Book Reviews

Der Abu Ballas-Weg. Eine pharaonische Karawanenroute durch die Libysche Wüste

Frank Förster

Africa Praehistorica 28, Köln 2015; Hardcover; 620 pages; 376 figures; 23 tables; RRP €78; ISBN 978-3-927688-42-1.

This book is the culmination of extensive research into the Pharaonic caravan route through the Egyptian Western Desert, the so-called Abu Ballas Trail. The resulting monograph stems from Förster‘s PhD thesis completed at the University of Cologne in 2011. The analysis of material in this well-written tome is based on archaeological investigations carried out under the auspices of the Cooperative Research Centre 389 ACACIA project at the University of Cologne.

After an introduction that covers the research history of the Abu Ballas Trail and the notable contributions Carlo Bergmann, the book delves into a lengthy tripartite discussion and analysis of the finds, use and purpose, and historical considerations of the trail. The first part presents an analysis and interpretation of the findings from the archaeological investigations. The dominant chapter of this part involves an excellent outline of the ceramics, rock-cut engravings, and unique finds from the archaeological investigations. The evaluation of this material has led to the notion that the caravan route was used episodically, covering a distance of about 400 km from Dakhleh Oasis to the Gilf Kebir Plateau. It has been suggested that it may also extend towards Djebel Ouenat, the nearest water source to the end of the trail. While the trail may have originated out of Dakhleh Oasis, the location of its final destination is not certain, with Förster suggesting a terminus in the sub-Saharan region of the north-west Sudan.

This is followed by considerations of the practical use of the trail in part two. An extended discussion on the use of the donkey during the Pharaonic period highlights the strategies that those using the trail would have undertaken to transport goods to and from Egypt via the Abu Ballas Trail. The effort required to undertake expeditions along the extend route have been estimated from the large amount of storage jars that have been preserved at multiple sites running the course of the trail. The discussion of the use of these way-stations gives an important insight into the capabilities of those utilising the Abu Ballas Trail, and the maintenance required to sustain its effective use. It is clear from Förster‘s discussion that their use as watering stops presented a large logistical undertaking in both material and human resources. This section of the publication also highlights the fact that the Egyptians interacted with the local inhabitants of the Western Desert, and beyond, as evidenced by distinct archaeological material for other cultures, such as the Sheikh Muftah.

The last part proposes approaches to the purpose and historical significance of the Abu Ballas Trail. Chapters 16 to 18 of this section are arranged according to the archaeologically attested periods stemming from the excavated material found along the Abu Ballas Trail. The Abu Ballas Trail seems to have primarily been in use from the late third millennium BC, corresponding with the late Old Kingdom/First Intermediate Period. It was used intermittingly throughout the Second Intermediate Period and into the New Kingdom. Förster suggests that the route was used to access tradeable items from sub-Saharan regions, including incense, ivory, skins, and oils. These would have been imported into Dakhleh Oasis, where they could then be transported and exchanged to the Nile Valley. These chapters trace the development of the use of the trail through each epoch that is attested, providing a background and context to the connection with Dakhleh Oasis and the Nile Valley. Importantly the discussion here incorporates material from other sources, mostly inscriptional in nature, to provide explanations about the use of the route. The analysis undertaken here emphases the episodic nature of expeditions through this part of the Sahara, highlighting perhaps an ad hoc approach to trade with regions beyond the Western Desert. Notably the organisational and logistical skills required to trade along this arduous route show the capabilities of the Egyptians from at least the late Old Kingdom onwards.

