

III. ART AND ARCHAEOLOGY

R. NEUDECKER and P. ZANKER (EDS), *LEBENSWELTEN. BILDER UND RÄUME IN DER RÖMISCHEN STADT DER KAISERZEIT. SYMPOSIUM AM 24. UND 25. JANUAR 2002 ZUM ABSCHLUß DES VON DER GERDA HENKEL STIFTUNG GEFÖRDERTEN FORSCHUNGSPROGRAMMS "STADTKULTUR IN DER RÖMISCHEN KAISERZEIT"* (Palilia 16). Wiesbaden: Dr Ludwig Reichert Verlag, 2005. Pp. 253, illus. ISBN 3-89500-515-0. €45.00.

When Roman Art and Archaeology started to boom in the 1970s, inspired by the movements of the period, it was the political sphere — public buildings, state reliefs, imperial 'propaganda' — which dominated research in the field. Only more recently — and, arguably, again in tune with our own time's mood — has the private sphere moved into the centre of interest. On the one hand, private buildings, houses, villas, tombs, and their respective furnishings and decoration increasingly attracted attention. On the other hand, interest shifted from the sheer reconstruction of objects

and from potential intentions for their creation, to their reception, to the various ways a potential user, visitor, or viewer would perceive a building or an image. It was this general interest that also motivated Paul Zanker to initiate a research project on 'Urban Culture in the Imperial Period', involving twenty young scholars specializing in various fields of 'Altertumswissenschaften'. The sixteen contributions to the present volume, two of them in Italian, the others in German, were originally presented at a colloquium concluding the project and comprise both papers by project members and by established scholars (a list of the original projects is provided on p. 253).

In their introduction to the volume (7-19), Zanker and Neudecker present the outline of their project in more detail and summarize its basic themes and insights, partly published already elsewhere. Stimulated by recent debates about the event-driven world of the metropolis as it was created in the late nineteenth century, they sought to explore the potential of studying metropolitan culture and city-life in antiquity. The project members mostly focused on various aspects of private life in the city and on the experience and perception of individual recipients and 'users', explicitly rejecting an approach directed at the reconstruction of an 'objective' and uninhabited environment. This interest, Z. & N. felt, presented a particular methodological challenge since an anthropological approach to Roman life entails at least an awareness of aspects traditionally studied in different disciplines — if not a multi-disciplinary approach as such. The editors thus also wanted their project to counterbalance an increasing specialization in the discipline, which, so they hold, obscures larger cultural and historical contexts.

In a first paper (21-37), Palombi discusses the early history of those quarters in Rome later built over by the Imperial Fora. Livy's description of the fire of 210 B.C. (26.27.1-5) serves to establish the areas north of the Forum Romanum as its urban and functional extension, so that the fire appears as a terrorist act on the heart of Rome. Based on Terence, *Adelphoe* 568-86, Palombi establishes further detail about the area, and using Propertius' (4.4.1-8) and Ovid's (*Met.* 14.772-804) versions of the final encounter between the Roman and Sabine forces, he argues that the area later covered by the fora of Caesar and Augustus was an almost bucolic, wooded landscape to which the Augustan authors relocated the event in order to elevate the atmosphere of the new fora by reference to a myth-historical episode from the formative period of Roman history. Though Palombi's descriptions are as clear as they could get, an inclusion of some plans would have helped the reader's imagination.

Grüner (39-50) looks at 'demolished buildings as an urban problem in the early Imperial period'. Reviewing both written and archaeological sources in order to distinguish between real ruins and cases where benefactors only talk, conveniently, about ruins when they wish to claim a building for themselves rather than its original donor, he points out the methodological problems involved in analysing his sources. He goes on to look in particular at destructions by natural disasters in the early imperial period and demonstrates that Rome was marked throughout not only by individual ruined buildings but by whole areas lying in ruins, which were regarded by the authorities as rather unsightly. Whether this was due to an increasing interest in pure aesthetics, as Grüner suggests, or rather to the feeling that ruins are a sign of neglect and a disorderly state of affairs reflecting badly on the emperors' *providentia* may, however, be debatable.

