

A ROMAN NEIGHBOURHOOD OVER TIME

JACOBS, II (P. W.) *The Lives of a Roman Neighborhood. Tracing the Imprint of the Past, from 500 BCE to the Present*. Pp. xii + 245, ills, maps, colour pls. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2023. Cased, £75, US\$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-316-51263-0.

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S. Kostof's *The City Shaped* (1991) has inspired innumerable studies of urbanism and continues to provide a guide for those exploring the politics of urban layout, its builders and processes of change. Following K. Lynch and L. Mumford, Kostof argued that we must see the city as 'a human artifact' (Kostof, p. 9), shaped by historic and cultural processes over time both intentional and unwitting. He argued therefore that urban form is 'a receptacle of meaning' that can be understood only with adequate knowledge of those same contexts obtained from a variety of source material such as art, maps and texts. Such is the approach taken in J.'s *Lives of a Roman Neighborhood*.

This is J.'s second book following *Campus Martius* (2014) and is similarly the first English monograph written about a subject well-researched but never synthesised into one narrative spanning such a time frame. J. focuses on a 'slice of an urban landscape' north of the Tiber Island (p. 2), which, in antiquity, encompassed the Theatre of Balbus, the Crypta Balbi, the Theatre of Marcellus, the perimeter of the Circus Flaminius and numerous other porticoes and temples. Later it would be designated by medieval administrations as the Sant'Angelo *rione* and enclose the Jewish Ghetto systematically demolished by the Liberal and Fascist governments in their sanitation and excavation campaigns.

In ten chronological chapters, each split into major phases of development, J. explores physical aspects of urban change from antiquity to the present day with three Kostof-esque questions in mind: how 'location and topography influence development over time', how 'existing development attracts still further alterations to the landscape' and how 'earlier development may be imprinted upon the landscape or otherwise preserved to influence future changes' (p. 3). To this he adds the relationship between 'development' and 'memory', specifically 'depositories of memory', which, as theorised briefly in the introductory chapter, include ruins, inscriptions and toponyms: the spatial forms in which 'the past seeps through Rome's later urban fabric and often guides future patterns of development' (p. 2).

This is ultimately both a study of ancient Roman urbanism and a work of memorialisation. It comes shortly after two edited volumes published by the Impact of the Ancient City project (ERC, Cambridge) that have similarly dealt with how the material and symbolic aspects of Graeco-Roman urbanism interact as they are transmitted: *Remembering and Forgetting* (2022) and *Cities as Palimpsests?* (2022), both of which critically question how the past is remembered, layered, stripped back and reconfigured to suit political interests.

To address all these ideas in one book across 25 centuries is ambitious, and J.'s discussion is mostly clear and compelling. At times the writing becomes descriptive but is kept lively by strong passages of argumentation particularly in the ancient and Renaissance chapters. J. explores throughout how space is shaped top down, whether this is to manage earthquakes and floods or peoples and pasts. A key theme, therefore, is intention, and J. makes persuasive points about Augustus' motivations siting the Theatre of Marcellus, suggesting the arcades functioned as a form of crowd control or

'turnstile' (p. 74), more important perhaps than the theatre-going experience given the orientation (p. 68). In connection with this J. considers throughout movement on the ground and how ancient structures directed pedestrian and economic circulation via road layouts and processional routes. This is done effectively in the chapter 'Repurposing Space', which reimagines a pilgrim's experience following the Einsiedeln Itinerary and reflects upon what has been lost and preserved within Christian city guides (p. 106). Well-illustrated arguments are made for how the Pons Aemilius, the so-called Ponte Rotto, redirected traffic and therefore contributed to the abandonment of Churches in the area (p. 169).

Much of the discussion about 'memory' revolves around the correct identification of the location or dedication of ancient structures. J. devotes attention to the Circus Flaminius and its changing topographical memory, via the *Mirabilia* and Piranesi, leading towards Giuglielmo Gatti successfully 'connecting the dots' in 1960 (p. 216). In the later chapters these themes are brought together in an analysis of the Jewish Ghetto and its enclosure as depicted by maps of Rome, Gregorovius and supported by statistics. This is tied to an investigation of its physical reminders today, and J. points out that destructions have somewhat paradoxically left a 'topographical imprint' of the medieval neighbourhood and the Circus Flaminius (p. 218). In comparison with the opening chapters, this treatment of Liberal and Fascist urbanism feels less underpinned and needed to be interwoven more explicitly with cultural context, including unification and the development of archaeology, Romanticism and Modernism, epidemics, all of which impacted why the *rione* was studied, remembered and shaped in the way in which it was (p. 204).

