

James C. R. GILL, *Dakhleh Oasis and the Western Desert of Egypt under the Ptolemies* (Dakhleh Oasis Project Monograph, 17), Oxford - Philadelphia, Oxbow Books, 2016, 21 x 30, XVIII + 483 p. ill., rel. £ 75, ISBN 978-1-78750-135-1

The Western Egyptian Desert remains to this day a shadow of its former self, as the region has never recovered from its decline during Late Antiquity. From the colonisation of the Old Kingdom to the Roman golden age, ruins of settlements, forts, caravan stations and centers of worship from different eras have been left beneath the sand, an archaeological wealth that still couldn't prevent almost a century of scholar's neglect; since the survey conducted by Ahmed Fakhry during WWII, three whole decades passed before the oracle of Amon at Siwa was cleared from modern occupation, and opened to systematic excavation. Almost twenty years later, Guy Wagner published *Les oasis d'Égypte à l'époque grecque, romaine et byzantine d'après les documents grecs*, a work that remains to this day the main reference covering this region. Since then, oases scholarship has made a huge progress, and recent evidences from the Western Desert even had made their way into more global Egyptological publications. The field, however, still lacks general works of reference of its own. Furthermore, most of its new classical scholarship focuses on the late Roman occupation from which the most apparent remains are dated. On the other hand, the Ptolemaic occupation, buried deep beneath, is often overlooked. In this volume, James Gill took upon himself to unearth this neglected layer; from the very beginning of Chapter 1, he states his intention to challenge the previously dominant view among scholars of a sudden rise of Dakhleh Oasis under Roman rule, and undertakes the demonstration of a rather significant growth, both in settlements and in agriculture, that was already ongoing in the area under Ptolemaic rule. The author applies his reasoning to other sites in the Western Desert to demonstrate that the process was not limited to Dakhleh. J. C. R. Gill gives then an overview of previous researches and digs relevant to his own research. Relying heavily on archeological evidences, Chapter 2 demonstrates Ptolemaic activities in Mut-al-Kharab, a well-documented site in Dakhleh Oasis. The typology of Ptolemaic pottery from Dakhleh is the backbone of this study; Chapter 3 analyses these mostly unpublished wares of the oasis and compares it to the better-known production of Theban neighbors. Chapter 4 studies the geography of Ptolemaic settlements, temples, and cemeteries in Dakhleh. When available, additional details are given for some sites; finally, the archaeological data are summarized in two imposing tables, and from the resulting statistics, the author demonstrates the growth in the oasis during the Ptolemaic Period. Chapter 5 takes the study into other oases where the author suggests evidences of Ptolemaic activities. Finally, Chapter 6 synthesizes these previous arguments and concludes that the Lagid Dynasty may have conducted an official policy of demographic and economic development in the Western Oases. The rest of the volume is made of six appendices, which weight for more than half of the overall publication. Appendix 1 lists archeological contexts from Ptolemaic times in Mut Al-Kharab for which it provides very technical descriptions. Appendix 2 presents a rich corpus of pottery finds from the same site, and Appendix 3 links pottery samples to others from the same book or from the wider published literature. Appendix 4 is a catalog of Ptolemaic sites in Dakhleh; descriptions and plans are provided and sometimes relevant bibliography is suggested. Appendix 5 goes back to pottery drawings, for the broader Dakhleh Oasis this time. Finally, Appendix 6 lists sites from the other western oases following the format of Appendix 4. The overall volume doesn't lack in illustrations, be it plans of archeological digs or drawing and photographs of relevant artifacts. Due to scarce evidences of texts from this period in the Oases, we understand the very hands-on approach taken by the author. This volume focuses on Dakhleh and does no more than preview Ptolemaic materials from the broader Western Desert, as the author himself stresses the need to further explore the other sites. Overall, this book constitutes a significant contribution to the expanding oases scholarship, a solid reference book for specialists of Late Egypt, and a practical handbook for ceramic experts. – Anas DAKKASH.