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MANTHA ZARMAKOUPHI. 2023. *Shaping Roman landscape: ecocritical approaches to architecture and wall painting in early Imperial Italy*. Malibu: J. Paul Getty Museum; 978-1-60606-848-9 hardback \$65.



The theme of landscape is of central importance to the conception of Roman society during the late Republican and early Imperial periods. It is both praised in the Greco-Latin literary texts of the time and sought after in the daily lives of the empire's inhabitants, particularly as an integral part of architecture and represented in painted decorations. The richly illustrated book *Shaping Roman landscape* by Mantha Zarmakouphi, comprising 206 pages, aims to echo contemporary ecological concerns by examining the place of 'landscapes' in architecture and decoration, particularly in paintings. To achieve this, the author uses a wide range of sources, including ancient literature, archaeological remains and studies of toichography (the excavation and study of ancient wall paintings and stucco), to which she applies a particularly effective 'ecocritical' approach (as the subtitle of the book suggests), which aim is to go beyond the limits, often restrictive, attributed to traditional Roman iconography.

This work employs an innovative methodological approach, it is well written with very clear, precise descriptions, and is resolutely solid thanks to its convincing arguments and the inclusion of many very high-quality colour images (photographs, plans and graphic renderings). Zarmakouphi demonstrates that the large luxury residences, belonging to the imperial sphere in Rome or to the elite on the coasts of Latium and Campania (*villae maritimae*), show an intentional and deliberate interaction between architecture, landscaping and painting. Indeed, a collective analysis of the archaeological remains of the architecture, topiary art and decoration found in these great elite residences, combined with the ancient textual evidence, allows us to know how the Romans, at the beginning of the Empire, understood that they had considerable power to shape the natural world. This reflects well the personal, cultural and political impulses of the time.

The book is organised in six chapters: Ecocritical approaches to the Roman landscape; Changing landscape; Environmental considerations in luxury villa design; Between conceptual and perceptual space: miniature landscapes; Simulacra and simulation: garden paintings; The remediation and intermediality of landscape. The chapters examine the way in which garden paintings (*horti*) place the depicted ecosystems under Roman control, as well as how miniature landscape paintings captured the transformation of the Italian coastline with its colonnaded porticoed villas. These works of art are testament to the changing relationship between man and nature. Examples of these natural and constructed landscapes, derived from the sacro-idyllic and Nilotic landscapes, as portrayed in wall paintings in the fourth Pompeian style of the urban houses of Pompeii and Herculaneum and the suburban villas of Stabies and Oplontis, showcase a particularly significant corpus. The Roman domination of the Hellenistic world through its integration of different Greek architectural styles

is fully illustrated by these landscape representations. The imported plants featured in the vast ornamental gardens, whether as real plants or symbolically depicted (e.g. wall paintings in the second Pompeian style in the villa of the empress Livia at Prima Porta and in the third Pompeian style in the House of the Golden Bracelet at Pompeii) were inspired by the Hellenistic *paradeisos*. The painted harbour scenes reveal as well that Rome, in an adapted form, had inherited the Greek culture that it now dominated.

The interesting methodological contribution is Zarmakoupi's use of the concept of 'artialization', which refers to the creative transformation of the natural landscape into a constructed landscape through human intervention. It also contributes to the cognitive concept of 'remediation', as defined by Jay Bolter and Richard Grusin (2000)—that is, the change of medium of a work, both in the technical sense of a change of medium and in the broader sense of a change of cultural form. This allows the author to establish that these landscape paintings constitute a genuine form of mediation that has transformed our understanding and knowledge of the real world by guiding the viewer's gaze to the landscapes surrounding the buildings. The interaction between real landscapes and figurative landscapes, and the interconnected construction they share, are at the heart of this resolutely innovative and effective study. Zarmakoupi's work is an excellent exploration of ancient architecture and presents a particularly interesting approach to painted landscape decoration. The bibliography delivers a comprehensive framework and mirrors a deep understanding of the literature on Roman archaeology and, more specifically, on architecture and ancient wall paintings. The indexes at the end of the book serve as invaluable resources for locating each example cited, including ancient literary sources, names of places, archaeological sites and individuals.

This beautiful book will appeal not least due to its colourful images to a wider audience and Roman specialists alike. The author lets the reader look over the shoulder of the creators: the architects, gardeners and painters and allows us a glimpse of what the real early Roman Empire looked like.

Reference

BOLTER, J. & R. GRUSIN. 2000. *Remediation: understanding new media*. Cambridge (MA): MIT Press.

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