

P. M. ALLISON, *POMPEIAN HOUSEHOLDS: AN ANALYSIS OF MATERIAL CULTURE*. Los Angeles: Cotsen Institute of Archaeology, University of California, 2004. Pp. xvii + 255, 114 figs. ISBN 0-917956-96-6. £35.00/US\$40.00.

Penelope Allison's study of artefact assemblages in thirty of the larger houses from Pompeii is a welcome addition to published work available to students of this ancient city. It is ultimately a revised version of work conducted for her doctoral thesis that has been available to scholars from University Microfilms International (P. M. Allison, *The Distribution of Pompeian House Contents and its Significance*, UMI 9400463). There has been much re-evaluation of the original ideas from the thesis and new publications have been embedded into the text. Unlike the thesis, no discussion of case by case examples is undertaken in the book. Information on individual houses can be located at <http://www.stoa.org/pompeianhouseholds>.

A. has sought, through painstaking study of the published and unpublished records of earlier excavations, to reconstruct patterns of artefact distribution across thirty houses. These are analysed to provide us with a deeper understanding of life in Pompeii and to compare Pompeian lifeways with those of other Roman sites and those found in ancient texts. The latter tends to dominate much of A.'s analysis with an attempt to test the conformity of the artefact distribution to textual evidence (37). The work attempts to challenge assumptions made by others, rather than to produce an explanation of what the artefactual assemblages mean. The problem for this work, is that it is not clear what a normal pattern of artefact assemblage would have been. A. is forced to return to the only pattern available to her — that of ancient texts. Non-conformity to the patterning expected from texts is utilized to suggest that textual analogy is unreliable or that there had been a change of purpose in the use of a room or space (37). As much as A. wishes to move on from the textual evidence, she comes back to it time and time again. Some will find depressing the conclusions that artefact distributions alone cannot address the issues of slavery in the household, gender divisions, or age related behaviour (155).

The book challenges our basic assumptions; for example casseroles were found most often in or in rooms off the 'Front Hall' (or atrium) of houses and none displayed any sign of blackening. Hence, rather than a kitchen item, we can view this item, prominent in exhibition catalogues, as some sort of ladle and need not associated it with cooking and kitchens. There is much more, not least the emphasis on the utilitarian function of these Front Halls as circulation spaces. A. tries to identify functional patterns for the rooms of each architectural type across the sample of thirty houses. What is maybe underplayed is the level of variation. This may not be surprising in the domestic context; even today, individuals approach living in quite different manners. Looking at her figures for functional activities, e.g. eight Front Halls with evidence of weaving, you cannot help but remember that the majority of houses did not display the isolated attribute under discussion. The division of rooms into twenty-two architectural types, isolating them from any discussion of their association with neighbouring rooms, might create more problems than it solves. Indeed the relationship of architecture to room function is proven by this study to have little actual patterning across the thirty examples discussed. A. is forced to conclude that there do not appear to have been distinctive functions for a large number of rooms, and that the patterns she has found can only provide a guide to how spaces might have functioned (120-3).

One of the most interesting points made in the book, is the observation of the presence of building materials in the houses. A., in line with much contemporary thinking, argues for a period of continued, intermittent or persistent, seismic activity from A.D. 62 through to A.D. 79. The repair of houses and/or their abandonment occurred over this longer period. No longer can we see Pompeii as some form of time-capsule, but as a site with a complicated history of renewal and relocation following the major quake of A.D. 62. Ten of her thirty houses display evidence of building material in places likely to disrupt daily activities. Nineteen of the houses display repair or alteration to Fourth Style decoration and three *lararium* shrines were newly constructed in front of these recent decorative schemes. Moreover, ten houses did not appear to have a functioning kitchen (items may, of course, have been removed by those leaving the city). There is also evidence of hoarding. For A., this indicates a gradual process of abandonment of the city in the face of continued seismic activity. Again, the problem for any evaluation of this evidence is that we simply cannot tell what a normal pattern was. Can this feature of the final years of Pompeii be utilized to explain individual artefact distributions in the city? The absence of a record of inorganic material is a major hindrance for understanding this development.

