

(*azādarāġt*) al que en Tabaristán, según la información que ofrece al-Qazwīnī sus gentes llaman *tahak* (p. 41).

La labor de estudio de esta sección primera realizada por las autoras es excelente, desde el estudio preliminar sobre el autor y su obra, como en el posterior de traducción, anotación y estudio del texto, junto con el complemento de los índices. Las Prof.<sup>as</sup> Bejarano y Cabo han llevado a cabo una labor admirable en esta interesantísima sección dedicada a las especies botánicas.

Las autoras han sabido captar a la perfección el texto árabe en su traducción castellana, pero al mismo tiempo su labor analítica ha logrado un estudio espléndido que las ha llevado a indagar con detalle y esmero en cada una de las especies de las que trata al-Qazwīnī en esta sección primera. Si detallada es la identificación de términos botánicos, rigurosa es la labor de verificación terminológica a la que se han entregado las dos autoras, logrando con ello una obra al tiempo sobria, sólida y de gran rigor científico con la que enriquecen el panorama de los estudios sobre historia de la ciencia, en concreto de una de sus especialidades, la botánica, y sus ulteriores proyecciones agronómicas, médicas, lexicográficas y culturales en general, como así lo prueba de forma soberbia esta obra.

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RUFFINI, Giovanni R., *Medieval Nubia. A Social and Economic History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 295 pp. ISBN: 978-0-19-989163-4

The book by Giovanni Ruffini, Associate Professor of History and Classical Studies at Fairfield University, is the first publication on Nubia by Oxford University Press. The fact that such a prestigious publishing house decided to make an appearance in Nubian Studies with a new-comer in the discipline and with a topic never before treated in the length and depth of a monography should be seen as a significant marker of the exceptional quality of the final product.

Of course, Ruffini has already become an important reference in the field of social and economic history of Late Antiquity in the Nile Valley. In 2008, the student of Roger Bagnal published at Cambridge University Press the first book-length application of the method of social network analysis to the ancient world, using the abundant documentary evidence from sixth-century Oxyrhynchos and Aphrodito in Egypt. His monograph «Social Networks in Byzantine Egypt» was seen as a most welcome contribution to the field of social history of the Early Medieval era (see E.R. O'Connell, review in *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 41:1 [2010], pp. 173-174).

Equally welcome is Ruffini's contribution to the social and economic history of Medieval Nubia. Both the geographical context and the historical period he examines in «Medieval Nubia; A Social and Economic History», as well as the

amount of data available to him for this publication are rather different than those for his first book, though.

Ruffini turned his attention to Nubia, the southern neighbor of Egypt already in 2008. His academic background, profile, and experience helped him obtain the permission of the Egypt Exploration Society to study and publish the ca. 300 textual finds (for this number, see Ruffini 2012, 11) written in the Old Nubian language - and dating from the first half of the second millennium CE - that have been in the possession of the Society since the 1960s excavations at the site of Qasr Ibrim.

Qasr Ibrim was «a hilltop fortress settlement central to the administration and defense of Lower Nubia» (Ruffini 2012, 1) from the Bronze Age world (3rd millennium BCE) down to the Ottoman period (ending in the 19th century). In the medieval centuries, it was the see of a cathedral and the base of important office-holders of the Makuritan kingdom, ruling from the capital city of Old Dongola over large parts of the Middle Nile Valley and for a period of almost a thousand years (ca. 5th-15th centuries CE). Today, Lower Nubia (the stretch of the Middle Nile between the first two Nile Cataracts) is mostly flooded by the Aswan High Dam reservoir. The citadel of Qasr Ibrim, though, is still above water and continues to be investigated archaeologically. During the Aswan High Dam campaigns administered by UNESCO in the 1960s, the Egypt Exploration Society discovered at Qasr Ibrim, among a very rich archaeological record, the largest amount of manuscripts ever found in Nubia.

In the medieval centuries, Nubia was a multilingual Christian society using Greek, Coptic, Old Nubian, and Arabic in various combinations and functions. Old Nubian was the language spoken by the local population in the Christian kingdoms of the Middle Nile Valley during the medieval era, and it was written in the Coptic script with the addition of three characters, probably deriving from the ancient Meroitic script used in Sudan from ca. the second century BCE to ca. the eighth century CE. The Old Nubian language remains largely unknown outside a small circle of specialists, despite the efforts made by late professor G. M. Browne to describe and systematize both its philological study and its literary corpus. In fact, a linguistic breakthrough to the secrets of Old Nubian can only be achieved, in my opinion, on the one hand by rigorous linguistic studies comparing related languages (e.g. modern Nubian against Old Nubian) and on the other hand by further discoveries that will enlarge the database upon which one can work out one's way to the understanding of all the details of that language.

Therefore, Ruffini was not given access to the Qasr Ibrim Old Nubian material because he was expected to solve these linguistic riddles or because he had also access to other unpublished texts in Old Nubian that would help him achieve such a task. Rather, the Egypt Exploration Society trusted that they found in the scholar who had untangled the social network patterns of Byzantine Egypt the person who

could also bring insightful new interpretations to the very rich published and unpublished documentary evidence from Qasr Ibrim. And Giovanni Roberto Ruffini did not fail them.