This book makes an invaluable contribution to understanding the Egyptian interest in the Western Desert beyond Dakhleh Oasis, highlighting the connection they had with the sub-Saharan region through multiple time periods. The structured nature of this volume provides a distinctive accessibility to the different regions and find-spots along the route (chp. 5), as well as the exhaustive discussion of the find material within these regions (chp. 6). For those interested in this region of Egypt, the historical discussion (chps. 16-18) provides a chronological overview of the use the Abu Ballas Trail that complements other archaeological investigations and excavations in the Western Desert undertaken by the Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, and the Dakhleh Oasis Project. Most importantly, this book shows that the Egyptian world extended beyond the Western Desert, enlarging the geographic and political scope in which the Egyptians interacted and operated. This thankfully challenges dated notions of a narrow Egyptian worldview, extending the reach of Pharaonic cultural contact into the Libyan Desert, prompting a reconsideration of the significance of this contact between Egyptians and neighbouring cultures within this broad region. This is certainly a volume that would benefit any who are interested in Egyptian interconnections from the Old Kingdom through to the late New Kingdom, and more specifically those with an interest in the Western Desert. It is useful for those archaeologists, historians, and students interested in desert road archaeology, though also those interested in trade, logistics, and the interactions with the arid zone of the Sahara.

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Elephantine XXXI. Kisten und Schreine im Festzug: Hinweise auf postume Kulte für hohe Beamte aus einem Depot von Kult- und anderen Gegenständen des ausgehenden 3. Jahrtausends v. Chr.

Andreas Dorn with a contribution by Erico Peintner
Harrassowitz Verlag, Archäologische Veröffentlichungen 117, 2015; Hardcover; 268 pages; 31 figures; 14 tables; 16 plates; RRP €98; ISBN 978-3-447-10481-4.

The Archäologische Veröffentlichungen series has yet again produced some uniquely fascinating results stemming from the archaeological investigations conducted by the *Deutsches Archäologisches Institut* on Elephantine Island. This volume, the 31st to have such a focus, draws attention from excavations conducted in the south-eastern part of the island, more specifically from the large state building discovered in this part of the island. Here the recovered material from 40 years of excavations inside and out of so-called "House 2" forms the subject of the present volume by Andreas Dorn, with a notable contribution by Erico Peintner. This is the revision of Dorn's work from the Universität Basel.

The excavations produced an array of items including wooden boxes, shrines, a plain statue, cylinder seals, as well as an alabaster offering table. One alabaster cylinder bears the titulary of Unas (chp. XI). Indeed, Unas may have visited the island, which Dorn suggests links with the graffiti found on the east side of the island. Dorn has deduced that the shrines were used in processions for honouring deceased individuals from the region. These shrines were reused in the processional ceremonies, noting their importance. Interestingly, copious sealing fragments, or potentially locking mechanisms, were recovered from the excavations. These date from throughout the late Old Kingdom and into the First Intermediate Period, helping to indicate a date or use for the building.

One of the focuses of the volume centres on the unique wooden box labelled with the name of Heqaib. This box is decorated with false doors on each of the longer sides. These wooden boxes also seem to have been used in part of the procession for honouring the deceased. The detailed discussion of the conservation of the recovered wooden objects by Erico Peinter provides a useful insight into the reconstruction and interpretation of this material from the site. This is noteworthy in its contribution to the overall understanding of objects from House 2, and their subsequent interpretation by Dorn.

The book begins with acknowledgements of the excavations of House 2 prior to the 1995 season, which is followed by a brief discussion of the missions from 1995-1998 and 2000-2006. Next is a discussion of the interpretation and dating of the wooden panels discovered within House 2, as well as a consideration of the building's use and function. This helps to contextualise the dating of some of the excavated finds. Objects inscribed with the names and titles of Mechus, Sobekhotep, Heqaib, and Sabni form the subject of a short chapter (chp. V), though this makes an important connection between House 2 and the burials at Qubbet al-Hawa. The panels most likely date to the late Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period, based on the representations inscribed on them and compared to examples from other parts of Egypt (chp. VII). The construction and

use of House 2 is also discussed as part of the very well organised and micro-managed structure of the publication. The consideration that House 2 may have originally been the residence of Heqaib offers an interesting development of the building. It seems that the building was used in an official capacity, rather than as a private residence after the death of Heqaib.

