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Public buildings in Roman Egypt

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ADAM LUKASZEWICZ, *LES EDIFICES PUBLIQUES DANS LES VILLES DE L'EGYPTE ROMAINE, PROBLEMES ADMINISTRATIFS ET FINANCIERS* (Studia Antiqua, Wydawnictwa Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warsaw 1986). Pp. 183. ISSN 0138-0583. zł.120-

ἀποδέχομαι ὑμᾶς τὴν πατρίδα κοσμεῖν προηρημένους καὶ ἐπιτρ[έ]πω κατασκευάζειν τὸ βαλανεῖον ἔκ τε τῶν ἤδη συνειλεγμένων χρημάτων, ὡς φατε, καὶ ἐξ ὧν ἂν ... "I congratulate you on your design to beautify your city and I permit you to equip the bath from the funds already collected, as you assert, and from those which may be contributed by ..."; after this point the text becomes lacunose — the probable sense, as suggested by the editor, is "and from contributions that may be made in the future by any person who is anxious to gain a reputation for generosity." No ancient historian would be surprised to find this text coming from the Roman east at the height of the imperial period — perhaps a fragment of a letter from a 2nd-c. emperor to the authorities of a Greek or Asian city, Ephesus, Miletus or Pergamum. The text does indeed date to the 2nd c. (probably A.D. 128), but it comes from Oxyrhynchus in Egypt and is a letter from a prefect of Egypt to the 'city of the Oxyrhynchites'.¹ As the editor noted, it raises important questions which bear on the administration of public buildings in the towns of Roman Egypt: how were municipal buildings administered before the nome-capitals obtained *boulai* in A.D. 200? Did all new building require imperial or prefectural permission? What conclusions are to be drawn from the implication that the town of Oxyrhynchus has the status of a *polis* and a corporate legal identity? The manner in which the text was introduced suggests another question — how do we fit the Egyptian towns into the received picture of urban development in the high imperial period, urban decline in the course of the 3rd and 4th c?

Adam Lukaszewicz's book, as its subtitle clearly asserts, offers a most valuable systematic discussion of the documentary evidence for public buildings in the metropoleis and 'Greek cities' of Egypt in the Roman period. Despite its date of publication, however, it was effectively completed in 1978. It constitutes a very substantial addition to our corpus of monographs on administration in Roman Egypt. The core of the work consists of two chapters which amass and discuss the evidence for the identity and nature of the various types of public buildings in the metropoleis and their administration in the first 4 centuries A.D. These are preceded by a brief chapter defining the types of buildings which are the proper subject of the study and followed by a historical analysis and explanation of the evidence for building activities in the metropoleis of Egypt. The book is completed by a useful inventory which collects terms used for public buildings, with dates of attestation, functions and references arranged by provenance.

Thus, in the context of 'municipalisation' and consideration of *opera publica*, a municipal public building in Egypt is defined on p.30 as one "qui fonctionne pour les besoins de l'organisme urbain, qui est situé sur le terrain de la ville et lié à sa structure administratif." Given the amount of documentary evidence for the application and administration of the law, it is hardly surprising that the discussion of the buildings in chapter 2 leans heavily in this direction and analyses the evidence for the buildings in which such activities took place. The local administration in the metropoleis, the presence of gymnasia, baths and other social amenities is much better attested after the Severan reform than before it, and in chapter 3 Lukaszewicz is able to consider the evidence for the way in which the municipal authorities administered and financed their facilities, with due emphasis on the importance of the liturgical system and the relationship between the councils and the magisterial and liturgical posts. The final chapter makes some attempt to define the nature and scale of this activity and to put it in the context of Egypt's development in the imperial period, with particular reference to the broader context of the empire-wide problems in the 3rd c.

¹ *P. Oxy.* XLIII 3088. I am grateful to Dr. D. W. Rathbone for his helpful comments and suggestions on a draft of this article.