

BOOK REVIEW

The Berthouville Silver Treasure and Roman Luxury. Edited by KENNETH LAPATIN. Los Angeles: The J. Paul Getty Museum, 2014. Pp. x + 190. Hardcover, \$50.00. ISBN 978-1-60606-420-7.

This richly-illustrated edited volume presents an important hoard of nearly 90 silver objects, deposited in the 3rd century AD, that was discovered by chance in 1830 at Le Villeret, a hamlet close to the village of Berthouville in Normandy, France. The entire assemblage, which dates from the 1st to the 3rd centuries AD, was fortunately purchased by the Bibliothèque royale almost immediately, becoming part of the collection of the Cabinet des médailles in Paris. It was shipped to the J. Paul Getty Museum in 2010 for study, conservation, and as a multi-museum exhibition project, while its French home was being renovated.

The book will ultimately supplement a full scientific, especially timely catalogue, currently under preparation, that will update the original 1916 Ernest Babelon publication. A short forward by Timothy Potts and a longer introduction by Kenneth Lapatin, a leading expert in luxury arts and editor of the volume, offer a brief overview of the treasure, the history of its discovery, perils, acquisition, conservation, and historical context. These are followed by six essays that are authored by the French and American collaborators. The essays are supplemented by comparative studies of select objects from the treasure, with emphasis on the style of their representation. Entries, relevant to topics covered by individual essays, follow these as inserts that are printed on buff-colored, as opposed to white paper.

In Chapter 1, entitled “The Berthouville Treasure: A Discovery ‘As Marvelous as It Was Unexpected,’” curators Mathilde Avisseau-Broustet, Cécile Colonna, and Kenneth Lapatin, briefly discuss the history of the Roman province of Gallia Lugdunensis, where modern-day Berthouville is located, with special emphasis on modern archaeological research. The authors determine that the location of the hoard is associated with a sanctuary of Mercury Canetonensis, that included a shrine to Maia, to which gods the objects were dedicated. Most of them are vessels of varying forms, styles, and qualities, that were probably pro-

duced locally, and the names of some of their illustrious dedicants were inscribed as was standard practice in the Greco-Roman world since at least the Archaic period. The inclusion of a discussion of ancient vessel nomenclature is of particular value.

In Chapter 2, entitled “Gaul at the Time of the Berthouville Sanctuary,” Isabelle Fauduet, an expert in Gallo-Roman bronzes and sanctuaries, further explores the precinct’s historical context, focusing in particular on the administration and religious landscape of the four Roman provinces that comprised Gaul at the time that Mercury’s worship was active. Peering through a kaleidoscope of archaeological, including significant architectural material, the reader gains an understanding of Gallic society, ritual, and urbanization under the Roman Empire, as evidenced by settlement patterns.

Ruth Leader-Newby, an expert in Roman silver, is the author of Chapter 3, entitled “Heroes, Lions, and Vandals: Four Late Roman Missoria.” Her essay presents four little-known but spectacular Late Roman (4th-6th centuries AD) silver plates, or *missoria* from the Cabinet des médailles collection, representing chance discoveries of previous centuries and are virtually out of context. Leader-Newby’s extensive knowledge of iconography and *comparanda* allows her to reinterpret convincingly the iconography of one of the plates, that had traditionally been known as “Shield of Scipio,” and which rather seems to represent a scene from Homer’s *Iliad*, featuring Achilles handing over Briseis to Agamemnon. The iconography of two more plates is associated with Hercules, while the remaining vessel depicts Venus and Adonis. All silver objects, recently restored, represent important examples of the Roman silversmith’s art as it developed during a long period of significant cultural developments, partly associated with population movements and the advent of the Vandals.

In Chapter 4, entitled “The Hidden Lives of Ancient Objects: Conserving the Berthouville Treasure and Four Missoria,” conservators Eduardo Sánchez and Susan Lansing Maish relate the painstaking process and challenges of restoring the specific objects, which included cleaning previous restorations. The authors also offer valuable observations regarding their craftsmanship and include drawings, photographs, x-rays, and a glossary of the techniques used in conservation.

Kenneth Lapatin is the author of Chapter 5 entitled “Roman Luxury from Home to Tomb and Sanctuary,” a *synthesis* that draws from literary sources and archaeological material from several periods of antiquity, that demonstrates the breadth and depth of his knowledge of ancient extravagance and its uses in do-

mestic and religious contexts. The book concludes with an essay by Avisseau-Broustet and Colonna that presents the history and holdings of the Cabinet des Médailles that houses one of the greatest archaeological collections in the world.

If I could offer one criticism to this excellent volume, this would be associated with an aspect of its editing: placing the detailed presentation of objects in the middle of Chapters 2, 5, and 6 was a little disruptive for the reader and may have been better placed at the end of each essay. However, this detail does not subtract from the value of this model study of ancient luxury by distinguished scholars that is uncommonly well-illustrated in color. It will undoubtedly be of tremendous value to those studying precious objects, religion, ancient societies, the Roman provinces, and Late Antiquity. Finally, the example of its authors should be followed by other colleagues to produce much-needed studies of similar luxury objects.

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