Review

Reviewed Work(s): <italic>STYLING ROMANISATION: POTTERY AND SOCIETY IN CENTRAL ITALY</italic> by R. ROTH

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Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to The Journal of Roman Studies
empire-wide literary élite. T.’s exploration of the relationship between Antonine architecture and the broader movement usually known as the ‘Second Sophistic’ offers new insights into the value of nostalgia, attitudes towards the future, and methods of intellectual self-definition during this period.

The presentation of the book is generally superb, with almost two hundred pertinent and interesting illustrations, extremely thorough indices and a useful glossary of technical terms. T.’s mastery of a vast and varied field of primary material is striking, although I did notice one small factual error: the market of Sertius at Timgad is attributed instead to a Cosinius (119) — presumably a confusion with the Lucius Cosinius Primus who dedicated a similar building at Cuicul. Occasionally, too, there are editorial slips. The pagination in the contents list goes into reverse at Appendix 3 and remains out of step thereafter; members of the same family are referred to as ‘Iulius’ and ‘Julius’ within two successive sentences (8); and the title of Table 4 at the back of the book is spelt correctly in the main text, but incorrectly in the page header. But these are small flaws, to be seen in the context of an otherwise meticulously-produced work. They do not in any way detract from the importance of this stimulating contribution to our understanding of the Antonine cultural milieu, and of the universal appeal of monumentality.

University of Leeds

Penelope J. Goodman


In this monograph Roman Roth succeeds in authoring a pottery study of a new ilk, up to now unknown in Italian pottery studies. R. brings ceramics to the forefront of the discussion about the highly debated notion of Romanization, exploring ways in which the nearly omnipresent potsherd can contribute to the construction of a social history for Roman Italy. R.’s study is grounded in the canonical and path-breaking work of Nino Lamboglia and Jean-Paul Morel, and could not be realized without either of them, yet succeeds in pushing beyond the constructed typologies of these giants in order to scrutinize ceramic evidence that seems to have been heretofore overlooked. R. studies instances of variation within a seemingly homogeneous corpus of archaeological ceramics and adopts an intriguing stance by asking what conclusions may be drawn not only about production and consumption, but also about the potters and the social context of pottery.

Since other typological studies of black-gloss fine ware have not been interested in regional production, R. must find a theoretical milieu within which to conduct his discussion. Influenced both by Bourdieu’s approach to habitus and Terrenato’s application of the concept of cultural bricolage, he examines the ways in which variability affects both pottery production and style and seeks to expose the causative agents of variation. R. rejects the notion that the Slave Mode of Production model can be used to explain the genesis and distribution of black-gloss ceramics, especially given the regional variation discussed in this volume that offers two case studies of black-gloss pottery from Volterra and Capena. At Volterra R. singles out two fabrics (designated V I and V II). Type V I is a daily ware, with a link to coarse ware, while type V II is a special use ware whose production is seemingly controlled. The daily ware is used more frequently (and thus has a higher rate of breakage) than the special ware, yet the two fabrics have similar forms, demonstrating that a use ware imitates the fine ware. For R. this process of ‘competitive emulation’ is crucial since in an hierarchical society like Volterra’s the objects themselves communicate social status. At Capena, the available sample of black-gloss diverges from the Volterran ceramics in several respects; notably there are large quantities of imported second-century B.C. black-gloss remains at Capena. R. speculates that the second century B.C. is a boom time in the wake of the Second Punic War and that an increased variety of forms may show innovation on the part of potters trying to gauge the likes (and dislikes) of the market, a suggestion on R.’s part that verges toward an endorsement of free market capitalism. At Capena R. again focuses on two fabrics — one of them (C I) a hybrid type wherein bowls give way to plates and a second (C V) that is imported, most likely via the Tiber. This hybridity may result from Capena’s proximity to trade networks that exposed Capenates to more variation in terms of material culture. It also seems that at Capena, where a lesser degree of élite control is evident, the standard of living, and thus the demand for goods, was on the rise in the second century B.C. Additionally, Capena’s wider degree
of Romanization (as compared to Volterra) may have resulted in a heightened need to emphasize local identity.

For R., the emergence of new types of regional pottery indicates changes in society itself, and reflects something of Zanker's notion of Stadtbild. At Volterra the élite sent clear signals to express their status, and the control of production and use of fine ware factors into this behaviour, since élite display often went so far as to create an altered setting for social interaction. Thus the emergence of fabric V I at Volterra allowed potters to bypass élite control of fabric V II. The economic situation at Volterra, largely dominated by surplus and storage in proportion to increased prosperity, is a bit easier to comprehend than the situation at Capena. Clearly second-century B.C. Volterra was growing, but Capena operated on a smaller scale. Due to its commercial nature, Capena had more of an outward focus than Volterra, and within their commercial climate, Capenates expressed their identity through ceramics. While Capena enjoyed intense commercialism, the situation is not completely without problems since archaeological material in the middle Tiber valley becomes scarcer moving from the third to the second century B.C., which has caused some to speculate whether or not this is indicative of some crisis or other. Since imports were a part of life at Capena, the intense commerce there led to the appearance of local fabrics in reaction to (or imitation of) imported wares.

R. sees the phenomenon of Romanization as, among other things, a means of ‘local empowerment’ and cautions that there is no generic rubric that we can use to explain the genesis of a Roman Italy. What R. has done here by examining the evidence of regional black-gloss pottery is to show that local actors are very important in Italy of the third to the first centuries B.C. It must be noted that while R.’s study is commendable, his sample size is but a mere fraction of the material studied by Morel. In scrutinizing remains at the local level, it is possible to draw conclusions that have broad reach and also underscore the fact that regional variation within the make-up of the nascent Roman Italy was the norm, not an exception. We may hope that further scrutiny of local evidence, following R.’s lead, will continue to help clarify and advance what has become a thorny discussion about the cultural fabric of Roman Italy.

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This very useful book collects and analyses a mass of data from villas in Lazio, Tuscany and Umbria. The main chronological focus is the second century B.C. to the mid-imperial period. The approach is essentially archaeologically-led history, aiming to understand the role played by villas in Roman society. The author’s observations on this substantial dataset often have broader implications for Roman society and economy.

The main arguments are as follows. Villas were a significant source of élite wealth, even if they were also built for non-economic reasons and did not form the only (or perhaps even the major) source of their owners’ income. The archaeological data for villas offer a corrective to the literary picture of residences primarily created for their owners’ luxurious enjoyment, even in the case of maritime villas. Although economic and infrastructural factors affected the distribution of villas, equally important were the social relations of the villa owner with both the emperor, who often owned property nearby, and local communities, where members of the élite, like Pliny, often played an important role. Modern scholars have over-emphasized the decline of villas from the first/second century A.D., schematically envisaging a crisis in the slave mode of production that they supposedly represent; the archaeological evidence is often more plausibly explained as a sign of changing use without necessarily implying discontinuity of ownership.

The analysis is thorough and methodical, deploying literary and archaeological material with critical acumen. For instance, Marzano points out that the partial nature of villa excavations, like the disdain of élite authors for commercial money-making, has often skewed the evidence in favour of the villa as a place of luxurious retreat. M. deals confidently with modern controversies, and her moderate stance on the more gradual beginnings and decline of slave-based market agriculture are sensible and convincing. Some provincial parallels are drawn (e.g. 221), but the focus is very much on Italy.

At the core of M.’s argument are ch. 5, critiquing the ‘The “Villa Schiavistica” Model’ established by Carandini on the basis of his excavations at Settefinestre, and ch. 8, reassessing