

*Cosmetics and Perfumes in the Roman World*. By S. Stewart. Tempus, Stroud, 2007. Pp. 160, illus. Price: £16.99. ISBN 978 0 7524 4098 9.

The introduction states: 'It is the purpose of this book to examine the ideas associated with cosmetics and perfumes, which made them such a powerful rhetorical tool, but, at the same time, to place equal emphasis on trying to discover as much as possible about the products themselves and their place in the day-to-day lives of the population of the Roman world.' The book concentrates on the Roman Empire prior to A.D. 303 and includes all areas that came under Roman control during that period, deliberately stopping short of exploring the attitudes to adornment that accompanied the rise of Christianity.

The book itself is an easily digested 160 pages and gathers together much of the known documentary information about cosmetic and perfume use from Classical sources. As such this makes the book an extremely useful resource for those working on this topic. It gives rather less space to archaeological finds of tools and containers, though these are certainly mentioned. Sadly, the author misses the opportunity to explore in more depth the properties and relative uses or dangers of many of the ingredients, leading to some assumptions that I feel could have been argued in different ways. Stewart also chooses not to draw on the growing amount of published experimentation with reconstructed cosmetics and ingredients and barely mentions the scientific analysis of surviving cosmetic residues, some of which may have helped answer questions about how these preparations appeared on the skin or how different ingredients performed when combined. There are also a few rather perplexing errors, for example S. states that galena is a cosmetic 'made from malachite, a lead ore mixed with silver' (47), rather than the accepted geological identification of galena being a metallic ore of lead and malachite a compound of copper; also, that madder dye is extracted from the leaves, not the roots of the plant (45). Given that the book is based on a PhD thesis, simple errors like this are a little surprising in a study over which the author has clearly taken a great deal of time.

The book takes different themes in turn, focusing on health and hygiene, gender, social status and luxury, and although this does allow for differing angles of discussion, it also leads to a certain amount of repetition regarding the preparations themselves and can at times make the book read in a disjointed manner. A price list of products and ingredients, based on Roman sources, is a useful appendix, highlighting the wide variation possible in commodities, and this works well with the comparative social focus of the text.

The majority of illustrations are black-and-white sketches or line-drawings, and whilst they serve well as *aides mémoire* to those already familiar with the objects in question, they would have benefited from including crisper detail or the substitution of a photograph. Unfortunately in a number of cases it is impossible to glean any extra information from the images and it is unclear why those examples have been chosen over other similar artefacts.

Whilst there are notes for each chapter, the lack of a detailed bibliography is the biggest drawback to what is overall a useful collation of information. Classical sources are referred to in the text as they are discussed, but not all mentions cite which text or passage the information is drawn from. The reviewer would have welcomed a much greater use of direct quotation of the source material in order to clarify just what is stated by the Classical authors and what is modern interpretation of the evidence.

This book certainly has its place as part of a collection of work on Roman adornment. However, it is possibly best viewed as a starting-point for further exploration of the subject, and an insight into the relative social importance of cosmetic use, rather than being a final stop which will fully answer questions about the nature of the Roman beauty industry, the products it used, and the women who consumed them.

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