

ROGER S. BAGNALL, *Everyday Writing in the Graeco-Roman East*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011. Pp xiv, 180; ISBN 978-0-520-26702-2. US\$49.95.

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The chapters collected here had their origins in Bagnall's Sather Classical Lectures given at Berkeley in the autumn of 2005. This deceptively slim volume contains a number of thought-provoking insights. Bagnall ranges over a broad geographic area from Egypt to Turkey to Afghanistan while covering an equally wide linguistic range, including material in Greek, Latin, Coptic, Demotic, Syriac, and Bactrian. The evidence that he draws together here will be of interest to anyone who studies Roman antiquity.

In a short introduction, Bagnall notes that the book is part of a larger trend in the discussion of reading and writing in antiquity that is eschewing a focus on estimated literacy rates in favour of thinking in terms of how societies as wholes used writing to function. Bagnall's analysis begins in the first chapter, 'Informal Writing in a Public Place: The Graffiti of Smyrna,' which introduces and discusses recent work on the basement of the basilica of the agora in Smyrna (modern Izmir). Excavations in 2003 uncovered multiple layers of plaster on the walls of the basement, with a good deal of legible graffiti on a variety of topics including sex, sports, word games, and notes of thanks for healings, as well as various drawings. Bagnall places this material into the ongoing debates about the social location of the producers and consumers of graffiti. This chapter will be of special interest to students of early Christianity since one of the graffiti Bagnall mentions, which pre-dates 125 CE, may well be the earliest extant identifiably Christian specimen of writing. Chapter 2 ('The Ubiquity of Documents in the Hellenistic East') could appropriately be called an introduction to the archaeology of papyrology. Bagnall focuses on the questions of how Egyptian papyri were deposited and how they were excavated. He observes that papyri could be deposited in a number of ways: thrown out as waste on trash heaps, reused as cartonnage for mummies, or kept together in troves or archives in buildings. Papyri have also been recovered in a variety of ways: by illicit excavators supplying the antiquities market, by academics working under duress in a rush to beat illicit excavators, or by scholars working under more ideal conditions in scientifically controlled excavations. These circumstances imply that the ancient writing that has survived to the modern day constitutes only a small portion of what once must have existed. Bagnall also offers evidence for archives outside Egypt, which suggests that the evidence for heavy use of everyday writing in Egypt was not as anomalous as is sometimes claimed. The third chapter, 'Documenting Slavery in Hellenistic and Roman Egypt,' uses the topic of slavery to demonstrate the 'lumpiness' of the preserved papyrological record (a recurrent theme in the book) and how failure to account for this lumpiness can generate statistics that certainly do not reflect ancient realities. Especially illuminating

are Bagnall's studies of the ways in which the Zenon archive and the Oxyrhynchus papyri skew various statistics about slavery in Egypt. Chapter 4, 'Greek and Coptic in Late Antique Egypt,' traces the development of Coptic in the bilingual milieu of late antique Egypt with the help of new finds of papyri from Kellis. The next chapter, 'Greek and Syriac in the Roman Near East,' contextualizes the Egyptian papyrological record by exploring not only the Aramaic papyri that have come to light in recent decades but also documents in Bactrian that have surfaced through the antiquities market in the last twenty years. In the final chapter, 'Writing on Ostraca: A Culture of Potsherds?' Bagnall provides an overview of the study of ostraca (noting several corpora of ostraca from north Africa to Asia Minor to Syria that remain unpublished) and points out that given the rising levels of humidity so destructive to papyri in Egyptian soils, the study of these potsherds may well play an increasingly large role in the field of papyrology. A very brief conclusion brings together several of the topics that run through these chapters. Bagnall neatly summarizes the lessons of the book for ancient historians: 'All of these considerations lead to the conclusion that we can never trust patterns of documentation without subjecting them to various sorts of criticism. It is not only arguments from silence that are suspect, but arguments from scarcity or abundance. The documentary record is irreparably lumpy, mainly because of patterns of deposition, preservation, discovery, and editorial choice' (141). Bagnall points out that papyrologists have yet to come to terms with the difficult questions posed by the antiquities market, questions that professional archaeologists have been debating for some time now. In line with this observation is Bagnall's call for more interaction among the fields of papyrology, epigraphy, and archaeology. The endnotes and bibliography offer a nice snapshot of much recent fieldwork in the Roman east.

There is little to critique in this engaging contribution from a seasoned papyrologist and ancient historian. Bagnall's emphasis on the ubiquity of writing in the Roman world is salutary, but I would suggest that the book be read alongside William A. Johnson's *Readers and Reading Culture in the High Roman Empire: A Study of Elite Communities* (Oxford, 2010), which stresses that the production and consumption of *literature* in the Roman world was a rather more specialized affair. Taken together, these two books will offer readers a look at some of the exciting new developments in the study of literacy and reading in the Roman world.