

Review

VALENTINA LIMINA, *POTERI E STRATEGIE FAMILIARI DI VOLTERRA: IL CASO DI UNA COMUNITÀ ETRUSCA NEL MONDO ROMANO*. Oxford: BAR Publishing, 2021. Pp. xiii + 194, illus. ISBN 9781407357881. £48.00.

In this book — a revised version of her doctoral thesis — Valentina Limina offers an intimate and intricate study of the community of Roman-era Volterra through a focus on the long-term strategies for success of its elite families. Deftly drawing together a dense web of literary, archaeological and epigraphic material (both published and unpublished), she presents a robust account of people and landscape from the first century B.C. to the fifth century A.D. L.'s Volterra and its leading lights are resilient and versatile, adapting to changing circumstances to retain, and sharpen, their competitive edge. Volterra has sometimes been characterised as a conservative society, clinging on to its Etruscan past, but L. shows how its elites strategically leveraged conservatism and tradition to keep themselves and their community relevant in turbulent historical circumstances. These, therefore, are not the immobile or rigid elites of some earlier scholarship, but more creative and dynamic agents. They are simultaneously masters of small town and big city; indeed, L. argues that it is precisely local elites' grip on Volterra that provides the platform for their influence in the city of Rome and the wider empire. She depicts the relationship between Volterra and Rome as one of constant dialogue and negotiation, making this a textured and nuanced case-study of '*romanizzazione*' (L. does not shy from the word, though uses it only intermittently).

L. is committed to a chronologically and thematically wide-ranging approach. The book takes us from the Volterran elites' struggles in the Social and civil wars of the first century B.C. to their eventual replacement by new powerbrokers in the changed and Christianised world of the fifth and sixth centuries A.D. It explores social, political, economic and cultural strategies in turn. And it is firmly a history of both people and place: L. throughout emphasises the significance of physical landscape and devotes attention to geography and hydrology.

After a brief introduction to Volterra and to L.'s project, most of the book comprises four main chapters, each summarised in workmanlike abstracts in Italian and English and supplemented by illuminating maps, figures and photographs that display the impressive range of material that L. is drawing upon. Ch. 1 examines society and administration, analysing Volterra's demography, franchise, civic and political structures and offices. It devotes attention to the historiographical problems of reconstructing these, to prosopography, and to Volterra's relationship to structures and figures of Roman politics. L. argues for Etruscan elites' successful leverage of local family and client networks as a powerbase for long-term success. Ch. 2 turns to economic strategies, examining elites' management of resources and private property. L. considers elite commercial activities both in Volterran territory and abroad, and compares the lasting success of the Cecina family with the more fleeting success of the Venulei family. Local kinship and family networks, and effective negotiation of the wider political currents of the Roman Republic and Principate, emerge as central to economic success just as to political success.

Ch. 3 traces the archaeological visibility of different phases of Volterra's history. It uses field surveys to explore changing landscape and settlement patterns, both in the urban centre and rural hinterlands. L. also considers 'marginal landscapes', which she depicts as especially vulnerable to outside political forces, being the site both of imperial and early ecclesiastical properties. The discussion of the choices and agents behind these archaeological patterns is unavoidably speculative and L. is honest about the limitations of the evidence; but this is one place where it would have been helpful to signpost links between findings in this chapter and those in other chapters more explicitly. Ch. 4 concentrates on cultural strategies. It argues forcefully for elites' instrumentalisation of their Etruscan identity and the marketisation of their religious and philosophical assets to gain respect and influence at Rome. L. is sharp here on identity and/as power, and it is in this chapter that the Etruscan/Roman negotiation that she argues for throughout becomes clearest and most pointed. The book concludes with an epilogue on Volterra as 'paradox', traditional but innovative, geographically isolated but politically plugged in.

This book is unashamedly a story of the elite. It embraces Mattingly's 'trickle-down' model of Romanisation and Syme's emphasis on oligarchy. L. references elite negotiation with those below

them, but these people barely get a look in themselves. This is an elite that is local but not parochial, with one eye on Volterra and one eye on Rome and the wider Mediterranean. L. does well to avoid long theoretical discussions of Romanisation and instead to get on with showing negotiations and strategies on the ground, to direct our attention to people and processes rather than terminology.

Above all, this book is the story of one family — the Cecina. Just as for Ovid, ‘Caesar is the state’, so for L. the Cecina are Volterra. They are uniquely and enduringly successful, pulling the strings in economy, culture and politics and coming to represent and enact Etruscan influence amongst the Roman elite. In her conclusion, L. boldly compares them to both the Florentine Medici and early medieval feudal lords.

This is a meticulously researched and rich book of interest to both historians and archaeologists. On the back cover, Nicola Terrenato describes it as a ‘fascinating fresco’ of Volterran life. It is undoubtedly that, offering both a portrait and landscape view of an elite and their region.

University of Oxford
olivia.elder@classics.ox.ac.uk
doi:10.1017/S0075435824000443

OLIVIA ELDER

© The Author(s), 2024. Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.