

- J. A. BECKER and N. TERRENATO (EDS), *ROMAN REPUBLICAN VILLAS: ARCHITECTURE, CONTEXT, AND IDEOLOGY* (Papers and monographs of the American Academy in Rome 32). Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2012. Pp. 146, illus. ISBN 9780472117703. £52.50/US\$60.00.

Jeffrey Becker and Nicola Terrenato's edited volume does not claim to be the final word on the Roman Republican villa, nor even a summary of the state of the field. Such a publication would be almost impossible, given the state of our evidence and the ideological divides that characterize its interpretation. Rather, the editors' stated aim is to bring together a range of different voices and to place archaeological, historical and literary approaches to the villa on 'that strictly equal footing that is the first prerequisite for true interdisciplinarity' (4). They deliberately eschew any attempt to define 'villa', instead proposing a Geertzian method of 'thick description', but leaving it up to individual contributors to decide what exactly they should describe. This light-handed editorial approach results in some disagreements between contributors over what exactly should be considered a villa, making it difficult to measure the evidence of different chapters against each other. Overall, though, the approach is a success, providing examples of a wide range of approaches in what is still a slim volume. What is more, some contributors use their freedom to concentrate on marginal cases: Mario Torelli on proto-villas, arguing for the influence of Magna Graecia ('The early villa', 8–31); Rita Volpe on the large number of agricultural sites in the *suburbium*, some of which may not be large enough to earn the name 'villa' in all eyes ('Republican villas in the *suburbium* of Rome', 94–110); and Becker's own contribution on the *basis villae*, which, he concludes, may have nothing to do with villas at all ('Polygonal masonry and Republican villas', 111–28). Such explorations around the edges of the phenomenon help clarify the questions we should ask when applying the word 'villa', even though each individual researcher will probably come up with different answers. And as Stephen Dyson's concluding remarks to this volume (129–36) remind us, different Romans probably understood the word 'villa' differently too.

A book specifically focused on the Republican villa, so often obscured by its Imperial successors, is welcome. Later textual evidence can mislead us with anachronistic concepts, something John Bodel unravels in his consideration of the evolution of the literary image of the villa during the Republican period ('Villaculture', 45–60). For archaeologists, the later evidence literally obscures earlier phases. Volpe argues that we should reconstruct a Republican *suburbium* far more densely populated with villas (or, rather, productive agricultural sites of various sizes, as stated on p. 106 n. 23) than current maps suggest, based on her own successful identification with a team from the Comune di Roma of otherwise unknown Republican phases connected to three Imperial-period villas at Centocelle.

Although this volume is dedicated to bringing together archaeological and literary approaches to the Republican villa, it ends up pushing them further apart. This is by no means a negative conclusion. The finest essay in the collection, Terrenato's rigorous comparison of Catonian precepts and the contemporary archaeological material ('The enigma of "Catonian" villas', 69–93), demonstrates very little overlap between the two — and what overlap there is does not come where we might expect it. The absence of the 'Catonian villa' in the archaeological record strengthens the arguments of those scholars who would follow Habinek (*The Politics of Latin Literature* (1998), 34–68) in analysing the texts of Cato (and Varro) as documents of élite self-fashioning rather than evidence for contemporary architectural practice. Here such approaches are represented by Carin Green ('The shepherd of the people', 32–44) and Brendon Reay ('Cato's *De agri cultura* and the spectacle of expertise', 61–8) as well as Bodel and Terrenato. Bodel and Reay, in particular, provide new nuances in the reading of Cato's *De agri cultura* as a text of the 'cultural revolution', complemented by Green's allegorical interpretation of Varro in its political context.

Dyson's concluding remarks are forthright on the subject of the (lack of) relationship between archaeological and literary evidence. He is only surprised that it has taken this long to get close to severing the two. Dyson is right, of course, but the appearance of both categories of evidence, each correctly contextualized, in an interdisciplinary volume of this kind must be a good thing. They may not have much to say directly to each other, but readers with a background in either discipline or both will have something to learn.

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