Kockel contributes three 'miscellanies' on Pompeii (51-72), correcting a detail of local topographic chronology, newly identifying and dating the statue of Fortuna from the Eumachia building, and arguing that two statue groups of Aeneas and Romulus with inscribed *elogia* originally adorned the so-called Lararium Publicum rather than the Eumachia building. All three miscellanies prove Kockel's point of how much can be gained by studying both archival material and the extant monuments, though it is hard to see any link to the overall theme of the book.

Steuernagel (73-80) discusses the Piazzale delle Corporazioni at Ostia in order to demonstrate that the public perceived Roman associations, whether or not centred on a common occupation, primarily as cult communities. He convincingly rejects the view that the place had a mainly commercial function. Rather, the associations successively established their seats around a typical public *porticus post scaenam*, attracted by the temple in the middle of the portico. The temple provided a cult centre for festive meetings and dinners at the various *ludi*, while the porticoes served as a sort of VIP lounge for the members of the associations, who thus established themselves as an important factor in local politics.

Neudecker (81-100) offers another example of his intriguing talent to throw new light on much neglected building types and aspects of Roman daily life in exploring the intricate connection of sanctuaries and shopping facilities. Turning an abundance of information from literary texts into

a vivid description of elevated Roman shopping, he demonstrates how shopping facilities for luxury goods became an ever more prominent feature in the early imperial period, and how shopping centres and *tabernae* gained prestige and flair from their location. Shops in the shade of marble temples provided the most sophisticated shopping experience.

Busch (101–12) studies tombs of members of the Roman military units. Topographically, they tend to appear in clusters, often near to the camps. Yet, with the exception of the *Equites Singulares Augusti* who had a necropolis of their own, most members of the military chose to be buried within necropoleis also used by civilians. Their stelae, however, set their tombs off within any context through their uniform shape and iconography, which again was different for the *Equites Singulares*. As Busch suggests, these limits in design result from the burial of military personnel by their peers rather than their family, who developed traditions of their own.

Heinzelmann discusses flats and rented accommodation in Ostia (113–28). The establishment of the new Trajanic harbour brought about a radical change in the social structure of the city and its complete rebuilding, resulting in entirely different forms of social contacts and alliances. Traditional atrium-peristyle houses were substituted by *insulae* of up to five stories comprising *tabernae*, storage places, workshops etc., as well as flats. Analysing archaeological evidence for these *insulae* in the light of Roman law of ownership, Heinzelmann argues that they were mostly built and owned by syndicates of owners, none of whom were living in the flats themselves. The owners either lived in large houses and suburban villas or else they were investors not living in the city at all. The blocks provided rented accommodation for a broad spectrum of budgets and demands, from the simplest *tabernae* to luxury apartments rented out to the local élite. Heinzelmann paints a precise and vivid picture of the social implications of a building type which dominated in Rome as well.

Pirson (129–45) describes his joint project with Dickmann on the Pompeian Casa dei Postumii, which was built over an early city wall and moat around 300 B.C. and is a good example of the intimate connection of living and working. The long excursus on methodological and practical difficulties involved in their project appears somewhat at odds with the intention of the book. Kastenmeier (147–51) discusses various potential functions of the middle floor of the Suburban Baths in Pompeii without arriving at any conclusion.

Galli (153–73) studies the Italian city of Ariminum, that was later turned into a Roman colony. His main interest is in interpreting pottery as a particularly useful indicator of acculturation. Rather than identifying certain types of pots with certain ethnic groups in an abstract way, he relates these types to specific practices of usage, certain kinds of food and modes of food preparation known through other sources. These are shown to change considerably by becoming much more complex, varied, and socially stratified at the establishment of the colony and increasingly so afterwards. Galli thereby favours a methodological approach now common in ethno-anthropological studies, especially of the northern Roman provinces and Roman Britain, demonstrating how a typology of ceramics cannot just be used for abstract classification and dating but also as an indicator of particular practices and life-styles.

Stein-Hölkeskamp (175–85) describes how Roman *convivia* would serve various kinds of needs for both men and women. While always being occasions for erotic encounters, they would also provide an opportunity for Roman women, including single ones and those of respectable reputation and high rank, to participate in a quasi-public activity involving debates about politics and following general socio-political and cultural trends in society. Women were able to establish links and alliances with members of other families, thus making up to some extent for the lack of any official political role. With time, interest shifted to *convivia* as primary occasions for enjoying educated conversations about literature and philosophy after, so Stein-Hölkeskamp suggests, the upper class lost influence in politics under the Principate.

