



Urban Centers and Rural Contexts in Late Antiquity

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Recent publications on urbanism and the rural environment in Late Antiquity, most of which explore a single region or narrow chronological niche, have emphasized either textual or archeological evidence. None has attempted the more ambitious task of bringing together the full range of such evidence within a multiregional perspective and around common themes. *Urban Centers and Rural Contexts* seeks to redress this omission.

While ancient literature and the physical remains of cities attest to the power that urban values held over the lives of their inhabitants, the rural areas in which the majority of imperial citizens lived have not been well served by the historical record. Only recently have archeological excavations and integrated field surveys sufficiently enhanced our knowledge of the rural contexts to demonstrate the continuing interdependence of urban centers and rural communities in Late Antiquity. These new data call into question the conventional view that this interdependence progressively declined as a result of governmental crises, invasions, economic dislocation, and the success of Christianization.

The essays in this volume require us to abandon the search for a single model of urban and rural change; to reevaluate the cities and towns of the Empire as centers of habitation, rather than archeological museums; and to reconsider the evidence of continuous and pervasive cultural change across the countryside. Deploying a wide range of material as well as literary evidence, the authors provide access not only into the world of élites, but also to the scarcely known lives of those without a voice in the literature, those men and women who worked in the shops, labored in the fields, and humbled themselves before their gods. They bring us closer to the complexity of life in late ancient communities and, in consequence, closer to both urban and rural citizens.

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