

religion, culture, and media technology. These issues are effectively addressed in Sharif Islam's "Media, Religion and Citizenship in the Mosque-Building Debates in Europe," in Janice Peck's "The Politics of 'Empowerment' in Oprah Winfrey's Global Philanthropy," and in Ann Hardy's "Spirituality in Flight: Making Meaning around State-Sector Television Commercials."

The key flaw of this collection of studies is the all-too-apparent lack of scholars of religion as participants in the conversation. This lack reflects a tendency that, unfortunately, is characteristic of a number of similar collections published in the past. The issue can no longer be ignored, as it can and does undermine the quality of some of the scholarship in the field of religion and media. Most of the authors in the present volume, for instance, ignore the fact that, in a world in which mass media are becoming central mechanisms of social change, many religious institutions are quickly realizing that they cannot remain passive observers of this process if they are to maintain their relevance in contemporary global culture. Indeed, a considerable number of religious communities have profited from their engagement with mass media, expanding their membership base and transforming social, cultural, and political contexts that, until recently, were resistant to anything overtly 'spiritual'. The few references to more traditional religious ideas and beliefs found among these studies are too vague to merit serious attention. To be sure, the explicit purpose of the book is to explore the 'spiritual', not the 'religious' dimensions of contemporary media; however, both terms remain equally obscure in the current global context, as does the nature of the relationship between them. Even if the reader is willing to accept the concept of 'spirituality' in its radically open sense, he or she will likely have a difficult time grasping the reason for the inclusion of four or five of the texts in this collection.

These criticisms aside, *Media, Spiritualities and Social Change* contains a sufficient number of interesting and relevant studies. As such, the book constitutes a valuable resource, not only for scholars of religion and media, but also for college teachers and university professors who engage in the exploration of the presence of religion or spirituality in contemporary culture in their classrooms.

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***Early Christian Books in Egypt***

Roger S. Bagnall. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

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Reviewed by Stéphanie Machabée, McGill University

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*Early Christian Books in Egypt* is written by papyrologist and professor of ancient history at New York University, Roger S. Bagnall. This scholar enters into the

dialogue of early Christian papyrus manuscripts found in Egypt, not with the intention of completing a survey of the material, but rather to challenge what has been said about certain topics in the field. Bagnall seeks to demonstrate that much of the scholarship that engages with early Christian book fragments has been misleading and has not taken into account the realities of the ancient world. The book is arranged into four chapters.

Bagnall begins by explaining why he enters into the discussion of early Christian books from Egypt: ‘what has led me to trespass onto this intellectual territory is my unease with what I see as the excessively self-enclosed character and absence of self-awareness of much of that scholarship’ (1). Focusing on pre-Constantinian Christian manuscripts, Bagnall argues that papyrus manuscripts have frequently been dated too early. In his challenge, he acknowledges what is at stake: ‘it shows just how vital the existence and early dating of the papyri are to the entire conception of the development of Christianity in Egypt’ (5). Using the Leuven Database of Ancient Books as his starting point, Bagnall surveys how various scholars have dated early Christian papyri from Egypt. He observes the estimated Christian population size in Egypt in the early centuries and, using these numbers, calculates the expected number of surviving Christian books to demonstrate that the odds are extremely low that late first or early second century Christian papyri would survive. He states that the number of surviving Christian books before the Severan period (193–235 C.E.) would likely be no more than one or two, even though scholarship has identified more.

In the second chapter, Bagnall examines two controversial case studies regarding the dating of ancient manuscripts. The first case handles the late Carsten Peter Thiede’s 1995 article “Papyrus Magdalen Greek 17 (Gregory-Aland P64). A Reappraisal,” in *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 105, and the book that followed it. According to Bagnall, ‘Thiede argued in the article that the Magdalen papyrus, along with other parts of the same manuscript then in Barcelona, was to be dated to the first century’ (27). This was argued despite other scholars who dated it to around the end of the second century, or later. Bagnall summarizes and points out the faults in Thiede’s arguments. According to the logic of Thiede’s argument for the dating to the first century, his readers are presented ‘with an utterly fantastic tale of a complete Christian-Jewish split during the 60s’ (37). The example of Thiede illustrates the troubling aspects of palaeographic dating of early Christian books.

The second case engages with the dating of volume 69 of Oxyrhynchus Papyri, specifically the problem of dating P.Iand I 4, an issue raised by Antonio Carlini. He perceives the dating of a papyrus of the Shepherd to the first half of the second century as facing an insurmountable difficulty, for diffusion of this work to Egypt would have had to be quite short. Bagnall summarizes how Carlini resolves his dilemma by theorizing that Shepherd was a composite of two originally independent

collections. This enables him to maintain an earlier date. Bagnall presents these two case studies in order to contend the structural similarities between the two. He affirms that even among qualified scholars, consensus on dating is difficult to attain, where issues of dating can be influenced by biased agendas.

In chapter three, Bagnall studies the economics of book production in Egypt. He cites a variety of sources in order to calculate the costs of codices, taking into account the cost of different materials, the size of the codices, and the cost of labour. He then provides a practical table which calculates the cost in solidi for one (unbound) bible, assuming the labour costs of four different qualities of writing and the use of either parchment or papyrus. Bagnall also considers the re-use of papyrus and whether monastic labour lowered the cost of book production. He again concludes that it is highly unlikely to find many Christian books datable to the second century or earlier.

The final chapter examines the spread of the codex. Bagnall explains how statements that claim Christians had a distinctive preference for codex form, to a degree that was not paralleled by non-Christians 'are partly misleading and need significant qualification' (71). Again using data compiled from the Leuven Database of Ancient Books, Bagnall demonstrates that scholars cannot maintain that the codex was a specifically Christian book-form, or that Christianity was the primary force behind the move from roll to codex in the Roman world. The origin of the codex remains uncertain. He acknowledges that Christians adopted the codex form early on, but he dismisses existing hypotheses that explain this early adoption. Instead he proposes that this adoption is rather the result of Romanization, 'the spread of Roman habits and technologies throughout the empire' (87).

Although Bagnall's calculations and reappraisals are highly hypothetical, where he often depends on techniques of extrapolations, his book brings awareness to the subjective approach of dating early Christian manuscripts from Egypt. The amount of Christian papyri from the first and second centuries is likely fewer than previously believed, and therefore there is little evidence for the spread of Christianity in Egypt before this period. Bagnall's book is short but highly informative, easy to read, and provides valuable insight on important issues. Even if the reader may not agree with his insights on the topic, his survey of early Christian book material and his engagement with the scholarship is worth the read.