

BOOK REVIEW

The Hills of Rome: Signature of an Eternal City. By CAROLINE VOUT. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2016. Paperback, \$22.55. ISBN 9781107678712.

This is a marvelous book, and a pleasure to see re-released in a paperback edition. It is a lavishly (and beautifully) illustrated volume, and one that is of potential great interest not only to specialists in classics and allied fields, but also to a general audience with interest in the rich history and topographical story of the city of Rome.

The title may be misleading; there is far more here than a study of the development of the canon of the hills of Rome, or a treatment of this or that facet of each slope. For the (fittingly) seven chapters of Vout's work are focused on exploring the development of a legend—the (both literary and visual) coming into being of a conception of the city that was famously said not to have been built in a day, and to which all roads lead (Vout offers especially valuable analysis of the many clichés that have come to characterize common parlance about the city).

What is perhaps most impressive in the author's explication of this legend is the stunning range of her material. Vout expertly manages antiquity; the Renaissance; and Mussolini's fascist regime; the index of passages discussed in her book range from Virgil to Balzac and beyond. There is a dazzling quality to pages that lucidly and succinctly discuss some of the most important events in the history of the Mediterranean, all with an eye to explicating how it is that "Rome" came to be perceived as an immortal, "eternal" city—one "worth killing for," as Vout notes with reference to Romulus' fratricidal founding efforts. Nor is the emphasis exclusively on the rise of the city; the fall of "Rome" (both in 476 and 1453) also receives rich consideration; there is an especially poignant consideration of the elegiac poet Rutilius Namatianus and his haunting *De Reditu Suo*, one of the most powerful of extant poetic reflections on a city and empire in inexorable decline.

Vout's volume bridges not only different disciplines, but disparate levels of experience. The audience for her book is anyone with an interest in Rome and the tracing of the story of what that city's name has meant across time and space (it would serve well, too, as secondary reading in a number of courses on Roman history and culture). Literary scholars will be interested in her reappraisal of famous

passages from Virgil's eighth *Aeneid* and the last book of Propertius' elegies in particular (and lovers of Latin verse will find that Vout has done much in these pages to rehabilitate the reputation of the underappreciated poet Claudian; in some ways the treatment of poetic passages in this book offers a brief commentary on the history of the representation of Rome in Latin verse). Art historians will be richly served by the treatment of the depiction of the city and its environs in painting, photography, and the plastic arts. Numismatists will enjoy the author's examination of the iconography of the city and its foundation lore on coins.

Rarely has a book of this modest scope of length succeeded so admirably in offering valuable commentary on so varied an assortment of topics. There is a quality to the writing and range here that harks back to the best prose of a bygone age, though with a detailed scholarly apparatus that grounds Vout's work in the vast tradition of classical scholarship on the city (the bibliography is especially valuable for further research, alongside the extensive notes and detailed index). By the end of Vout's work, one will have gained a renewed appreciation for the immense difficulty attendant on any historical writing about Rome, and a broadly based, soberly presented appraisal of the efforts of both scholars and artists to "write" the city.

In short, both press and author are to be warmly thanked for making available this evocative, unfailingly engrossing survey of the city and its signature hills. Those who missed the original edition will want to take advantage of the convenient new paperback printing. In the seemingly never-ending queue of works on the city and its legends, Vout's volume should be privileged to skip the line.

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