

BOOK REVIEW

Walking in Roman Culture. By Timothy M. O'SULLIVAN. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xii + 188. Hardback, £55.00/\$95.00. ISBN 978-1-107-00096-4.

What is your first thought upon reading the title *Walking in Roman Culture*? Is it a look at Roman culture within an historical time frame? Is it a presentation of archaeological cultural evidence? Or is it a compilation of citations from ancient sources which mention the physical activity of walking by the ancient Romans? If you said the last, you would be correct. O'Sullivan thematically gathers together a plethora of literary references to the when, how, why, and wherefore of walking as an ancient Roman art form. This perspective and focus serves to provide a unique insight into an underreported aspect of Roman culture.

O'Sullivan speaks of the "rule of the gait: how you walk defines who you are" (13). Whether you are a god, a goddess, a politician, a man, a woman, or even a slave, the pace of your gait is predetermined by your place in society. The lowly slave is not a walker. He is instead a *servus currens* (18). Regarding the others, O'Sullivan, using Martial's critique of an individual (51), speaks to the "how" of the walk ("slowly and aimlessly"), the "where" ("in a popular portico"), and the "with whom" ("a retinue of dependants, free and slave") (52)—all of which play a part in determining an individual's social status.

Horace, Seneca, Ovid, Cicero, Vitruvius, Celsus, Pliny, Varro, and Juvenal are among the Roman writers quoted as to their opinions of the whys and wherefores of proper walking styles. When O'Sullivan uses the same criteria to determine a man's status while discussing the *deductio in forum* (54–9), he adds in the time of day. *Deductiones* involving Augustus, Scipio Africanus, and a boy assuming the *toga virilis* are also described. O'Sullivan even applies the term *deductio* to appearances by the powerful Messalina and Agrippina (65) as they walk through the forum. Pitiful Verginia's *deductio* is not one of marriage, but of death (58). Comments on gait by the Christian writers Tertullian and Jerome are likewise included (25–6).

O'Sullivan distinguishes the *deductio* from the *ambulatio*: "the contemplative walk that became a central practice of Roman leisure" (78). He notes that the

verb *perambulare* is used distinctly from *peragrar* (101) to describe types of walks. Letter exchanges between Cicero and Caelius Rufus (84), Cicero and Pollio (85), Ovid and Macer (85), Seneca and Lucilius (86), as well as Pliny and Spurinna (88–9) lament or reminisce about walks shared or planned.

Metaphorically, even philosophers “walk through time” and place (104). The Greeks especially appear to walk as a prelude to seated/standing serious discussions (92–3). O’Sullivan makes a case for the replicas of Greek artwork and statues found in collections “of [Roman] villa owners” for “their metaphorical travels” (115).

Chapter 6 (116–149), entitled “Walking with Odysseus,” is such a case. At first glance, one questions the lengthy chapter on a Greek subject in a book discussing a Roman activity. But the pictured story panels, the “Odyssey Landscapes” currently in the Vatican Museum, represent a Roman activity. The panels, separated by a portico-like setting of intervening columns, depict a wealthy Roman’s domestic *ambulatio*. They bring “together associations of movement of the body, acquisition of knowledge, philosophical contemplation, mythology as exemplum and travel” (148): themes and topics found throughout the book.

References and excerpts abound in support of O’Sullivan’s statements. This slender volume, based on his original dissertation, is crammed with not only ancient Roman (and some Greek) literary citations and quotations in the text, but also recent scholarship in extensive footnotes. All translations are O’Sullivan’s. The bibliography (158–75) is extensive and scholarly. The detailed subject index (176–82) and *Index locorum* of Roman and Greek authors (183–8) are helpful to both collegiate and high school instructors.

AP Vergil high-school teachers will find the discussions of “walking” in the *Aeneid* of particular interest. Aeneas’ recognition of his mother by her godly gait (*Aen.* 1.402–5) and his walk with King Evander through Rome’s future landscape (8.306–12) are here. These same teachers will recall other “walks” not mentioned by O’Sullivan: Aeneas and the Sibyl in the Underworld or Euryalus and Nisus in the forest, for starters. After reading this book, general readers and instructors alike will be affected forevermore by the word “walk” found in any context.

Lucius Cicero, a cousin of the famous Cicero, is cited in *De finibus* as saying “... wherever we walk, we place our footprint in some history” (104). O’Sullivan connects the “footprints” of the ancient and modern worlds when, near the book’s end, he includes a haunting picture from Fellini’s 1972 *Roma*. The docu-

mentary crew “walks” downward beneath the city of modern Rome to a *domus*. The crew briefly gazes upon “a wall painting depicting a procession of Romans making their way up a staircase, some of whom stare directly out at the viewers” (153) before the inrush of outside air “destroys the murals, which fade away in seconds” (154) thereby ending the ancient walk.

Lucky for us, O’Sullivan leaves us a longer lasting portrait of the Roman art of “walking” with his book, *Walking in Roman Culture*.

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