Short chapters follow on the *ka*-shrines from Elephantine and the identification of objects. The central chapters of this volume form the discussion and comparative analysis of the shrines and boxes, with several notable examples with identified owners. This is complemented by suggestions regarding their use in processions and celebrations connected to the deceased's *ka* (chp. VIII). The reuse of the shrine of Heqaib is notable.

An interesting examination of locking mechanisms or sealings rounds out the in-depth chapters from this book. The numerous sealings are well presented in this chapter (chp. IX), set in well-drawn images of these. The discussion (chp. XII) of the role of Elephantine as an administrative and religious centre highlights connections between the evidence from House 2 and officials such as Heqaib and Sabni.

Peintner's contribution regarding the conservation of wooden objects provides an insight into what cleaning and restorative techniques were applied to this type of evidence. This analysis provided critical information about the materials employed by the Egyptians in the creation of these wooden boxes, the type and quality of wood used, and the application of any decoration. This section is certainly useful for conservators working with such objects.

The extensive catalogue and indices at the rear of the book provide a useful resource for consultation of the material listed above. This makes a welcome addition for those studying such objects from the late third millennium, and is useful for comparison with material from other sites.

This volume makes an important contribution to understanding numerous aspects regarding the role and function of Elephantine, and more specifically House 2 as a state building during the late Old Kingdom and into the First Intermediate Period. The administrative connection between some of the objects recovered from excavations at this site and well-known individuals from the region highlights the offices that people such as Heqaib and Sabni occupied during their lives. The unique finds and their careful restoration provide more examples of the wooden boxes and shrines used in processions celebrating the deceased. Such evidence is useful for those interested in wide ranging studies, applicable to settlement archaeology, religious and administrative offices during the late Old Kingdom, private religion, and the role of Elephantine as a centre in this part of Upper Egypt.

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Greek Theatre in the Fourth Century B.C.

Csapo, Eric, Hans Rupprecht Goette, J. Richard Green, Peter Wilson (eds)
De Gruyter, 2014; Hardcover; 578 pages; 36 colour plates; numerous B&W illustrations; RRP $130; ISBN 978-3-11-033748-8.

This is an impressive volume with a wealth of latest research on this important era in Greek theatre, a time which reflects significant cultural developments. The sixteen papers included stem from a 2011 Classics conference in Sydney and are grouped in four sections: Theatre Sites, Tragedy and Comedy, Performance outside Athens, and Finance and Records in Athens. The topics covered range from Theatre, Religion and Politics at Alexander's Travelling Court, to the Inscribed Public Records of the Dramatic Contests at Athens, and in conjunction with excellent illustrations and footnotes throughout, this work is a goldmine for historians and archaeologists.

The editors in their introduction situate the material within the context of various debates about the role of fourth century theatre, noting its central role in Hellenisation, and the relationship with earlier theatre. Contrary to the prevailing view that this was a period of theatrical decline, they argue successfully that this was a period of great innovation and expansion. They note the value of theatre as Hellenic propaganda, and many of the articles indeed discuss theatre outside of Athens. The work provides an excellent overview through presenting a range of indepth explorations. I will briefly mention just eight of the papers as representative of the sixteen, all of which are of a very high quality.

Christina Papastamati-von Moock's chapter on "The Theatre of Dionysus Eleuthereus in Athens" provides rich evidence from analysis of excavations, and discusses the nature of retaining walls, the positions of pedestals and statues, and evidence for the cultural renewal of the Lycurgan period. This is an excellent chapter and a good selection for opening the book as it is well-illustrated, highly-detailed, and makes many good points that are somewhat representative of the volume as a whole.

Jean-Charles Moretti discusses in his "Evolution of Theatre Architecture Outside Athens," the development of both wood and stone theatres. He covers the developments in materials and form, and changes in the orchestra, koilon, perimeter walls, and auditorium. His lengthy section on the types of stage-building and their actual theatrical use is particularly interesting.

