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present

Religious Institutions as Instruments of Achaemenid Rule in Egypt

Dr. Henry Colburn
Getty Research Institute

Tuesday, February 23, 2016 | 306 Royce Hall | 4:00pm



This talk examines some of the roles played by Egyptian temples in the implementation and maintenance of Achaemenid Persian rule in Egypt, c. 526-404 BCE, through two case studies. The first focuses on the temples established and enlarged by Darius I in the Kharga Oasis in Egypt's western desert. These temples, along with the introduction of *qanat* irrigation, were intended to integrate the oasis more closely into the culture and society of the Nile Valley, thus bringing it into existing imperial networks of control. The second considers how grain, Egypt's primary form of wealth, was converted to silver in order to make tribute payments to the Persians. This conversion was carried out mainly through the export of grain to Greek cities, especially Athens, in exchange for coins. Since temples controlled significant amounts of Egypt's arable farmland, they must have been central to this process. In both cases temples served as instruments of Achaemenid rule, and this suggests that the empire's religious policy, whatever its cosmological dimensions, also served its political goals.

Henry P. Colburn is a Postdoctoral Fellow at the Getty Research Institute in Los Angeles. His research focuses on cross-cultural interaction in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East, with special reference to the Achaemenid Persian Empire. He is especially interested in using material culture to reconstruct ancient social environments. Currently he is preparing a book, based on his University of Michigan doctoral dissertation, on the art and archaeology of Egypt as an Achaemenid satrapy. Before coming to the Getty he was a Curatorial Fellow in Ancient Art at the Harvard Art Museums.

Light refreshments will be served
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