Dickmann (187–204) starts with some methodological reflections on the recent interest in ancient viewer perception, noting that the observer thus constructed often happens to be an educated member of the élite unfamiliar with a place rather than any member of society and someone going there frequently. Generally, he is rather pessimistic about this approach due to the lack of detailed information on a building's history and usage. He is on safer ground with mythological images because their contexts are fairly well known. His analysis of some images in Pompeian houses focuses on the display of erotically stimulating bodies, be they male or female, which he relates to erotic discourse in contemporary poetry.

Lorenz (205–21) looks at the decoration of Pompeian houses as well and draws on both literary and philosophical accounts of viewing images, and extant paintings. While a real viewer was

more than likely also to engage in some close reading of any individual image, in literary accounts viewers often explore links between two or more images. Discussing three sets of *tablinum* decorations, she identifies various kinds of cross-references between their images both in subject matter and artistic form. These links, however, neither result in proper decoration programmes nor do they correspond to rhetorical strategies, but they work on the level of free association.

Like Dickmann, Muth (223–42) is concerned about methodological issues involved in reconstructing viewer perceptions, taking the extensive mosaic decoration of the Villa of Piazza Armerina as her example — not exactly urban but otherwise well chosen. She doubts whether it is possible to recreate all the occasional detail of the viewer's background and current situation when viewing images, which are necessary for imagining a real viewer. Instead, she aims at reconstructing a 'conventional' viewer who, she believes, is the only one who can be studied on sound methodological ground because he is the one intended by the images. While this approach gains some justification from the fact that the images often follow artistic conventions themselves and thus seem to presuppose conventions in viewing as well, this viewer is a rather abstract notion and much in danger of becoming the modern scholar in disguise again. Muth's own in-depth study of three different categories of rooms pleasantly contradicts her theoretical scepticism. Giving an intense description of the images' power to draw their viewer into their artificial worlds, she imagines three rather concrete viewers defined by status, gender, kind of activity etc. — a visitor coming to meet the *dominus* in his most formal reception hall, a guest attending a more intimate dinner, and someone using the amenities of the villa's baths.

Finally, Zanker (243–51) looks at preferences in the choice of images in the decoration of sarcophagi in order to trace changes in value systems and interests in Roman society. Drawing on the change in preference from mythological images during the Antonine and Severan period to non-mythological subjects afterwards, Zanker stresses the continued interest in modes of happiness and longing for a contemplative 'good' life in both periods. The decreasing frequency of mythological images could be due to a declining interest in Greek *paideia* and an increasing number of (crypto-)Christians. As the most drastic change, he identifies the abandonment of any images expressing intense feelings of either joy and love or grief, and the sensual aspects of life in favour of more thoughtful images and spiritual values, which he relates to a general perception of crisis. Zanker's contribution is an excellent example of the kind of wide-ranging questions one can approach through 'art', even if his own historical interpretations may be disputed.

As so often with edited volumes, not all contributions adhere to the guiding idea of the book equally well and the coherence of the volume could have been increased by cross-references between papers. In particular, there is much fruitful overlap in interest between the papers by Neudecker and Palombi, and those by Stein-Hölkeskamp and Dickmann, but they are not close to each other in the book and the authors seem to be unaware of each others' contributions and bibliographical references. Overall, however, the quality of contributions is remarkable and the book's general aim is certainly achieved. We are made to imagine the city as a lived-in space and learn a lot about what urban life would have been like for the daily practitioner. Our attention is drawn both to aspects of ancient life which have so far passed largely unnoticed and interesting methodological problems. To the reviewer, the most illuminating contributions are those addressing experiences often neglected in scholarship, like the city landscape (Palombi, Grüner), luxury shopping (Neudecker), or the implications of *insula*-living (Heinzelmann). Some authors give wonderfully suggestive narratives of those potential experiences, especially Neudecker and Muth. Only a few authors address the methodological issues involved in such an approach (especially Dickmann, Lorenz, and Muth), two of them with a rather pessimistic result, demonstrating that this area still needs debate. In conclusion, the present volume contains some exciting insights into urban daily life and will hopefully stimulate further research in this field, extending collaboration between disciplines even further to include, for example, Numismatics, Epigraphy, Religion or Philosophy.

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