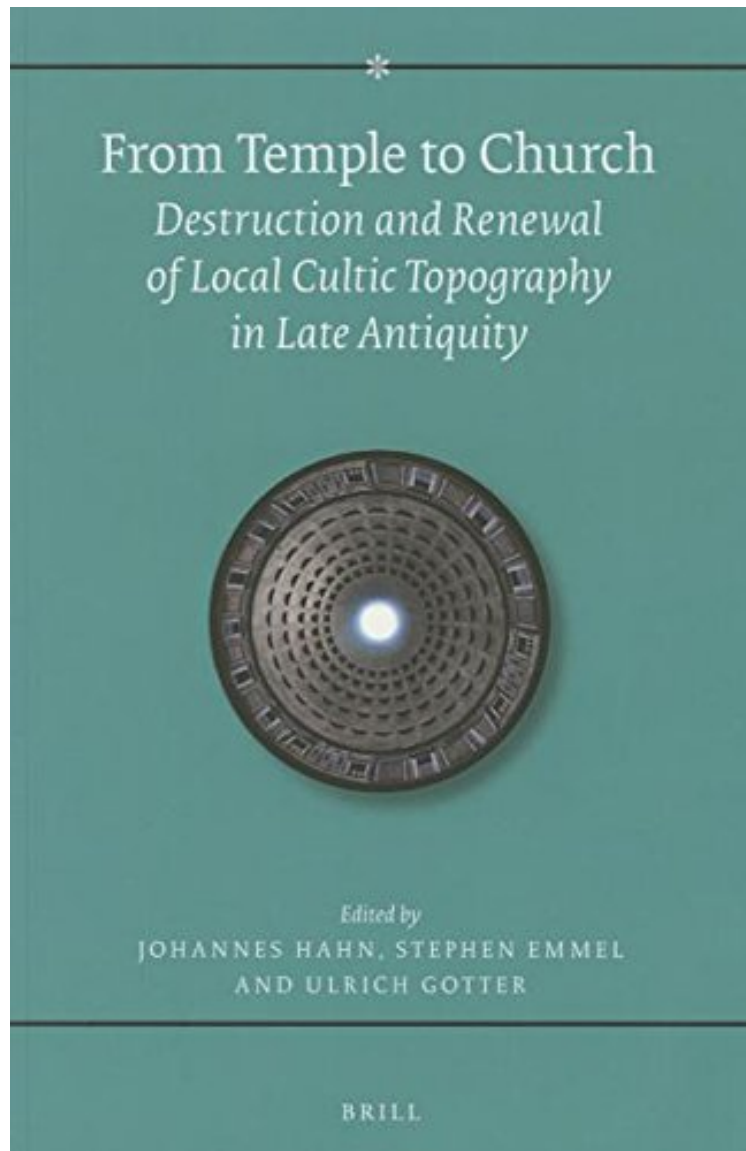


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## From Temple to Church

*Stephen Emmel*

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**Stephen Emmel : From Temple to Church** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised From Temple to Church:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Insightful but skewedBy DAJPolytheistic religion died out in the Roman Empire through a long, convoluted process. This book mostly discusses the conversion of temple buildings, which were often reused as churches. In some cases, most famously the destruction of the Serapeum of Alexandria, the traditional rites in the temples only stopped after a violent Christian attack, but as the editors say right at the beginning,

the texts that describe such violent events are often, though not always, inaccurate. One of the more important things these studies demonstrate is that anti-pagan edicts from Christian emperors couldn't stop people from practicing their religion. They could be used by Christian fanatics on the ground to justify their anti-pagan behavior, but those fanatics could distort what those edicts actually said to make their points. Even more important, Christian stories of saints' lives tend to exaggerate, or even fabricate, stories of temple destruction so as to make their subjects look more "heroic". Some of the better essays in the book are more focused on the texts themselves the types of stories they told and the way they distorted events rather than temple buildings. Despite their cautious approach to the texts, these authors still sometimes overemphasize violent conversion. Johannes Hahn, for instance, writes about Philae as the only certain instance where a temple was attacked and then immediately converted to a church. But Philae and the End of Egyptian Religion, published the same year as this book, persuasively argues that the cult at Philae died out decades before the temple was converted. The volume is also geographically skewed. It draws its evidence overwhelmingly from the eastern half of the empire, and of the nine studies that focus on particular regions, one is about Aphrodisias in Anatolia, one is about Palestine, and seven are about Egypt. That's useful to me because Egypt is my focus, but if your interests lie elsewhere it's a problem. A slightly later book, The Archaeology of Late Antique 'Paganism', edited by Luke Lavan and Michael Mulryan, provides a more complete and convincing description of the Christianization process. It's more geographically balanced and focuses on all kinds of archaeological evidence about pagan practices. This book's focus on textual evidence makes it a good complement to Lavan and Mulryan, but this book doesn't stand on its own as well as theirs does.

Destruction of temples and their transformation into churches are central symbols of change in religious environment, socio-political system, and public perception in late antiquity. Archaeologists, historians, and historians of religion seek an appropriate larger perspective on the phenomenon temple-destruction.

About the Author Johannes Hahn, Ph.D. (1986) and Habilitation (1993), Heidelberg University, is Professor of Ancient History at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. He has published primarily on Roman imperial history and late antiquity, including *Gewalt und religiöser Konflikt. Studien zu den Auseinandersetzungen zwischen Christen, Heiden und Juden im Osten des Römischen Reiches* (Akademie Verlag, 2004). Stephen Emmel, Ph.D. (1993) in Religious Studies, Yale University, is Professor of Coptology at the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität Münster. He has published extensively on Coptic philology and Coptic literature, including *Shenoute's Literary Corpus* (Peeters, 2004). Ulrich Gotter, Ph.D. (1992) and Habilitation (2002), Freiburg University, is Professor of Ancient History at the Universität Konstanz. He has published on Roman republican history, Roman historiography, and processes of acculturation and of Christianization and is currently working on monarchy in the ancient world. The contributors to this volume are: Roger S. Bagnall, Doron Bar, David Brakke, Angelos Chaniotis, Stephen Emmel, David Frankfurter, Ulrich Gotter, Peter Grossmann, Johannes Hahn, and Helen Saradi.