Ruffini's work centers mainly on three types of textual material (Chapters 4-7): land sales, letters, and the so-called by G.M. Browne «itemized lists» that Ruffini re-interprets as accounts (of both religious and secular character, pp. 184-198). Although the focal point are the land sales, their significance is only grasped through the re-evaluation of the itemized lists as samples of «Nubian accounting» and through the closer examination of the preserved letters. The former prove the existence of a monetary economy in Medieval Nubia, subverting all previous assumptions on the matter. The latter, despite their cryptic character, help shed light on the social relations developed between the individuals active in this correspondence and present in the other categories of documents as well. In total, we get an impressive picture of their careers which highlight the lack of definite boundaries between secular and religious offices in Medieval Nubia (see p. 245), the types of literacy in the social circles that they belonged in (where the role of Greek assumes a well-thought magical-sacral dimension, see p. 228), and the degree to which these circles were representative of the general social complexity in Medieval Nubia.

The bulk of the material under scrutiny by Ruffini can safely be dated to the 12th century CE and come in their vast majority from the site of Qasr Ibrim. This observation does not undermine, however, the value of his study for larger stretches of time and space. The reasons are simple: On the one hand, there are enough documents both from earlier and later centuries to show the perpetuity of the land sale tradition in the Nile Valley; on the other hand, a couple of documents have been discovered at sites outside Lower Nubia too. Thus, Ruffini's assumptions can have a more general value for the social and economic history not only of Lower Nubia but of the entire medieval Nubian world (see Chapter 6). At least that is what he claims by identifying in a find from the Third Cataract region (namely the document from a site called Nauri, a photograph of which was recently published in the magisterial volume edited by David Edwards and Ali Osman, *The Archaeology of a Nubian Frontier; Survey on the Nile Third Cataract, Sudan, 2012*, p. 154, figure 6.14) the southernmost example of the Old Nubian sale tradition he is investigating. I agree with his conviction that similar finds can be expected from even further upstream. Nonetheless, I am not certain to what extent these plausible discoveries will have the same significance in a region far away from Egypt and Lower Nubia with its long-standing tradition of contact with the Egyptian world.

Ruffini sees the land sale tradition as eloquent testimony of an at least partially monetized economy regulated by laws of personal profit deriving from the agricultural surplus of land property. The exigencies of a life style near the Egyptian border may not be present in an upstream periphery of the Makuritan

kingdom, for example the Fourth Cataract region. At the church site of Sur Island (one of the largest in the Fourth Cataract) excavated by the Humboldt University Nubian expedition, Old Nubian texts inscribed on leather (the almost absolutely preferred surface for the recording of land sales from Lower Nubia) have been discovered but not studied yet. If no land sales are identified among those finds, then perhaps Ruffini's generalizations for the entire Nubian world can be questioned. But even if such documents are to be found among the manuscripts discovered there, there are still two options that need to be taken into consideration: First, whether they indeed include regulations on the amounts of gold and/or silver paid during the land sales and/or accounted for in notary acts; and second, whether the persons involved in monetized transactions are carrying with them ready-made documents, phrased in terms that are not applicable to the realities of the region they are in; in other words, whether such documents «translated» into monetized terms barter transactions taking place in a Nubian periphery simply in order to respect the Makuritan state's «normal» notarial practices.

The publication of all the related material from Nubian sites is a *sine qua non* for the correct apprehension of Ruffini's contribution. Therefore, the reader is left wondering why Ruffini chooses to first publish his overview of the social and economic history of Medieval Nubia and leaves unpublished the Old Nubian documents that are the base reference for all his analysis. The reason should lie with the problematic level of our understanding of Old Nubian that defies most efforts for a final edition of the texts written in that language. Although progress has been made upon the knowledge inherited from G.M. Bronwe, there is still no one in the academic world who can claim a full comprehension of even many of the published texts in Old Nubian. Therefore, it has been understood that only through cooperation on an open-access data base of textual resources - and in Old Nubian there are no more than a few hundred pages of manuscripts - will there be any real chance of moving ahead with mastering the language. Ruffini has been pivotal in the elaboration of an online discussion forum on Old Nubian, by creating the wiki page [www.medievalnubia.info](http://www.medievalnubia.info) together with Dr. Grzegorz Ochala from the University of Warsaw.

Nonetheless, already as it stands now, Ruffini's work has met all its programmatically announced four aims (pp. 18-19): «first, to advance our understanding of the published Old Nubian land sales and their accompanying documentary evidence; second, to place these land sales in a broader social context and thus arrive at a better understanding of medieval Nubian social history more generally; third, to place medieval Nubian land tenure in its *longue durée* context - the Old Nubian documents studied cannot be understood without recourse to evidence from Greco-Roman Egypt to the Ottoman Empire; and finally, to show that medieval Nubia was a society both African and Mediterranean, both indigenous and Byzantine.»