Although beautifully produced and well priced, this is not a user-friendly volume. To understand room types in ch. 4, readers need to have referred to ch. 5 or at minimum table 5a. The order in which the house plans are presented has lost the logic of the original thesis presentation, and will defeat many undergraduates. The terminology associated with each room type is bombastic: 'Open-Fronted Areas off the Sides of Front Halls' and might be as confusing as the use of Latin terms such as *alae*. Moreover, there is a tacit assumption that readers will already be familiar with these houses. For teaching purposes, the website might provide a better alternative for the introduction of students to the study of artefact assemblages in Pompeii. The latter will allow students to see the contexts or *habitus* from which the data presented in this volume were drawn.

A. has made clear that there is a need to re-evaluate how the rooms within houses are represented in texts. Ch. 7 points the way for further discussion, now much aided by searchable CD-Roms of Greek and Latin authors. Her book has updated and made available a reconstructed data-set that is unique and needs to be better known by those studying Roman Houses and Domestic Space.

University of Birmingham

RAY LAURENCE

Y. THEBERT, *THERMES ROMAINS D'AFRIQUE DU NORD ET LEUR CONTEXTE MEDITERRANEEN: ETUDES D'HISTOIRE ET D'ARCHEOLOGIE* (B.E.F.R.A. 315). Rome: École Française de Rome, 2003. Pp. 733, 172 figs. ISBN 2-7283-0398-3. €96.00.

Some years ago, I expressed the expectation that regional studies of Roman baths would open up profitable avenues of future investigation (G. Fagan, 'Bathing in the backwaters', *JRA* 10 (1997), 523). It is gratifying to see, therefore, that the established scholar of Roman baths Y. Thébert has produced a monumental study of North African baths that exemplifies the merits of a regional approach to the subject (see also, A. Farrington, *The Roman Baths of Lycia* (1995); V. G. Entero *Los Balnea de las villae hispanoromanas provincia Tarraconense* (2001); and A. Bouet, *Les thermes privés et publics en Gaule narbonnaise* (2003)). Th., however, does more than merely catalogue and describe the hundreds of facilities that dotted the landscape of Roman North Africa from Morocco to Tunisia (Libya, regrettably, is absent). He also sets the monuments against their wider regional and historical backdrops, analyses their architectural peculiarities, how they were used, and their function as urban monuments. A catalogue of 196 related inscriptions is also included, though none are translated. This is a thorough and impressive piece of work, and a serious contribution to the field.

After reviewing some methodological problems and surveying the historical background, Th. enters the difficult province of the origins of the Roman bath as a building type, starting his analysis in the Greek Bronze Age and ending with the mid-first century A.D. This lengthy section (45–122) treads well-worn paths as it integrates and synthesizes prior work. Naturally, for so contested a subject, there is much that is debatable, but it is balanced by some new and noteworthy information. So, on the one hand, H. Eschbach's highly dubious scheme for a protracted building history of the Stabian Baths at Pompeii is presented, yet again, as if it were not fundamentally problematic (*contra* G. Fagan, 'The genesis of the Roman bath', *AJA* 105 (2001), 403–26, esp. 408–12, uncited here). On the other, Th.'s suggestion that public baths can be identified at the Punic site of Kerkouane in the middle of the third century B.C. (57–8) is intriguing, even if scantily supported by the evidence on the ground (i.e., *opus signinum*, benches, and drains). No less tantalizing is notice of an unpublished second-century B.C. hypocaust bath at Fregellae (82–3). Any new facility of so early an era adds considerably to our meagre database of pertinent archaeological material, so it is to be hoped that this bathhouse will be fully published sooner rather than later. (Edizioni Quasar is publishing the site reports from Fregellae, with two volumes thus far in print.)

Th. concludes from all the disparate sources that public bathing formed part of the cultural *koine* of the Mediterranean basin; that Roman baths were influenced in various ways by this *koine*; that Campania played no essential role in the emergence of the building type, a view he dismisses as the 'mythe campanien'; and that the hypocaust is what really initiated the development of the Roman-style bathhouse. Given the sparsity of the evidence and the difficult and contentious issues under debate, many will no doubt contest these conclusions, but there can be no doubt that Th. advances the discussion in useful directions.