While many chapters are of a more archaeological bent, Sebastiana Nervegna's analysis of the "The Tragic Canon in the Fourth Century and Beyond" raises interesting questions about why certain plays of Aeschylus, Sophocles and Euripides survived and why others were neglected. She discusses the re-performance of many plays in Southern Italy and Rome and how the plays of the "big three" were received. Why did certain tragedies become international favourites as evidenced on various kraters? This is an area requiring further research.

While Nervegna covered tragedy, Andrew Hartwig explores comedy and its evolution in the fourth century. He surveys the important changes in comedic style, especially the move to more mythological comedy and its relationship to para-tragedy. He also discusses some possible reasons behind these developments, and notes the

fourth century reception of fifth century political and personal satire. Hartwig's comments on the internationalisation of comedy and the role of comedic *agon* are apposite.

Brigitte Le Guen's chapter on Alexander's travelling court and its spread of Greek theatre is especially interesting as it demonstrates just how central Greek plays were to the spread of Hellenisation across West Asia. She deals with the important question of what significance the Greek theatrical *agon* and related athletic and musical contests had to the conquered populations. Le Guen notes relevant comments by Plutarch and Arrian of Nicomedia and others, and tabulates these according to date and place. She shows that these contests were both for the enjoyment of the soldiers and also to communicate the power of the victorious king as warrior and saviour. Theatre is thus seen as a tool of diplomacy, which was one of Alexander's greatest strengths in his expansive endeavours.

Again in a contrast to Le Guen's journey East, Edward Robinson moves west and discusses "Greek Theatre in Non-Greek Apulia". This addresses the important questions of how Italians received the plays, and the wider issue of the extent of Hellenisation of Southern Italy. Robinson makes some important observations about the differences in reception by the Italian elites and the common consumer, and relates this to other regions.

David Braund and Edith Hall take a journey north to the Black Sea, and discuss literary and archaeological evidence for how colonial settlements developed their own stories to link themselves with "Mother Greece" and surprisingly, other cities further afield. They raise questions particularly about the place of the theatrical competitions in the development of the Dionysiac cultus.

The final chapter on public records in Athens gives us new insights into the dramatic contests and their differences over time. Benjamin Millis reconstructs the textual evidence and articulates various possible meanings for the competitive and other aspects of the plays. He notes some radical changes in the contests, and the dating and purpose of Victor Lists. It must be said that the other eight chapters also contain a wealth of information on Greek theatre both in Athens and across the wider West Asian region. The standard of research and footnoting is very high, and readers will find much of interest.

One useful feature of this volume is the presentation of distinct indexes, and the extensive bibliography is also noteworthy. For a feast of information worthy of a Greek play, it is hard to go past this weighty tome. This work will provide researchers with numerous starting points for years to come, and it should be of great interest to historians and archaeologists of the fourth century Greek world.

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Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity
Kurt Flasch, trans. by Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides
Yale University Press, 2015; Hardcover; xv + 321 pages; RRP $38; ISBN: 9780300204865.

This excellent translation by Anne Schindel and Aaron Vanides makes available in English the most important monograph on Eckhart in recent years by renowned philosopher Kurt Flasch. Originally published in German as *Meister Eckhart: Philosoph des Christentums* (3rd edition in 2011 from C. H. Beck), this study is a sequel to Flasch's equally important *Meister Eckhart: Die Geburt der "Deutschen Mystik" aus dem Geist der arabischen Philosophie* of 2006 (not available in English) and witnesses the return of the important scholar of the so-called "Bochum-school" to the issue which has dominated much of his academic career: should Meister Eckhart be primarily characterised as a mystic, or a philosopher? Flasch has argued throughout his many scholarly publications that Eckhart must be considered the latter. In this newly available study, Flasch demonstrates that the Meister desired in his oeuvre to cultivate a new "Philosophy of Christianity" based upon a radical metaphysical interpretation of the Christian tradition, through an in-depth philological and philosophical investigation of Eckhart's writing and reception. Flasch has consciously developed this position against those scholars, such as Kurt Ruh, who instead have (erroneously, in Flasch's view) sought to present Eckhart's philosophy as exegetically motivated or have attempted to describe it as a 'rational' or 'intellectual' mysticism. Until this new translation, this debate has primarily raged only in German and French scholarship— all the major works by Flasch and his supporters tend to be published in German, whereas the major English language scholars who work on Meister Eckhart and his tradition have privileged the interpretation of Eckhart as a mystic (one thinks of Bernard McGinn, Frank Tobin and Oliver Davies). Schindel and Vanides in their translation have provided an English rejoinder to these voices and allowed for greater access to the debate about the Meister's identity for students of Eckhart in the English-speaking academy.