The last two points are, in my opinion, the most important contributions of Ruffini's work. His sound knowledge of Late Antique Egypt, combined with his penetrating view of the historical phenomena he turns his attention to, also allowed him to grasp the significance of diachronic patterns of interdependence between the neighboring states along and around the Nile Valley. Thus, he gives, for example, just merit to the role of the Fatimids in the developments in Nubia during the two centuries of their rule over Egypt, i.e. 969-1169 CE (pp. 263-264). This dynamic dialogue between cultures through space and time, he exemplified best by clarifying the role of food consumption recorded so often in the Old Nubian land sales (pp. 90-102). The food consumed by the witnesses of these sales is recorded as a gift offered by the persons involved in the land sale. This is a long-standing tradition that can be found in various places and cultures, including a number of African comparanda (pp. 111-114). In Medieval Nubia, however, the recording of this gift in food «is merely grafted onto Greco-Roman legal forms that the Nubians have adopted» (p. 108). The purpose of this «adoption» was to transform a local tradition into a documented legal act in imitation of the Roman practices. Ruffini is, to my best knowledge, the first who set the Old Nubian documents of land sales against the background of such ceremonies and under the light of the Roman notarial traditions. The documentation of a land sale on the one hand is a Roman practice that has been adopted by the Nubians in order to provide legality and legitimacy to an act that although seems to belong in the private (or local) domain, it has implications for the state and affects the state's interest in land property issues within its territory. Consequently, the Lower Nubian documents, along with the exceptional upstream parallels (i.e. Nauri), testify for a tradition that is not only local, but involves the entire Makuritan state as well. These legal acts as ceremonial practices on the other hand aim at safeguarding the social cohesion during and after a crucial moment of change of status, like a land sale. By offering food to the witnesses, the persons who sell the land confirm that they retain their status in the community, while the purchasers sanctify the effect of the transaction by the approval of the community participating in the recorded ceremony. The plurality of such legal documentations of food offering ceremonies in Sub-Saharan Africa make the work of Ruffini a useful starting point for examining the commonality of patterns of such documentary tradition in much larger stretches of the continent (e.g. from Darfur to Borno) and for many centuries post-dating the medieval era (in some cases up to the early 20th century).

With the corrigenda to the publication counted in one hand, and a useful index for the returning student, the publication surely merits applause. Despite some awkward moments in the argumentation (e.g. I consider the attack on Polanyi's model in Chapter 3 unnecessary and biased, but it is too secondary to be treated here at length), and a few addenda to his bibliographical references that Ruffini himself believes to have happened in full honesty of personal limitations,

«Medieval Nubia; A Social and Economic History» is a most valuable contribution to our understanding of many aspects of the (Christian) Nubian civilization of the Middle Ages. The quality of Ruffini's work is underlined by a clear language and a pleasant style for most types of readers - and this despite the difficulty of the many intellectual challenges tackled. The book is both very informative in the way it recapitulates important documentary evidence long overlooked by the historians, as well as creatively innovative in the manner it reinterprets the published Old Nubian texts in light of those that Ruffini had the privilege to work with at first hand. Therefore, he is also in the right position to sketch an interesting future research agenda (pp. 232-235) that should surely be followed up by other disciples of Nubian Studies too. In all, with his second book, Ruffini has, in my opinion, bequeathed another definitive reference point to the field of social and economic history of Late Antique and Medieval Nile Valley.

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SEELIGER, Hans Reinhard & Kirsten KRUMEICH, *Archäologie der antiken Bischofssitze I: Spätantike Bischofssitze Ägyptens*, «Sprachen und Kulturen des Christlichen Orients» 15 (Wiesbaden: Reichert Verlag, 2007), XIII + 128 pp. + 32 Abbildungen. ISBN: 978-3-89500-501-5.

Na página de rosto, vem indicado que Seeliger é o editor (“herausgegeben von”) e Krumeich, o verdadeiro autor (“bearbeitet von”). Manifestamente, este fez o trabalho de recolha directa, enquanto o primeiro sistematizou a informação em consonância com o projecto científico concebido e dirigido por ele.

De facto, é Seeliger quem abre o volume com um breve *Vorwort* onde é explicado que este constitui o primeiro fruto dum projecto de investigação sobre a arqueologia das antigas sedes de bispado orientais – projecto cuja designação aparece como título principal da obra em análise e ficara plasmada na sigla ARABS (solução infeliz, a nosso ver!). Parece que o projecto ficou por ali, pois que não há registo de outros volumes.

Ainda antes de passar ao levantamento sistemático levado a efeito por Krumeich, temos um capítulo introdutivo, do mesmo modo da autoria de Seeliger (pp. 1-40) sobre o tema geral em apreço, nomeadamente sobre as circunstâncias ou os condicionamentos históricos gerais dos edifícios das respectivas sedes de bispado. A obra, na verdade, é de cariz essencialmente arqueológico, como o sublinham as três dezenas de plantas reproduzidas nas gravuras que encerram o trabalho.

Segue o “Katalog”, ou seja, o levantamento propriamente dito das igrejas e outros edifícios sagrados – e não apenas das “sés” – das diferentes dioceses (pp. 41-110). Nele, as localidades são agrupadas em “províncias” (doze no total, na