

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Boundaries of Art and Social Space in Rome: The Caged Bird and Other Art Forms.*  
By FREDERICK JONES. London: Bloomsbury Publishing 2016. Pp. xii + 208. Hardcover, \$114.00. ISBN 978-1-4742-52610-20.

The foci of Jones' monograph constitute "cultural phenomena" from the late Republic and early Empire, particularly gardens, garden paintings, tapestries and caged birds. Moreover, these phenomena, unexpectedly, as the reader will soon be aware, serve as art forms that both impact and define the social space (i.e. the *domus*) of the elite Roman citizen. The analysis is cast wide with respect to the range of topics covered. Central to the work is the establishment of interrelated boundaries that exist not only between these particular phenomena qua art forms, but, also, how these boundaries are inherent in the city and beyond. Furthermore, to nuance these seemingly unrelated phenomena, Jones employs cognitive development as his theoretical model. Readers will find ample endnotes and bibliography to supplement the discussions along with six ten grey scale images.

The monograph comprises six chapters that delve into providing rich source evidence from ancient literature and material culture. In Chapter 1, "Introduction: Art," Jones begins the discussion by tackling how the Romans defined "art." The analysis takes us through a discourse stemming from contemporary times, the 19<sup>th</sup> and into the Renaissance to illustrate that defining art has not, by any stretch of the imagination, been static. Jones underscores that Roman art was to be imitated, competed for, and valued in order to substantiate the identities of the owners and elicit emotive responses for viewers.

With the stage built for a definition of Roman art, the author then moves into specific analyses of the four cultural phenomena, which begin with Chapter 2, "The Roman Garden." Jones provocatively introduces his theoretical underpinning of cognitive development. The reader is met with assertion that "The garden, the house, and the family are in intimate connection with each other from the very earliest moments of the citizen's life. This subjective experience must, therefore, be a strong factor in the citizen's cognitive development" (43). There are, however, key points that would be helpful for readers to understand further how children's roles in these settings were substantiated. A heads up for those unfamiliar with

Jones' previous works, they should be consulted to fill in the lacunae.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, it would have been to address that children were represented in select sculptural treatments of Roman villas. For example, marble statuary with seated children decorated the fishery basin at Sperlonga.<sup>2</sup> The spotlight for the settings concentrates on the adult Roman citizen.

Jones presents the second of the four cultural phenomena in Chapter 3, "The Garden Room at Primaporta." The "Garden Room" is, perhaps, one of the most iconic frescoes in the repertoire of Roman art history. Jones formulates the basis of his argumentation by asking, "if one of the two entities, the garden and the garden painting which are alike in content (the garden in experience) and context (the citizen's residence), can claim the status as art with any credibility, what are the kinds of grounds upon which can deny the status of to the other?" (56). To reinforce the interconnections between actual and perceived spaces, Jones draws upon aesthetic qualities, as well as, memory, and repetition in the art. Unfortunately, there is no mention of how this actually this may have played out in actual garden spaces, but it is a worthwhile question to ponder in order to consolidate the argument. The author also handles the conundrum of the lack of painted columns in the "Garden Room"—a reoccurring feature of other garden paintings—that potentially altered the experience of those engaging with the fresco. The author intriguingly teases out the potential for a gazebo like structure that once existed within the confines of this space.

Chapter 4, "Tapestry in Rome" attempts to weave together the literary and material evidence for the presence of tapestries. To commence, one reads, "there is an immediate problem that virtually nothing remains to be seen of this" (75). A recent study by Thomas, offers evidence to the contrary.<sup>3</sup> Also, curiously omitted from overview are the representations of framed tapestries (*siparia*) designed to

<sup>1</sup> The author recasts three published articles in the monograph. The first, pertaining to this particular chapter is F.M.A. Jones, "Roman Gardens, Imagination, and Cognitive Structure" *Mnemosyne* 67 (2014): 781-812.

<sup>2</sup> B.S. Ridgeway, "Greek Antecedents of Garden Statuary" in *Ancient Roman Gardens*, E.B. MacDougall, W.M. Jashemski, eds., (Washington, DC 1981): 14. For children on fountain statuary, see P. Bowe, *Gardens of the Roman World* (Los Angeles 2004): 36-7.

<sup>3</sup> While outside of the chronological framework presented in Jones' work, this exhibition catalogue provides some crucial evidence about the nature and subject matter of tapestries that would help strengthen Jones' argumentation. See T. K. Thomas, ed., *Designing Identity, The Power of Textiles in Late Antiquity* (Princeton 2016).

cover the *scaenae frons*. Such artforms were also featured on wall paintings dated to the mid first century CE, known as the “Tapestry Manner”.<sup>4</sup>

The last of the four phenomena is the focus of Chapter 5, “The Caged Bird”. Readers will have encountered the allusion to the caged bird in previous chapters (e.g., chapter 3). Similar to the actual and representational garden, the caged bird offers a means to control nature within domestic contexts. Through an examination of literary and artistic examples, Jones envisions the caged bird as a feature of interior decoration that is inherently Roman (99) and one that offers up a plethora of possibilities for “metaphoric values” (108).

The monograph concludes with Chapter 6, “Conclusion: Self-Projecting Inside and Out.” There is no shortage of analogies and evidence to suss out how Jones ultimately conceives the Roman *domus*. In essence it is “a metaphorical portrait of the owner” (116). In short the cultural phenomena qua art forms comprise aesthetic, emotional and intellectual factors that, in turn, contribute to a *domus* owner's place in Roman society.

In short, there are some incredibly salient discussions and analyses that Jones formulates in this monograph. Moreover, it is a commendable work that will drive specialist audiences to engage further in the topics of boundaries, garden spaces, and cognitive development in Roman art and literature. I offer one final remark that may benefit readers. If you are unfamiliar with the author's previous works related to the topics presented here, it is well-advised to read the published versions recast from chapters 2, 3, and 4 (see “Acknowledgements,” xii).

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<sup>4</sup> Clarke draws the conclusion that hanging tapestries featured in the wall paintings imitated what actually existed in the homes of the “very wealthy”. J. Clarke, *The Houses of Roman Italy, 100 B.C. – A.D. 250: Ritual, Space, and Decoration* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, Oxford 2003): 67.