Flasch undertakes to outline his position through a chronological reading of Eckhart's life and works, based upon the most up-to-date scholarship on Eckhart's scholarly career in Paris and Germany from c. 1260 until his condemnation for heresy in 1329. Flasch also relies on the most recent critical editions of Eckhart's work, such as the *Lectura Eckhardi* edited by Georg Steer and Loris Sturlese, and the fifth volume of the *Lateinische Werke* dedicated to Eckhart's trial and condemnation, also edited by Sturlese. This chronological examination, however, is supplemented by numerous addenda and digressions in which Flasch explores important themes, including how philosophy was defined as a "way of life" in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries when Eckhart was writing, rather than as an argumentative or rational tradition as it is today, and how the "Germanist" tradition of Eckhartian scholarship (spearheaded by Josef Quint in the early twentieth century and continued by Ruh) have privileged the vernacular German works of the Meister in order to substantiate their position that Eckhart was the premiere mystic of medieval Germany. This latter position, Flasch argues, is untenable because it ignores the fact that Eckhart never presented himself as writing a "mystical theology" at any point in his existing corpus, whereas he does

describe his output as philosophically and rationally motivated. Flasch thus begins his monograph with an overview of the rational and philosophical principles which Eckhart advocated across his writing (both the Latin scholastic treatises and the more popular German sermons) that grounds his wider analysis. In these "self-portrayals," Flasch argues, Eckhart reveals his preference for a "radical reform of living" (p. 43) based on the metaphysical conviction that one's soul shares in the superabundance of the divine Being. This is the new Christian philosophy as a "way of life" that Eckhart hoped to impart to his followers and students, and which saw him condemned for heresy by the Papal Courts at Avignon.

This theme is developed extensively throughout each chapter of Flasch's study. At the same time, Flasch also provides a succinct introduction to the major texts which Eckhart composed throughout his lifetime, such as the Meister's incomplete *Opus Tripartitum* (which was to consist of the philosophical groundwork that substantiated the Meister's exegetical and homiletic preaching and writing), the vernacular Sermon Cycle on the Eternal Birth, the *Parisian Questions* debated amongst Eckhart's scholastic peers, and the *Liber Benedictus* which contained a new "consolation of philosophy" based upon the Meister's radical metaphysical principles. Through in-depth exegesis of selected passages from across Eckhart's oeuvre, Flasch provides an excellent summary of some of the key ideas the Meister developed during his career. Always detailed and philological, these analyses from Flasch on diverse topics, such as Eckhart's understanding of analogy and participation, exposition of the relationship between the One and the Many, and metaphysical doctrine of the flowing in and out of the Trinity, not only contribute to Flasch's overall contention that Eckhart's thought is philosophical rather than mystical, but also serve as excellent summaries of the major premises Eckhart advanced throughout his writing. Flasch also does a thorough job of outlining the sources for Eckhart's positions, discussing texts, such as the *Book of the Twenty-Four Philosophers* or the writing of Dietrich of Freiberg, which are often overlooked in other scholarly work on the Meister. Unfortunately, in this volume Flasch does not discuss in detail the Arabic and Jewish sources that Eckhart employed across his writing, instead asking his readers to consult his earlier monograph of 2006. Regardless, in this book Flasch provides an exhaustive overview of Eckhart's thought that is bound to be of benefit to future scholars of the Meister.

