

edition), of an epitome of Valerius Maximus' collection of *exempla* by Ianuaris Nepotianus.¹² The epitome is only partially transmitted, up to Valerius 3.2.7, and has so far usually been edited as part of editions of Valerius Maximus' work. Jakobi offers a new edition and commentary, both of the main text of Nepotianus and the fragments for Books 3–9. Although this is really a work for the specialist reader, including a translation would probably have helped extend the reach of Jakobi's work a bit and make more readers familiar with Nepotianus' work. As Jakobi sets out in the introduction, the epitome is of interest because Nepotianus still presents it as a work in its own right (*hoc meum*), leaving out some of Valerius Maximus' *exempla*, especially non-Roman ones, and adding others, and also in other respects adapting the work to his own late-antique context (probably fifth century, Jakobi argues) and for a readership that is seeking rhetorical instruction rather than a broader political and ethical education. In the edition itself, Jakobi is often hesitant to intervene in the text as transmitted, although he does suggest some emendations where the text is clearly corrupt. In the commentary he shows very clearly where Nepotianus draws from Valerius Maximus' own source texts, especially Livy and Cicero, as well as other authors. Despite the fragmentary nature of the text, there is certainly some interesting work that could be done on it and on its techniques of epitomization, for which Jakobi's text and commentary provide a very good basis – a topic that is perhaps especially interesting at a time when we are constantly surrounded by a rather new wave of *epitomae*, as generated by AI.

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Art and archaeology

The books reviewed here offer a chance to look right across our discipline and each subfield's priorities and approaches. Sometimes, from the perspective of another, these can seem quite alien though there are also common preoccupations. I trace some of those oddities and commonalities here, not at all as a criticism of any of these authors or their disciplines, but as a reflection on the variety of ancient visual and material studies today.

One of the beauties of the fine new exploration of the Temple of Artemis at Sardis by Fikret Yegül and Diana Favro is that it encourages something we often forget to do: to slow down and look closely at just one monument.¹ Most of us have probably encountered this temple as a floor plan among several, grouped together to demonstrate

¹² *Die Valerius Maximus-Epitome des Ianuaris Nepotianus*. By Rainer Jakobi. Berlin, de Gruyter, 2025. Pp. viii + 178. Hardback £89.00, ISBN: 978-3-11-0-26600-9.

¹ *The Temple of Artemis at Sardis. The Hellenistic Temple Tradition in Asia Minor*. By Fikret Yegül and Diane Favro. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xiv + 324. 257 b/w and colour illustrations, 5 plans, 12 plates. Hardback £100, ISBN: 978-1-009-53216-7.

Hellenistic temple architecture in Asia Minor. Instead, this volume allows us to pore over the temple, almost as if sharing the experiences of Yegül on site (though without suffering the heat exposure he complains about!), admiring the traces of the craftspeople who worked on it and the details of the decoration they carved into the marble. Walking past the Roman column bases, many people presumably barely glimpsed the leafy decoration on their bases. However, look closely and, just as in the vegetal scrolls of the Ara Pacis, those oak leaves are populated by tiny creatures, lizards and snails, who crawl around the foliage (103). These details not only imply the skill and attention of the craftspeople who carved them but also perhaps how closely a local audience might be expected to explore their sacred buildings during their multiple visits.

The temple is remarkable for its unorthodox design but perhaps more so for the fact that this design was never fully implemented despite being in service for 500 years or so: this building has always been in a state of appearing and disappearing and the authors capture all those phases. The first version of the temple, initiated by the Seleucids, most likely Antiochus I and Stratonike, seems never to have got beyond the stage of completing the *cella*. The people of Sardis seem to have considered they had the essentials they needed: Artemis installed in her *cella* looking out across the porch to her altar. The temple suffered significant earthquake damage along the way, and fresh impetus to resume building in earnest did not come until the reign of Hadrian, whose neokorate decree necessitated alterations to the design to accommodate the imperial cult. The *cella* was divided in two, allowing Artemis to occupy the west side whilst a growing series of colossal statues of the imperial family occupied the east. Even then, the *pseudodipteros* peristyle was never completed. The temple eloquently tells the story of this prolonged process: one column celebrates its erection with a triumphant inscription declaring it is the first to be raised. Another is not so full of itself, demanding ‘finish me’ (90)!

