

iconography can be brought into today's discussions about social aspects of Roman art. If two German scholars can describe them as still little known outside a small group of specialists (6), the situation in British scholarship is probably even more restricted. An English translation of this excellent book could help relieve this and realize the potential contribution of this large group of monuments to our understanding of Roman culture and society.

*The Open University*

JANET HUSKINSON

R. E. LEADER-NEWBY, *SILVER AND SOCIETY IN LATE ANTIQUITY: FUNCTIONS AND MEANINGS OF SILVER PLATE IN THE FOURTH TO SEVENTH CENTURIES*.

Aldershot: Ashgate, 2004. Pp. xii + 240, 11 pls. ISBN 0-7546-0728-3. £50.00.

Leader-Newby seeks to offer an approach to the field of late antique silver which is neither the 'strictly archaeological' nor the 'traditional stylistic', but draws on cultural and social history. Close readings of individual artefacts (from prestigious vessels weighing up to fifty Roman pounds, down to small and obscure items such as spoons) are woven in to broader discussions of their context. The aim is a history of objects 'which seeks to determine their role in the wider sphere of visual culture' (5) and the result is an often enlightening perspective on an interesting corpus. As L.-N. notes (218) the pejoratively labelled 'minor' arts have been stigmatized for too long, while the potential of objects such as silver plates to stimulate readings in the cultures which gave them birth has been underestimated. The value of the corpus of silver plate in the late antique world is, the book shows us, particularly important: as a point of entry into the considerable cultural transformations of the period, from Antiquity to the Byzantine world in the East and the early medieval world in the West.

The book is divided into four chapters, focusing on different 'key functions' of silverware: as imperial gifts, as ecclesiastical adornment, and as domestic objects. L.-N. herself admits (6) that there are few 'explicit links' between these sections, which is slightly disconcerting, if perhaps an inevitable result of the book's genesis as a PhD thesis. Ch. 1, 'The Emperor's Gifts', starts off with a well-known object, the Theodosian missal, and places it firmly in its various contexts, examining its iconography, its economic significance, and its political importance. For L.-N. the function of the *largitio* plate in bringing the image of the emperor into the home of his subjects is key, and this domestic aspect of silverware remains a crucial focus of the next chapter. Ch. 2, on ecclesiastical silver, argues that it was the domestic rather than pagan cultic origin of liturgical silver which was significant. L.-N. reads a selection of hagiographical texts in order to highlight a late antique concern with the use of precious metals in an ecclesiastical context. The resolution of this anxiety she finds therein, a sharp differentiation between 'sacred' and 'secular', is perhaps not entirely convincing: some readers would prefer to see it as a rhetorical construct rather than an actuality. Chs 3 and 4 move to domestic silverware, with close readings of both mythical and biblical scenes. The unifying theme here is *paideia*, which for L.-N. is a crucial concept for understanding these objects in context. For L.-N. this unifying cultural bond helps explain the focus of some apparently distinct iconography (including the education of Achilles on the Kaiseraugst Achilles plate, and the early life of David on the 'David Plates'). Positing *paideia* as a catch-all historical explanation, or cultural description, is increasingly common in current scholarship, but, in this reader's view, it is also rather unsatisfactory. (The canonicity of *paideia* as keynote to Late Antiquity is such that there is often little attempt made to explain clearly why this concept is more than a favoured buzzword of current scholars.) The discussion is more interesting and more challenging when L.-N. focuses on the classicizing imagery of the David Plates, which date from the seventh century, to problematize, persuasively, the pervasive picture of Byzantine society as rigidly Christianized. The range of objects studied throughout the book points to clear areas of continuity, as well as change, and also suggests areas of study for future students. As L.-N. herself points out, there are many other 'minor arts' which could be profitably examined to provide further light on Late Antiquity. In all, this is an engaging and often persuasive book, which hopefully will achieve its aim to introduce its subject material to a far broader range of scholars.

*University of Edinburgh*

LUCY GRIG