Schindel and Vanides are to be praised for their superb translation effort. They have managed to competently render Flasch's distinctive style into English, consciously choosing to preserve the lengthy sentences and ruminations so characteristic of the philosopher's prose. As they recognise in their preface to the volume, however, Flasch's preference to avoid complex Latin neologisms in favour of idiomatic German is difficult to capture in English, where Latinate expressions and terminology have come to dominate philosophical vocabulary. So, whereas Flasch's German prose is characterised by its accessibility, this English translation is definitely geared towards academic readers. The fidelity to Flasch's preference for lengthy sentences may also seem particularly jarring to English readers unaccustomed to German writing. Yet *Meister Eckhart: Philosopher of Christianity* remains an engaging and enjoyable read and will surely become essential for anyone in the English academy who works on the

philosophy (or even mysticism!) of the Meister. Even should one ultimately disagree with his contention, Flasch's monograph demonstrates that Eckhart will always resist attempts at characterisation as a perennial outsider. For Eckhart as Christian philosopher remains to this day a condemned heretic, because the Church failed to appreciate or understand his revolutionary position.

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Postfeminist Digital Cultures: Femininity, Social Media, and Self-Representation.

Amy Shields Dobson
Palgrave Macmillan US, 2015; Hardcover; xi+ 202 pages; RRP US$100.00; ISBN: 978-1-137-40839-6.

This book usefully examines the "social media practices" and "digital self-representations" of girls and young women that comes with increasing access to the Internet. Accordingly, it situates girls and young women as media and cultural producers, rather than consumers [emphasis added]. Dobson's main point for doing this is addressed in the introductory chapter, where she wishes to subvert "cultural commentators" who view girls' and young women's self-representation on digital media with moral panic; and in some cases, "disdain and contempt". Ostensibly, Dobson's work contributes to a growing body of scholarship that frames girls and women as agentic and empowered individuals, in a postfeminist era.

In particular, this book stands out because it moves away from the dense, theoretical writing that plagues the scholarship on postfeminism. Dobson is meticulous in unpacking the implications and concerns of a postfeminist argument for a non-expert reader. This is important because she is not only able to highlight why her analyses on girls/young women's digital media practices are crucial, but in what ways a postfeminist reading of their digital self-representations is a topic worthy of focus. [emphasis added] Dobson lays substantial groundwork for a postfeminist framework in the second chapter. She dedicates a large part of the chapter to contextualising her project, starting first by delineating second-wave feminism; outlining the transition into a postfeminist era; and illustrating the emergence of 'new' postfeminist femininities.

Dobson neatly categorises her book into two distinct ways in which girls and young women (re)assert their digital identities as female and feminine. The first part of the book focuses on the way girls/young women portray themselves as 'sexual beings', and later, on girls/young women who convey their 'authentic selves' to be 'judged' by digital networked publics. Dobson takes on a calm, cool-headed approach from Chapters 3 to 6, in which she analyses the digital domains of social networking sites (SNS), sexting, and YouTube videos. She focuses to a lesser extent on blogs and forums. Instead of uni-dimensionally celebrating girls' and young women's postfeminist digital cultures and self-representations, Dobson discusses her findings in an astute and non-coercive

manner, which displays her vigour as a highly reflexive researcher; aware of her own research position.

Correspondingly, Chapters 3 and 4 examine the multifarious ways that girls and young women embellish their MySpace profiles and sext respectively. Though both chapters subscribe to the theme of the (re)production and circulation of sexy/sexual femininities, the two chapters differ in a sense that Chapter 3 attends to the construction of the "heterosexy feminine form" via 'othered' images such as those of the "dream girl", Paris Hilton or "soft pornographic imagery". Chapter 4 attends to the presentation of the sexual/sexualised self as more 'real' and 'palpable', because it provides a close reading of the circulation of girls' personal raunchy photos online.

