

which liquid landscapes were understood and imagined by ancient philosophers, scientists and mythographers.

The book is divided into three complementary parts. Part One ('Interpreting the Watery Framework') explores attempts to conceptualise and categorise both aquatic (e.g. rivers, seas) and semi-aquatic (e.g. islands, springs) phenomena within a range of cosmogonic, physical and philosophical frameworks. Part Two ('Explaining Watery Phenomena') interrogates the explanations offered for conditions and events associated with water, focusing particularly on weather and disease. Part Three ('Imagining the Watery World') turns its attention to the sizeable landscape of aqueous imaginaries and charts a course through the litany of gods, monsters, creatures and forces that asserted their presence in maritime contexts in ancient art and literature.

The picture of water that emerges from *Conceptions* is one of a simultaneously 'polymorphic' and 'metamorphic' (228) entity that both transformed and was transformed by the unstable currents of ancient thought. It was water, I. shows, that, on the one hand, 'fired the ancient imagination' (23), rearing its head as, among other things, a fundamental building block of the cosmos, a technology of cartographic organisation, a balancing foil for the terrestrial landscape, and more. It was, however, not merely a thing to think about, but likewise a tool to think with: 'a central component in how ancient thinkers viewed and interpreted their world, providing a prism through which to observe and consider natural philosophy and watery phenomena' (192).

*Conceptions* is especially remarkable for its pioneering embrace of interdisciplinarity. I. not only spans a wide range of subjects and methodologies from within the ambit of Classics but likewise wades into the waters of geography, hydrology, history of science, and so on. She does so, moreover, while avoiding the positivist pitfalls lying in wait for the clumsy intellectual historian, noting from the outset that her interest is not in whether the ancients were 'right' or 'wrong' in the view of modern science. She rather focuses our attention on the particular kinds of questions and responses developed by ancient thinkers and what this says about the unique cultural and intellectual context of antiquity.

The book is not, to be sure, without its weaknesses. I., for example, is clear that she has relied primarily on literary sources as the basis of her discussion. There are, however, in spite of this uneven weighting, several important texts that are not given a fair hearing. One example of this is the substantial extant corpus of Greek *periploi* (i.e. coastal geographies). I. makes incidental mention of some such texts but does not afford them any sustained or systematic discussion. This is a non-trivial oversight that results in the maritime coastline as a unique space of terraqueous interchange being sidelined in the discussion of land and water in ch. 3. This is despite the fact that works like Dionysius of Byzantium's *Anaplous of the Bosporus* engage creatively with the theme of the symbiotic relationship between the terrestrial and the aquatic that animates this section of the book.

These shortcomings do not detract, however, from the importance and originality of I.'s offering. This is an engaging and accessible work that does the long-overdue work of tracing the history of ancient epistemological engagements with aquatic environments. The treatment of practical human engagements with the watery world (e.g. baths, aqueducts, lighthouses) in *Using and Conquering* is a necessary complement to the intellectual history set out in *Conceptions*. These should now both be standard reading for students and scholars of maritime history and the environmental humanities.

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JESÚS BERMEJO TIRADO and IGNASI GRAU MIRA (EDS), *THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF PEASANTRY IN ROMAN SPAIN*. Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. Pp. xiii +299, illus. ISBN 9783110757200. £82.00.

The last five years have put peasants back on Roman archaeology's agenda. The ground-breaking *Rural Settlement of Roman Britain* project leveraged that country's unrivalled developer-funded

archaeological record to produce a rich vision of the lives of the province's rural inhabitants (A. Smith *et al.* (eds), *The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain*, Vols 1–3 (2016–18)). The French/Belgian/Dutch *Rurland* project attempted something similar, albeit on a less ambitious, more regional scale (M. Reddé (ed.), *Gallia Rustica*, Vols 1–2 (2017–18)). Efforts to do the same for Italy are more limited still, with more pointillist projects on a handful of sites or a single region (K. Bowes (ed.), *The Roman Peasant Project 2009–2015: Excavating the Roman Rural Poor* (2021); S. Maggi *et al.* (eds), *Edifici rustici romani tra Pianura e Appennino. Stato della ricerca* (2022)). The volume edited by J. Bermejo Tirado and I. Grau Mira presents the *communis opinio* from Spain. As evidenced from this twelve-chapter conference volume, a substantial gulf separates both the nature of the data for Iberian peasants as well as its theorisation, from peasants as revealed in these other places.

A robust introduction by the editors lays out what emerges as a consistent set of themes that run through most if not all of the papers: a critique of the bias towards villas in the Spanish scholarship; the archaeological histories — and vocabulary — which have made it hard to see other kinds of rural sites and populations; and an alternative historiography of peasant studies, largely drawn from Eric Wolf and Teodor Shanin. Like most conference volumes, the subsequent chapters constitute a mixed bag of approaches, almost all of which are micro-regional case studies.

Only Bermejo Tirado's first chapter draws on the few developer-excavated data from Spain to lay out a model for peasant settlement around Madrid. An analysis of tools, storage and ceramic wear patterns is adduced as evidence for a largely egalitarian, subsistence peasantry. Two ancillary chapters also offer a more granular finds-based approach: L. Neira's examination of Roman mosaics' depiction of agricultural labour; and L. Colominas and A. Gallego-Valle's presentation of some faunal analysis from three rural sites in Catalunya.

