

## BOOK REVIEW

*Rome's Holy Mountain: The Capitoline Hill in Late Antiquity.* By JASON MORALEE. New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xxv + 278. Hardcover, \$74.00. ISBN 978-0-19-049227-4.

From the marble plan of Septimius Severus (the *Forma Urbis*) to the *De-scriptio Urbis Romae* of Leon Battista Alberti, the centrality of the Capitoline hill has always been apparent. When the medieval stairway of the Aracoeli was constructed, that “holy mountain” received the marble blocks from a huge temple located on the Quirinal hill; in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century it was imagined as the Mons Olympus by Giuseppe Sacconi, the architect of the Monument to King Victor Emmanuel II (in its turn compared to the sanctuary at Praeneste). Moralee’s book tackles a long, yet too often neglected, period in the Capitoline’s history – ‘from the third to the seventh centuries CE’ (or, for the sake of precision, ‘from 180 to 741’) – and his investigations successfully dig into countless and poorly known literary sources, bringing to life forgotten people, monuments and stories. These are spread into seven chapters that examine different ways to experience the Capitoline, such as climbing, living and working, worshipping, remembering and destructing. In short, Moralee’s goal is to write ‘a history of the people who used the Capitoline Hill in late antiquity ... and wrote about the hill’s variegated past’ (xviii).

The ancient distinction between *mons* and *collis* would have deserved a brief discussion; in any case, the Capitolium was a *mons* and a very important one from a religious point of view – hence Moralee’s “holy mountain.” In antiquity the word Capitolium could indicate the southern summit of the hill (as opposed to the Arx) or imply the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus. Classicists, antiquarians and archaeologists have struggled for centuries to make sense of this terminology – note that until the late 19<sup>th</sup> century the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was even located on the wrong spot – but Moralee is surely aware of these issues, as attested to by his article on Francesco Di Giorgio’s problematic reconstruction of the hill in the 15<sup>th</sup> century. But what did the late-antique and medieval authors mean by Capitolium? Did they refer to the hill as a whole, to the

southern summit or to the temple? No doubt, they did not refer to the “streets and neighborhoods around it.” I am not sure that “the top of the Capitoline Hill did not look fundamentally different than the streets surrounding it” (76); yet, relying on these, Moralee argues that the hill survived as a densely populated urban zone, although the traces of a “late-antique” fire beneath the Aracoeli (which Moralee could not know) and, more important, the lack of water due to the decline of the Roman aqueducts, suggest that commercial life shifted down the hill, as customary in medieval Rome (cf. the case of the nearby Palatine hill).

Even when dealing with the churches located around the hill (93), Moralee provides an account of what happened around, not on, the hill. As for the early 9<sup>th</sup>-century Santa Maria in Capitolio, we now know that its walls survive beneath the transept of the present basilica of the Aracoeli (cf. C. Bolgia, *Reclaiming the Roman Capitol: Santa Maria in Aracoeli from the Altar of Augustus to the Franciscans, c.500–1450* [Abingdon 2017], also for the association *camera - camellaria*). At page 96, Moralee proposes the “highly speculative suggestion” that the original church was founded by Narses around 570, but why shift it to the “Tabularium” and date it earlier? Of course, Moralee’s readers should not expect detailed reports on the medieval archaeology of the hill, which is still poorly known due to an almost complete lack of evidence (which is telling, though). The author makes it clear from the outset that he is concerned with the literary, not the archaeological, side of the Capitoline and from this point of view his work is thorough and stimulating (although I would have liked to know the author’s point of view on the fact that the site of the temple of Jupiter Optimus Maximus was never occupied by a Christian church).

I have found very few typos – Taitius instead of Tatius (11), Gianelli instead of Giannelli and Tarpeo instead of Tarpea (57 n. 2), Centrum instead of Centum and Scala instead of Sculae (77 n. 88). Furthermore, many archaeologists would disagree that the Arch of Constantine marked the beginning of the Via Sacra (48) and that the Clivus Capitolinus was the last stage of the same road (77). The illustrations are well chosen, but Gatteschi’s drawing in Fig. 6 does not originate from *Restauro della Roma Imperiale* (1924) (see instead Fig. 19); it reproduces an original drawing measuring 2.25 by 1.15 m, on which Gatteschi based his *Restauro grafico del Monte Capitolino, Foro Romano e monumenti circostanti nell’anno 300 dopo Cr.*, a 29-page paper delivered on March 8, 1897. The main difference relates to the slopes of the Arx, but both reconstructions by Gatteschi are mistaken. I have concluded with this example in order to stress how late-antique and more recent visions (and literary descriptions) of the Capitoline hill should not

be considered for their objective value; reliable or not, they convey different images and interpretations of that urban space, and we must be grateful to Moralee for his sophisticated analysis.

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