Both chapters are closely interwoven in that they come together to elucidate the difficulties of a postfeminist viewpoint. Dobson argues that despite the "limited and heteronormative ways" (75), scholars should not marginalise young women's effort to (re)produce the heterosexy self on MySpace. She suggests that there is also a need to refrain from solely assuming that girls' sexting is a process and outcome of them being prematurely sexualised, which inevitably situates girls as passive victims as in the discourse of sexualisation. She mentions that while there are instances in which concerns over sexualisation are not completely unfounded, highly precautionary responses only serve to reinforce and normalise the shame and risk around the outward portrayal of sexuality for girls. In essence, she seeks to remind the readers not to dismiss girls' and young women's sexy and sexual self-representations as counterproductive, harmful or unimportant, and opens up a space for thinking about "legitimate sexual attention-seeking" in a postfeminist era.

In moving on to analyse textual self-descriptions and girls' narration and mediation of their insecurities online, Chapters 5 and 6 attends to the "contemporary feminine subjectivities" of girls and young women on the Internet. Chapter 5 looks at the assertive and confident self-making through decorative texts on young women's public profiles on SNS. Dobson concurs that young women who simultaneously construct their digital identities as youthful and feminine, and unafraid of being 'judged' by spectators signal to a "brand" of young female subjectivity that is ideal in postfeminism.

However, as an antithesis to this, Chapter 6 examines the mediated ways girls 'expose' and broadcast themselves to particular networked publics. Girls who articulate their insecurities through "Am I Pretty or Ugly" videos on YouTube and girls who relate their experiences of emotional pain are theorised by Dobson to be "in crisis". Dobson extends this argument to interrogate the type of responses assembled by the wider public to this growing trend, and points out that the former group of girls are frequently perceived as lacking value and values. While acknowledging that the latter group of girls who narrate and mediate pain are situated as somewhat 'different' and inherently 'problematic', Dobson concludes that postfeminist regulation and surveillance in networked publics should be central to future research in this field.

To sum up, while Dobson makes crucial points about girls' and young women's media practices, it is worth noting that the sources in which she bases her arguments on are backdated. This is not to say that a postfeminist perspective on mediated femininities on MySpace (now defunct) or "Am I Pretty or Ugly" videos on YouTube are

irrelevant or misplaced, it would be useful to see how Dobson's interpretations can be transposed to more current and popular SNS or popular culture material that are circulating amongst girls/young women today. Dobson only makes brief allusions to this in the afterword.

While Dobson's research contributes significantly to the issues and concerns that underlie girls' and young women's use of digital media, the cornerstone of Dobson's work lies unassumingly in a section of the introductory chapter. This is where she calls on the need to slow down the postfeminist analysis of girls, young women and digital cultures [emphasis added]. By calling upon readers and scholars in the field to slow down when it comes to "assessing youth digital cultures on political, social, and psychological levels", Dobson in a way emphasises on the need to (re)evaluate the complex terrain, and be astute towards the meanings that girls and young women attach to their media practices might not necessarily be those that adult social actors or researchers have ascribed. This is a crucial step forward in postfeminist scholarship, which inevitably also provides a head start for research in non-Western contexts, where work on postfeminism and postfeminist digital cultures has been scarce.

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Religious Women in Early Carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture.

Felice Lifshitz
Fordham Series in Medieval Studies, Fordham University Press, 2014, Hardback; pp. xxv, 349; 2 maps; 10 colour plates; RRP US$55; ISBN 978-0-8232-5687-7.

Evidence for female education and literacy is difficult to find, especially in the early Middle Ages as much material has been lost or destroyed. Analysing eighth-century manuscripts which can be traced to the Main River Valley in Francia (Germany), Felice Lifshitz finds traces of editorial decisions which suggest female involvement. The cumulative effect of these creative and editing choices offer tantalising glimpses into a network of educated and intellectual women who influenced later thought. The argument is convincing and clearly explicated at each stage of the book. *Religious Women in Early carolingian Francia: A Study of Manuscript Transmission and Monastic Culture* is a valuable addition to the Fordham Series in Medieval Studies which promotes original studies in late antiquity and the medieval period.

