Review

G. J. GORSKI and J. E. PACKER, *THE ROMAN FORUM: A RECONSTRUCTION AND ARCHITECTURAL GUIDE*. New York/Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xxii + 437, illus. ISBN 9780521192446. £150.00/US\$250.00.

The volume produced by Gorski and Packer provides an innovative approach to the quintessential *locus classicus* — the Forum Romanum. The Forum is perhaps one of the most iconic archaeological landscapes of ancient Rome and is a main point of contact for tourists, students, scholars and romantics alike. In 2013, over 5.5 million people visited the archaeological area of the Forum Romanum-Palatine Hill-Colosseum complex, making this the most visited heritage site in Italy (MiBACT, *Tavola 7 – Visitatori e Introiti di Musei Monumenti e Aree Archeologiche Statali* – ANNO 2013). This volume is not conveniently sized to be used on site (over 430 pages, weighing nearly 3 kg), but it provides a wealth of information to consult at home or in the library. The authors' choice to produce a comprehensive visualization of a circumscribed locus like the Forum Romanum is commendable and the volume's key contribution is a series of digital, reconstructed elevation drawings, some of which are presented as gatefolds. These allow the reader to imagine, along with the authors who insert themselves as *togati* in an early drawing, this now ruined archaeological landscape as the vibrant heart of the ancient city. Unfortunately, elevation drawings and the reconstructed ground plans are set against a monochromatic black background that hampers their legibility.

The volume treats two groups of architectural evidence in reconstructing the Forum and its immediate environs which include the Tabularium and the temples of Vesta and Antoninus and Faustina. The first group of remains are those buildings and monuments (for example, the Arch of Septimius Severus) that are reasonably well preserved or, in the case of buildings like the Curia Iulia, have, in modern times, been restored to an approximation of their ancient form. Such structures benefit greatly from the visualizations offered by the volume and provide the reader (and Forum visitor) with a vibrant look at a possible restored view of the monument. The other category of architectural evidence concerns monuments that survive only in a sparse and fragmentary condition. The efforts to reconstruct this latter category require a different approach and, in some cases, are bound to engage controversies, some of them long-standing. Dealing with less well preserved monuments, for instance the much-debated Tabularium or the Parthian Arch of Augustus, does, however, provide an opportunity to apply newer applications to more traditional problems of Roman topography.

In providing such high quality visualizations the volume performs a service, although one might also like it if CUP had supplied these images in a digital format on a companion website. The reconstructions that form the core of the book raise issues about the scholarly value of reconstruction drawings such as these and questions about the audience at which these reconstructions are directed. Specialists will debate the accuracy of the reconstructions and the various choices made in executing them. The non-specialist audience will find fruit here as well. Building on a long tradition of historical reconstructions of architecture, this project is a print manifestation that joins several other recent print and online reconstructive projects, notably the Rome Reborn project, Digital Augustan Rome and the Digitales Forum Romanum at Humboldt University.

The text accompanying the reconstructions surveys the general history and development of the Forum Romanum in three parts. Part I provides an overview of the architectural history of the Forum, beginning from the Augustan period and addressing the Republican forum only as a prologue. While the authors explain clearly this chosen focus, one might find the exclusion of reconstruction of Republican phases a bit disappointing since the development of the space and its monumentalization during the Republican period is fundamentally important to a topographic understanding of the Forum Romanum. Following this overview, Part II of the volume provides eighteen chapters that consider various monuments independently. The architecture discussed

includes the major temples, monuments and civic buildings. Part III summarizes the development of the Roman Forum during various Imperial phases, concluding with the Column of Phocas.

The discussion of viewshed analysis in the Imperial Forum Romanum is interesting and the accompanying plans (for example, figs 21.3 and 21.10) allow the reader to follow the sight lines that are discussed. Surprisingly in this same context there is no discussion of the spatial integration of the Fora of Iulius Caesar and Augustus, despite the fact that the volume is particularly interested in Augustan interventions in the forum complex. Additionally, the treatment of sight lines that accompanies restored elevations (for example, fig. 21.8) employs additional effects of lighting and environmental setting that — although attractive — seem subjective in nature, as opposed to the objectivity of viewshed analysis. The discussion of sight lines and siting of monuments and buildings within the Forum does help to give an impression of patterns of circulation and usage within the forum square itself.

A key question that this volume raises has to do with the source material for creating reconstructed elevation drawings. Traditionally topographers have tended to think (and debate) mostly in two dimensions, moving around the puzzle pieces in order to determine what can fit in which space in the fragmentary archaeological landscape of a place like Rome. More readily available — and more easily usable — digital technologies continue to facilitate moving into three dimensions. The recent Carafa and Carandini, *Atlante di Roma Antica* (2012) also provides a wealth of reconstructed plans and elevations. In that publication, perhaps guided by more conventional tenets of Roman topography, the focus is on ground plans. While many elevation drawings appear, they tend overall to be more schematized than the three-dimensional renderings produced by G. and P.

While the technical developments that facilitate these digital renderings are welcome, the final products themselves come with their own difficulties. G. and P. discuss the source materials and theories that have informed their reconstructions. In the case of the Parthian arch, for instance, *in-situ* archaeological remains do little to facilitate a restored elevation, thus scholars have relied on architectural fragments and numismatic depictions. The new reconstruction here follows that of Ioppolo and Monganet since the coin image of the moneyer Lucius Vinicius is assessed to have been ‘incorrect’. This raises the important issue of whether depictions of architecture appearing on Roman coins provide an accurate guide for historical reconstruction: are coin images faithful renderings or merely impressions? The question of the faithfulness of the Vinicius coin as raised by the authors seems more widely applicable. In the case of the Parthian arch reconstruction, the authors have elaborated the sculptural groups crowning the arch on the basis of numismatic evidence. This seems reasonable, although the coins offered as evidence show no human figures flanking the emperor’s *quadriga* and Augustus would almost certainly not have appeared in the triumphal chariot clad in military garb.

In the end, these observations should not detract from the achievement of this volume, especially since it capitalizes on the specialist talents of each author — P.’s topographic and architectural acumen marry well with G.’s plans, reconstructions and drawings. Perhaps this volume might serve as a catalyst for a reinvigorated debate about the complex archaeological landscape of the Forum Romanum in addition to fostering discussion about the techniques of architectural reconstruction and the rôle of those reconstructions in Classical archaeology. In scholarship and in the classroom these issues ought to be addressed. As the study of Roman topography moves forward in the twenty-first century, it must continue to draw on its traditional strengths, all the while adopting and adapting new techniques that help us to visualize the past.

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