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Arcari's "Beyond conflicts: Cultural and religious cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and the 6th century CE" (book review)

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Book Reviews



Arcari, L. (Ed.). (2017). *Beyond conflicts: Cultural and religious cohabitations in Alexandria and Egypt between the 1st and the 6th century CE*. Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck. 460 pp. ISBN 9783161551444

This collection of essays is the culmination of a research project examining how space and time affect religious and cultural exchange. This volume explores the “middle ground” of Alexandria, Egypt in the 1st–6th century CE and how the various cultures and religions therein interacted (p. 1). According to the introduction, “The pivotal idea of the book is the relevance of the spatial and chronological dimensions in the construction and transmission of collective identities” (p. 2). These collective identities are explored as perception of similarities and differences, as perceived through time and space, and as a social process (p. 2). While many scholars of Egypt in late antiquity have focused on the conflicts between the various groups – Greeks, Jews, Christians, Egyptians – this volume seeks to move “beyond conflicts” to see what other kinds of cultural interchanges were happening. This examination begins with a definition of discursive practices (p. 27), then moving through these discourses to an image of cultural and religious cohabitations (p. 155) and followed by an exploration of cults to further observe how various groups interacted (p. 247). The last two parts of the book explore “open” and “closed” groups (p. 307) and the role of authority in the philosophical schools (p. 361).

A close reading of this text will provide the reader with an honest – if quite complicated – picture of Alexandria in late antiquity. Drawing from scholars in many different disciplines, this work attempts to reconstruct an accurate portrait of Alexandria in the first six centuries CE. Each essay exemplifies well-documented scholarship on its subject matter, showing the authors’ knowledge of their subjects and ability to contribute to their field. This volume is well worth examining, especially for graduate or post-graduate students. It effectively achieves its purpose, that is, to relate religious and cultural exchanges to their settings in time and space – specifically, Alexandria in the 1st–6th century CE.

Reviewer

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