The preface introduces the author's moment of recognition, when she realised that she had stumbled upon materials that offered support for Gerda Lerner's theories about 'feminist consciousness'.[1] Lifshitz had been describing the Anglo-Saxon manuscripts with terms like pro-woman, antimisogynistic, gender-egalitarian

[1] Gerder Lerner, *The Creation of Feminist Consciousness*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

and nonandrocentric (p. xviii), terms which suggested to her that the producers of these manuscripts were showing resistance to patriarchal ideals. What follows is a clearly structured and well-argued analysis of the environment in which female scholarship had the potential to flourish in the eighth century.

The book is structured around three parts. The first deals with 'People, Places and Things' discussed over three chapters; they provide the social, religious and cultural context within which the manuscripts were produced. 'Syneisactism and Reform; Gender Relations in the Anglo-Saxon Cultural Province in Francia' introduces the main players, Archbishop Lul of Mainz, Boniface and Loeba. Their social environment is demonstrated to have been egalitarian. This style of relationship is shown to have been disrupted by the Carolingian reforms in the ninth century, giving way to what has become a more familiar pattern of gender relationships. The next chapter, 'The Anglo-Saxon Cultural Province in Francia' focusses more directly on the religious institutions as insular forms of Christianity expand into the region. The final chapter in this section, 'The Gun(t)za and Abirhilt Manuscripts: Women and Their Books in the Anglo Saxon Cultural Province in Francia' provides a description of the manuscripts to be analysed in the next section, including their contents, noting the clear editorial choices made by their producers that mark them as different to others versions of similar texts.

The next section of the book consists of four chapters devoted to analysing excerpts from the manuscripts under question. Each chapter is given a biblical quotation in its heading which relates to the material within, underlining how the producers of these texts interpreted scripture. Some of these interpretations run counter to the ways they have been understood in other contexts, demonstrating the uniqueness of the material presented. The first of these chapters, "I am Crucified in Christ" (Galatians 2:20): The Kitzingen Crucifixion Miniature and Visions of the Apostle Paul" offers a detailed analysis and interpretation of the said crucifixion image, focussing on gender. Although images can be understood to simplify the message, thus compensating for a more 'somatic' version of spirituality presupposed for women, the complexity of this image belies this notion; as Lifshitz notes, on a single leaf, the creator of this image graphically offered ideas that would have otherwise taken dozens of written pages. As well as this, the viewer, whether male or female, was equally able to read themselves into the image.

The next three chapters are introduced with quotations from Corinthians, connecting the ideas within to some of the earliest biblical texts. Two of these chapters relate to adaptations of earlier saints' lives by the community of women. They are shown to have been selective both in which lives they decided to record, favouring texts like Gregory's *Homilies on the Gospels*, for example, over works by Tertullian. Lifshitz demonstrates how this selectiveness demonstrates a conscious decision on the part of the manuscript creators to offer positive images of women within the Christian domain. The second chapter looking at the use of saints' lives demonstrates how the development of more misogynist trends prompted the writing of more feminist works, specifically designed to "critique male domination" (p. 147)

The final chapter in this section describes the connection of written texts to the daily lives of the women within the communities of the Main Valley.

There are two conclusions in this book. The first pertains to the ambiguity of evidence for women's historical involvement in the liturgy, and the difficulty in challenging the consensus view, especially when the stakes for finding such evidence has the power to impact on modern institutions. The second is on the quest for historical networks of women whose works indirectly nurtured others in maintaining faith in female intellectual thought.

The notes for this book are extensive (about 75 pages) which indicates the depth and rigorousness of Lifshitz research. I personally prefer footnotes so that my reading is not interrupted by so much page turning, but this is a minor gripe. I was not conscious of editorial problems, except for the labelling of one map as "The Cardingian Rhineland". The clear structure and use of primary source material make this an ideal text for graduate students, and I have not hesitation in recommending its use as a model for them. The content is also very powerful, and I will certainly be using much of the information in my own work.

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