completely contrary to Roman practices. These facts combined to form a society of three classes: firstly the Roman inhabitants, secondly the Greeks and partly the Jews. The Egyptians formed the lowest, third class, which had to pay the highest taxes and received the fewest rights.

In the third chapter (p. 26–36), the author introduces traditions and innovations in the community under Roman rule. The four Greek (resp. Roman) *poleis*, Alexandria, Naukratis, Ptolemais and Antinoupolis are described. After this Hermupolis is presented as an example of an Egyptian nome capital. In Egypt there are about 40 of this *metropoleis*. Here the ancient Egyptian cults and traditions are still alive, alongside the adoption of Greek culture like the erection of temples for Greek deities or the adoption of Greek educational institutions (e.g. the *Gymnasion*). Only in the small villages, away from the big cities and towns, the ancient religion stayed the most important one during Roman rule.

The fourth chapter (p. 37–50) deals with the religion, including old and new deities. A new element in Egyptian cultic practices was the cult of the emperors. In Pharaonic times, the king was seen as a 'Horus on earth', and the Romans tried to associate themselves with this welcome religious legitimization of the ruler. The cult buildings of Greek/Roman type are concentrated only in five towns, Alexandria, Arsinoe, Hermupolis, Oxyrhynchos and Antinoupolis.

During Roman rule over Egypt, the appearance of deities changed. Because of the distinctions between different forms of integration of Greek deities and traditions, it is not really possible to make a general statement concerning cult forms in Roman Egypt, but there are some specialized forms which are in contrast to those in other Roman provinces. Egyptian deities can be indicated with Greek names but they also can be identified with their Greek counterparts. It is clearly visible that the sole theriomorph forms become increasingly anthropomorph. Roman styled temples for Iuppiter, Iuno and Minerva, Mars or Apollo are never erected in Egypt, and it is only in Alexandria where we find the adoration of Greek and Roman gods. Special phenomena are the syncretistic gods, combinations of Egyptian and Greek ideas. The most important one of these deities was Serapis (known since the time of Ptolemaios I). On the other hand, adoration of ancient Egyptian gods flourished during Roman times, and this is clearly visible in the great Greek and Roman temple complexes in Upper Egypt, as well as the Serapeum of Memphis or the Bucheum in Armant. The cult of Isis flourished and was also performed in many regions of the *Imperium Romanum*.

In the fifth chapter (p. 51–65), Lembke gives an overview of the funeral practices in Roman Egypt. In Alexandria, there existed two different funeral practices. The Greeks either cremated their deceased, or they buried the whole body. The author describes the *necropoleis* of Alexandria with a focus on Kom es-Shugafa, illustrated with several pictures and architectural drawings. In Roman times, some deceased were mummified in ancient Egyptian manner. After this, the reader is provided with information about other cemeteries in Egypt, especially Tuna el-Gebel and the tomb of the Soter family in Thebes (a reused New Kingdom tomb).

The sixth chapter (p. 66–84) deals with the cultural connections in border regions like the oases, the Eastern Desert and the upper Nile regions. The decoration of Egyptian–Roman tombs are analysed in detail, including sites from Dachla (Petubastis, Petosiris, Keinos) and Siwa (Siamun, crocodiles tomb). The paintings were rendered in Egyptian and Greek styles, mixed or in direct proximity to each other. After this, the author gives an overview of the different temples in these regions, e.g. Dusch, Taffe, Dabod, Philae etc.

The 7th chapter ‘Schrift und Verwaltung’ (p. 85–98) is written by Günter Vittmann. Vittmann describes the different scripts and languages and their development in Roman Egypt, including Hieroglyphs, Hieratic and Demotic, as well as, in a short chapter, Greek, Latin and Coptic. The second part deals with the administration: several officials and their functions are introduced, including the *praefectus Aegypti* (the ‘governor’ of the emperor in Egypt), the *conventus* (for legal decisions), and different officials of central and regional administrations. This part ends with information about the taxation and the reforms of emperor Diokletianus.

The last part of the book is about ‘Spätantike und frühes Christentum in Ägypten’ by Cäcilia Fluck. She explains the political development in Late Antiquity Egypt and the growth and history of Egyptian Christianity. Special focus is made on the monks, the Kellia (a settlement of eremites), the pilgrims centrum Abu Mina and the famous Copts Pachom and Schenute. In addition, information about the language, every day life, villages and funeral practices are provided.

After this excursus in post–Roman times the user will find a timetable. This is subdivided into the reigns of the Roman emperors, with additional notes about selected important events concerning Roman Egypt. In my opinion, this table and the notes could have been a bit more comprehensive.

At the end of the entire volume there are some very rich appendices. The list of literature is structured into the themes as follows: general, history, Egyptomania, Alexandria, infrastructure, religion, temples, funerary cults, oasis, the Eastern Desert and southern border, writing, administration and Late Antiquity. Writing is subdivided into the different languages and scripts. So every user, even non–Egyptologists, can easily find references to his/her special field of interest. The following notes contain all the important literature on the subject, including newest books and articles.

This volume by Lembke, Fluck & Vittmann is a very interesting, excellently illustrated and well–substantiated and investigated reference book about Egypt in Roman and Christian times for any reader interested in this period of Egypt’s past. In addition, the quality of the book itself demonstrates the publisher’s very high publication standards, which is something that we are used to.

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