Across the building, craftspeople have left traces of their working lives: guide marks remain on socles to indicate the placement of the Roman columns, and on uncut columns they guide the cutting of flutes and carving of pattern. Using these details, the authors explain exactly how the temple was built. Such technical details can be overwhelming but they are explained in an engaging manner, all the more so given that we can see the remains of these processes in action. Useful illustrations also help conceptualize the ways in which marble blocks were lifted and clamped and dowelled into place. The sheer tonnage and expense of marble needed to be quarried, transported, and worked perhaps explain the reason the temple was never finished. One of the fullest inscriptions on the building announces the recall of a mortgage debt, presumably as the temple tried to raise the cash to raise some more of the columns.

The authors also trace the temple’s ongoing disappearance as it has succumbed to natural degradation and deliberate despoliation over centuries, valued of course for the marble but also for the lead which held the clamps/dowels in place. Most of the marble, being too heavy to transport, probably ended up in the lime kilns that dot the site. In discussing these, it is notable that the authors try to balance mourning the site with a more practical appreciation of processes of recycling that we recently saw in Beth Munro’s book about the dismantling of Roman villas in late antiquity.² As the authors

² Beth Munro, 2024. *Recycling the Roman Villa. Material Salvage and the Medieval Circular Economy* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press).

relate the impressions of later antiquarians to the site, we are able to watch that degradation in real time: in 1444, Cyriacus of Ancona saw twelve standing columns, Edmund Chishull in 1699 six and Charles Cockerell, in 1812, only three. A little over ten years later, only the two columns that are still standing today had survived into the century that would see full excavations begin.

Tracing this arc is only part of the remit of this volume, which aims to scrutinize the existing temple, to situate it in its historical contexts, and to see how it relates to Hellenistic and imperial temple-building. We end up where we might not have expected: in Rome, noting similarities with Hadrianic building projects, not least the Temple of Venus and Rome, which shares with Sardis the twin *cella* arrangement. Throughout, the authors share their knowledge and engagement with the site in such a generous way that the last image of the book feels particularly fitting. It shows Yegül's drafting board balanced on scaffolding next to the capital of one of the remaining columns, an image that sums up the entire project: the close reading from all angles of a temple that has always hovered between curation and collapse.

Sophie Crawford-Brown also explores temple architecture, but brings us from the marble blocks of Asia Minor to the terracotta roofs of central Italy.³ The book focuses on two case-study cities, the temples built in the new colonies of Cosa and Minturnae, to make much bigger arguments about cultural interaction across Italy during the third to first century BCE. The author's contention is that during this time the roofs of many temples, regardless of location, share a 'standard temple kit', including *potnia theon* antefixes (antefixes taking the form of a winged woman flanked by animals), revetment plaques, cornices, and simas (all of which are carefully explained and illustrated). As new towns, both Cosa and Minturnae needed temples and they each made use of this 'kit'.

The author's explanation for the appeal of such a kit seems very sensible: it is easy to see that sacred architecture might be very conservative so as not to upset tradition (though as the author shows, conservatism is not the ONLY possible response and in previous eras sacred architecture had been a place for innovation and experimentation). That some of the standard kit was based on designs that had gone out of use for some time before their reawakening does seem to show a deliberate return to the antique, a move the author proposes is driven by the rapid change and uncertainty of this period.

By interrogating the process of crafting such items, Crawford-Brown shows convincingly that the recurrence of this standard kit is not simply due to the dominance of one workshop. Terracottas do not lend themselves to long-distance transportation, liable to breakage and as heavy to move as they are. So, are the moulds circulating or the craftspeople themselves? In some cases it does seem that the same mould might have produced tiles in different places. Itinerant craftspeople may have arrived in new cities, borrowing local kilns to produce their wares. Understanding these processes helps elucidate the choices made at any one location: when the first colonial temple at Minturnae burned down, it was replaced with a tripartite temple that seems to have shared the same types of terracottas, but the minor differences on them make clear that the two generations were not made from the same mould. Given that the later builders

³ *Religious Architecture and Roman Expansion. Temples, Terracottas, and the Shaping of Identity, 3rd–1st c. BCE*. By Sophie Crawford-Brown. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xiii + 271. 122 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £90, ISBN: 978-1-009-44511-5.

had to start from scratch, going for a new design would have added no expense or labour. It must have been a deliberate choice to replicate the older designs (88).