The volume otherwise relies on the strong Spanish tradition of remote sensing — terrestrial and aerial survey and some geophysics. Grau Mira uses a combination of surveys near the ancient city of Dianium to reveal a range of small, isolated sites. While these display high levels of subsequent consumption, including Roman fine wares, their early foundation in the first century B.C.E. leads to their characterisation as indigenous sites which continued their way of life under Roman rule, although under the control of the area's few contemporary Roman villas. V. M. Herrera *et al.* present an artifact-density survey in the Estremadura (an area known mostly for its great villas but with a long tradition of survey). Centred on the tiny Roman town of Contributa Iulia (Medina de las Torres), it lays out a settlement pattern from the Bronze Age to the present with a tight nucleus of Roman activity near the town. J. García Sanchez offers a highly theorised interpretation of an artifact-based survey in the *ager Segisamonensis* (Sasmón) in Palencia, conceptualising the off-site as an example of posthuman object agency, and an indicator of resistance to Roman rule. Chapters by V. Revilla and M. Sánchez-Simón return to the villa, interrogating its broader agricultural apparatus for possible sites of peasant life. Revilla's survey of Catalonian coastal sites focuses on producer sites of various sizes, some of which have been catalogued as villas, and some of which are much smaller or more dispersed. He argues that their productive apparatus — kilns, wine presses and grain storage — indicate sites controlled by villas and their elites, and therefore not autonomous peasant sites. Sánchez-Simón examines the single villa of Almenarade Adaja-Puras near Segovia. Excavations in its early phases reveal something of its pre-monumental material culture, while explorations in its near and more distant hinterland provide a sense of its agricultural apparatus and near neighbours.

Two final chapters draw on the older and more developed study of early medieval peasants, and offer a much-needed reflection on the heuristic relationships between materiality and the search for rural non-elites. Drawing on a robust body of developer-excavated fifth- through ninth-century sites, A. Vigil-Escalera Guirado interrogates settlement morphology, funerary structures and grain storage for the social context of peasant community. J. A. Quirós Castillo, one of the most prolific voices on early medieval peasant archaeology, presents a robust historiography of the field, contesting approaches which emphasise alterity and passivity, and engaging with much broader — and more contemporary — peasant studies, including the rich medieval literature largely ignored in the Roman-period chapters.

In publishing these collected papers, the editors aimed to provide a broader, English-reading audience with a snapshot of peasant settlements in Spain and the various approaches currently used to study them. This well-illustrated volume has certainly done that, providing a useful panorama of Spanish rural archaeology. Although one misses the adjacent Portuguese material and historiography, the volume is (mostly) well translated; all the chapters provide orienting maps

for those unfamiliar with the Spanish landscape and useful historiographic introductions for those unfamiliar with its scholarship. The *communis opinio* and *communis ratio* are both readily grasped from the volume's regionally grounded studies.

For those steeped in the peasant archaeology of other parts of the empire, it is nonetheless disorientating. While most chapters cite a contemporary archaeological-theoretical apparatus, the peasant studies bibliography is that of the 1970s: the more recent work that has called into question the autochthonous, subsistence peasant — including the work of Barcelona-based Susana Narotsky — is absent. As a consequence, one is left with some jarring moments, where archaeological data fail to align with an interpretive apparatus determined to find the Wolfian indigenous agriculturalist. Disorienting, too, is the disjuncture between highly specialised studies — e.g. on tooth-wear patterns for domesticates, or wear analysis on ceramics — but without the more basic reporting — e.g. clear NISP numbers for individual species, functional analysis of the full range of ceramics — that are both discipline standards and potentially critical support of the authors' arguments.

Above all, though, one misses the peasants. The reliance on field survey to 'find' the peasants — which are the pre-arranged subject of inquiry — results in field-survey data pressed into uncomfortable service. Scatters or artifact densities are used as proxies for land tenure, dependency relationships or indications of colonial hegemonies. The excavated data that would actually reveal these relationships more clearly — more robust ceramics analysis, and the totally absent archaeobotanical evidence — is unavailable, but there is very little discussion of the limits of spatial data to supply these gaps. Whether artifact scatters actually represent peasant dwelling is never asked. There is, in short, a tendency to rely on new theory and technology in lieu of rigorous data, or a critical interrogation of what heuristic weight the extant data will bear. This is most clear when reading the more robust early medieval chapters: each, in their own way, approaches their subject from this critical perspective, asking what the material detritus tells us — and cannot tell us — about early medieval rural lives. Both of these chapters draw on a more people-centred theoretical apparatus, emphasising relationships and risk. But above all, both can draw on several decades of excavated data, including the all-important botanical and faunal data, which the Romanists still lack.

These last two chapters are a fascinating reminder of what periodisation does to our historical gaze. Without the overburden of a villa-centred, imperial historiography, it is possible to ask fundamental questions about how peasants lived. Inside that historiography, peasant lives are too readily shorthanded by their *a priori* embodiment as a subject people.

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NICHOLE SHELDRIK, *BUILDING THE COUNTRYSIDE: RURAL ARCHITECTURE AND SETTLEMENT IN TRIPOLITANIA DURING THE ROMAN AND LATE ANTIQUE PERIODS* (Society for Libyan Studies open access monographs 2). London: Society for Libyan Studies, 2021. Pp. xiv + 205, illus. ISBN 9781900971775. £40.00.

This is a revised version of a DPhil thesis prepared at the University of Oxford under the supervision of Professor Andrew Wilson. The book's main aim is to offer the first synthesis of Roman and late antique rural architecture and settlement in ancient Tripolitania (modern Libya), an area still ravaged by civil war. It forms part of the EAMENA (Endangered Archaeology in the Middle East and North Africa) project, a joint research initiative devoted to applying several remote sensing technologies to record available data from archaeological sites and landscapes which are under threat.

Despite the publication of some previous monographs on the archaeology of the Roman period in this region of North Africa — the best known being D. J. Mattingly's *Tripolitania* (1995) — our current knowledge about rural landscapes and living conditions in most parts of Roman Tripolitania is still scanty. In an attempt to fill these gaps, Nichole Sheldrick's book is based on a