This book is an insightful and readable addition to scholarship recommended for students and non-specialists seeking a well-synthesised introduction. Given this audience, it is essential to raise the significant problem that the book tells a history of Rome, but lacks proper engagement with the historiography. Increasingly, Classical scholarship reflects critically upon how the urban past has been studied and narrated by questioning colonial assumptions in order to understand how our approach and picture of the past is problematic. In failing to engage with these debates explicitly and often using the language of the source material, the text risks leading readers towards mistaken value judgements. This can neither be the intention, nor is it the character of J.'s book, where judgement is sometimes suggested by tone. But chapter headings 'The Long Show Ends 14–554 CE', 'Growth and Decline, 1347–1555' or statements such as 'Romans living in the first half of the fifth century witnessed not only slow deterioration of the once magnificent buildings of antiquity' (p. 92) have the potential to replicate narratives that, as per Gregorovius or Liberal 'accretions' (p. 210), have glorified monumentality and used constructions of decline or dirt as narrative devices to create hierarchies of value. Scholars of late antiquity would likely protest unframed assertions that 'ancient Rome was turning to rubble' (p. 97) and 'that in Rome and in Italy as a whole classical civilization had perished' in the Early Middle Ages (T. Magnuson, *The Urban Transformation of Medieval Rome* [2004], cit. J., p. 97). It was not all transformation and ease (B. Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome* [2005]), but critical reflections drawing from post-colonial thought are important. This applies equally to the study of intention, which has historically projected modern reason onto ancient builders – sometimes suggested here by terms like 'real estate' and hypotheses about growth-oriented development.

The presentation of material would have been strengthened by a more robust theoretical framing of 'memory' – and for whom – in relation to the processes of physical change considered. It would be impossible to interact with all themes of this ever-expanding field, nor does J. set out to do so, but the text interacts with far more ideas than 'depositories', motioning often towards dynamics of knowledge production, ownership of heritage and place or factual accuracy versus truth. Unpacking these subjects is essential

in helping readers to understand what is at stake in the mutability of memory and leaving them better equipped to apply such analysis themselves. At times, the invocation feels insubstantial, signposted by poetic metaphors such as ‘imprint’, ‘lives’, flickering and fading.

The epilogue takes us on a walk through the contemporary *rione* and invites us to consider simultaneous pasts, cultural dynamics and our lives as another phase in one of many. I hope that this also highlights how we see the past through the lens of the present and will therefore always ‘correct for errors’ (p. 223).

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PEASANT HOUSEHOLDS

BOWES (K.) (ed.) *The Roman Peasant Project 2009–2014. Excavating the Roman Rural Poor*. In two volumes. (University Museum Monograph 154.) Pp. xxxiv + 753, figs, ills, maps, colour pls. Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2020. Cased, £96, US\$120. ISBN: 978-1-94905707-2.

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Archaeological knowledge of the non-elite Roman countryside based on academic excavations is virtually non-existent and highly dependent on the archaeological surface record produced in the many landscape surveys that have been carried out all over the Italian peninsula since the advent of systematic landscape surveys in the 1980s. Indeed, Bowes is only able to cite a handful excavations that have been carried out on rural sites that can plausibly be interpreted as the homesteads of Roman peasant families, a site category that, on the contrary, occurs frequently in the record of systematic surveys but not substantiated by excavation. The Roman Peasant Project, therefore, can be characterised as an undertaking that was geared towards the identification of peasant households in the Roman landscape. It opted to do so with a keen interest in the reconstruction of the environment in which they were set.

To this end Bowes and her multidisciplinary team of researchers selected a number of sites found in the surveys by landscape archaeologist Marielena Ghisleni, who compiled the archaeological map of the province of Grosseto in northern Tuscany between 2006 and 2009. The almost complete absence of the top tier of the rural hierarchy in the landscape surveyed by Ghisleni – the villa – made the study area attractive for Bowes’s team as it offered the opportunity to study Roman peasant households in the context of their ‘locale’ without overt elite presence. Based on the small to modest sized artefact scatters mapped by Ghisleni, Bowes and her team expected therefore to be able to excavate the remains of peasant households, possibly with different wealth levels.

As it turned out, the archaeological excavations showed the rural smallholders’ use of the landscape to be much more complex than was expected, and only a few trenches provided convincing evidence of a domestic function. The majority of trenches pointed to seasonal occupation, sheds or stables and agricultural functions, including a (communal?) isolated oil press and a field drain. In other words, a quite different picture from what was envisaged in the project design.