The case studies also trace how this standard kit interplayed with local peculiarities that tied a temple to its immediate and regional contexts. At Cosa, the more ‘non-standard’ elements of the design are seen to have close similarities with sites immediately to its south and north, including Tarquinia. This closeness might be the result of craftspeople and moulds travelling up and down that immediate stretch of coast, but also of worshippers who may well have visited a number of sanctuaries in these sites and so would have ‘felt’ and expected those visual connections. Regardless, it is startling the extent to which this brand new Roman city has taken care to integrate with its neighbours. At Minturnae, meanwhile, there are similar links to the wider region, to cities such as Capua, but also seemingly deliberate links made to the temple roof in the much older sanctuary of Marica outside the city walls, again showing a deliberate attempt to tie the new Roman temple to a much older, local religious landscape.

These observations lead to the second main aim of the author: to undo a perception that, by this point in time, ideas in central Italy are emanating from an increasingly dominant Rome. In rejecting theories of ‘Romanization’, the author reaches for the concept of network theory. Rome should be understood as just one city participating in shared regional preferences that trumped political allegiances/imbances.⁴ An example is repeated from another volume on central Italian architecture that we recently reviewed: the fourth-century BCE roofs of a temple in Falerii Veteres and the Capitoline temple in Rome share forms even though they were at war at the time (46). This idea of shared vocabularies sometimes feels a little at odds with arguments made for very particular identity claims made for any one site. At Falerii, the author claims that the early ‘standard kit’ terracotta assemblage of the roof of the temple known as Lo Scosato I was deliberately made up of different elements from prominent sanctuaries around the region in a bid to assert the sanctuary to be THE dominant centre, but one does wonder how many people would be familiar enough to recognize all these influences, particularly when they only saw these details at a distance above their heads rather than photographed for the close scrutiny we enjoy as readers of this book.

The last chapter looks forward to Augustan Rome and the manner in which the tradition of terracotta decoration retained a place even after marble replaced wood and terracotta roofs. The so-called Campana reliefs often favour vegetal decoration, particularly human/plant hybrids. The idea that their medium was deliberately used to evoke tradition and piety is convincing, less so that the decoration on them is essentially a continuation of Italic tradition. In this story they end up being a reference back to Italia: a sign that Rome includes all of Italy and its regional customs and traditions. But it is only an Italy that has fully swallowed fashions carved in marble at sites such as the Temple of Apollo at Didyma and even that of Artemis at Sardis. They are an indication of how broad the network in which ideas might circulate has become.

A new volume edited by Diego Elia, Eleni Hasaki, and Marco Serino keeps our attention on terracotta, but widens the scope to include all sorts of ceramic production

⁴ Charlotte R. Potts (ed.), 2022. *Architecture in Central Italy. Connections in Etruscan and Early Roman Building* (Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2022).

from tiles, figurines, and all sorts of vessels produced in the Greek and Roman worlds.⁵ As with Crawford-Brown, network theory is a dominant approach, as the contributors explore the technology, skills, and mobility that enabled the production and dissemination of ceramics around the Mediterranean. Before reading, one should be warned that the papers arise from a conference and so are addressed largely to peers in the same discipline, and many of the papers are very short, providing snapshots of projects in action rather than end results or drawing broader conclusions. There is also a good deal of technical terminology (see, for example, 173) that will be very alien to many readers. Nevertheless, to a non-specialist like me, the volume offers a very good indication of the current state of the field, the questions being posed, and the technologies and approaches used to explore them.

What is most notable, particularly in the chapters devoted to figured vases, is the extent to which the field has progressed so far beyond Beazley's techniques of attribution and yet is still so dependent on them. In some papers, such as that by Philip Sapirstein, the workshops of named painters and potters are used as the basis to work out production rates. In others, though, new approaches begin to break down the authority of these attributions. Elisa Chiara Portale and Gabriella Chirco find that approaches that move beyond the iconographical to morphological and archaeometric analysis begin to question the idea that the Centuripe vases were produced by a series of distinct individuals, the named painters to whom they are attributed.

