

BOOK REVIEW

A Companion to Roman Art. Edited by BARBARA E. BORG. Chichester, United Kingdom: Wiley-Blackwell, 2015. Pp. xxv + 637 pages. Hardcover, \$224.95, eBook, \$44.99. ISBN 9781405192880.

Over the last couple of decades, there has been a trend in publishing handbooks and companions on various aspects of the ancient world. Oxford University Press, Cambridge University Press, Brill, and Routledge have all thrown their hats into this ever-expanding ring. Wiley-Blackwell is also an active participant in this trend, with over sixty published companions to the ancient world, covering focused topics like Hellenistic literature along with general topics. In 2015, Wiley-Blackwell added *A Companion to Roman Art* (*CRA*) to their series.

Taking six years to complete, *CRA* is over six hundred pages long and is organized thematically into seven parts: 1) methods and approaches; 2) the beginnings and end of Roman art; 3) producing and commissioning Roman art; 4) genres; 5) contexts; 6) themes; and 7) reception of Roman art in the modern world. Each of the seven parts has at least two chapters while some have as many as seven; there are thirty total chapters. As editor, Barbara Borg guides thirty leading scholars of Roman art as they discuss their individual areas of expertise. For example, Kenneth Lapatin, the leading scholar of Roman luxury arts, contributes a chapter to this subject (Chapter 17) while Lauren Hackworth Petersen writes a chapter on non-elite Roman art (Chapter 11). Because of this, *CRA* is up-to-date with the latest research trends and methodologies.

The content and scope of *CRA* are broad. Some chapters look closely at individual objects or types of objects (like Lapatin's chapter) while others explore themes or debates within the field (like Petersen's). In total, *CRA* is comprehensive and offers a substantive introduction to the discipline of Roman art, with many approaches, methodologies, and themes covered. Furthermore, *CRA* examines current debates within the discipline and is also on trend with its contextual approach.

Companions, like *CRA*, appeal to an eclectic audience. First, *CRA* can serve as either the primary or supplementary textbook for students enrolled in a Roman art and archaeology course, providing an in-depth examination of debates, objects, and themes in the discipline. Second, scholars of the ancient world are another target audience for companions as they provide an enormous amount of information in one text; I myself would like to have at least a dozen more of Wiley-Blackwell's companions on my bookshelves. And finally, a companion such as this one appeals to an individual interested in antiquity. Obviously, the targeted audience is all-encompassing, thus explaining the continued popularity and publication of these types of handbooks.

There are a couple of drawbacks to *CRA*. First, all of the images are in black and white. For \$224.95, one would expect at least some color photographs. Second, the price must be mentioned as a potential hindrance. Most students and scholars would not be able to afford this book, though there is an eBook for only \$46.99. Third, while *CRA* is comprehensive and covers a variety of themes, methodologies, and genres, this also means that there is not a focus and the book at times feels like it is all over the place. Perhaps if Barbara Borg tied everything together in the end with a concluding chapter, the reader would feel like there is a greater connection between the thirty chapters and seven sections. Finally, some sections get short shrift, like the last section on the reception of Roman art in the modern world, which only has two chapters in it.

But what makes *CRA* stand out from the rest? At this point, a comparison to *The Oxford Handbook of Roman Sculpture (OHRS)* edited by Elise A. Friedland, Melanie Grunow Sobocinski, and Elaine K. Gazda is appropriate (Oxford University Press, 2015). Obviously, *OHRS* has a more focused theme, but nonetheless a comparison is worthwhile. First, the contributors for both *OHRS* and *CRA* are the leading scholars in the field and offer a variety of approaches, genres, and methodologies. Both have a contextual approach, attempting to place Roman art into the larger Roman world. Both are also expensive (*OHRS* is a little cheaper at \$175), with almost exclusively black and white images (*OHRS* has ten color photographs within its 713 pages). One advantage that the *OHRS* has over *CRA* is that you can go to the Oxford University Press website and buy PDFs of individual chapters so that it is unnecessary to buy the entire book. *OHRS* also offers an expansion to its handbook on their website, so that as scholarship changes and evolves, Oxford University Press can keep adding digital chapters. But *CRA* has its own advantages. First, *CRA* covers the minor arts more

thoroughly with chapters on mosaics, decorative art, and luxury arts; these three chapters account for ten percent of the book. In contrast, *OHRS* has only one chapter on the minor arts (terracottas), or roughly two percent of the book. Therefore, for those scholars like myself who are specialists in the minor arts, *CRA* provides a well-rounded view, perhaps because it is more general in its focus.

However, these critiques and comparison are nitpicky, because the overall benefits of *CRA* far outweigh the very few negatives. This handbook is a valuable resource for students and scholars alike.

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