The most compelling contributions are those that take us through the production process. Linda Adorno presents potters' tools and stamps found in recent excavations at Selinous. Meanwhile at Pompeii, the excavation of two workshops in different parts of the city, dedicated to different outputs (cups in one and lamps and tiny vases in another), shows the environment in which craftspeople worked and how they arranged space to accommodate the firing and drying of vessels. Dario Giuliano's chapter on roof tiles shows the marks left by those who made them, some deliberate, to identify which employees made which tile, as well as other finger and palm marks left less intentionally as the workers treated the tiles (though less dramatic than an example in Crawford-Brown's book of the footprints on unfired tiles left by people fleeing the fire that was about to consume a workshop in Poggio Civitate (21)). In several chapters, the contributors have gained insight into ancient practice by working with practitioners who make a living from making 'ancient' vases today. One of the best chapters from this point of view is Eleni Hasaki's, in which she imagines what it took to create the famous Sarpedon vase. One does not need to believe in an artist called Euphronios to be moved to ask: what happens in what order? How on earth does a craftsperson grapple with such a huge vessel while trying to work on it? Images show various options for handling the vessels during production, whilst others show step by step the order in which the vessel was assembled and how the decoration may have been applied. The wider discussion considers the length of time it takes to shape, fire, dry, and then decorate a vase, and uses the findings to determine how a workshop might balance the production of large, fancy, high-end kraters with that of more everyday vessels to meet local demands.

⁵ *Technology, Crafting and Artisanal Networks in the Greek and Roman World. Interdisciplinary Approaches to the Study of Ceramics*. Edited by Diego Elia, Eleni Hasaki, and Marco Serino. Berlin and Boston, De Gruyter, 2024. Pp. ix + 385. 166 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £100, ISBN: 978-3-11-115461-9.

Figure vases, of course, formed only a small percentage of vessels circulating the Mediterranean. The first chapter considers Aeginetan cookware, noting that this very practical ware became what the author, Gudrun Klebinder-Gauss, calls a ‘megaseller’. On the one hand, the popularity of this ware is testament to the skill of Aegina’s potters, the quality of their products, and the raw materials they comprised; all elements that guaranteed reliable and even cooking. On the other hand, and more intriguingly, their dispersal tells us about culinary preferences across the territories where they were sold. The spread of specialist shapes implies the spread of the culinary techniques for which they were designed, offering insight into wider cultural changes across their distribution area. Importing specialist ware is just one solution to serving evolving culinary traditions. In a previous review, we encountered the range of cooking wares found at Fregellae, explained as a reflection of the diversity of the population, which included both Italian settlers and Punic hostages.⁶ Barbara Borgers and Francesca Diosono show that both sets, as morphologically different as they are, appear to have been made of local clay, suggesting that the local market adapted to serve its multi-ethnic clientele.

In recent reviews, we have met Constantinople in the context of the volumes arising from the Impact of the Ancient City Project, in which Istanbul often served as an example of the palimpsest city, with so many histories simultaneously on show.⁷ Here, John Matthews sets out to offer an ‘urban history’ of the early years of the city, showing its development from Byzantium (in its Greek and Roman phases), the Constantinian foundation of Constantinople through to Theodosian developments.⁸ The cut-off date is determined by the scope of the *Notitia Urbis Constantinopolitanae*, a gazetteer of the fourteen regions of the city and their key features.

The early chapters of the book revolve around the author’s translation of this text, which is followed by chapters tracing each region of the city. A warning here, though: if you launch straight into chapter 1, it will be page 37 before this becomes apparent. The disarming preface acts as the introduction, explaining the structure and aims of the book with absolute clarity on the intended scope and approach. Chapter 1 is actually a biography of Constantine and an overview of the circumstances that led him to Byzantium, a city that had been sacked and then rebuilt by Septimius Severus and was now to be transformed by being absorbed into Constantine’s new city.

Matthews clearly knows Istanbul very well, confidently tracing the remains of the ancient regions and their road networks in the cityscape of the modern city. Like many people, I suspect, my own learning about Constantinople was based around the art and architecture of its early churches, and I have little idea of the city’s topography or a sense of life in its streets in the way that I can picture Juvenal or Martial moving around different areas of Rome. Writing in a relaxed and warm style, Matthews shaped Constantinople for me, offering a strong topographical description of how the heart of the new city related to that of Byzantium and then how the city grew with the expansion of domestic and commercial space. The gradual provision of new harbours and the

⁶ Alessandro Launaro (ed.), *Roman Urbanism in Italy. Recent Discoveries and New Directions* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2023).

⁷ Elizabeth Key Fowden, Suna Çağaptay, Edward Zychowicz-Coghill, and Louise Blanke (eds.), *Cities as Palimpsests? Responses to Antiquity in Eastern Mediterranean Urbanism* (Oxford, 2022).

⁸ *From Byzantium to Constantinople. An Urban History*. By John Matthews. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2024. 51 b/w illustrations and 10 tables. Pp. xv + 262. Hardback £64, ISBN: 978-0-19-757549-8.

extension of the water supply catered for a growing city whilst the proliferation of steps and bakeries shows those neighbourhoods where most of the inhabitants were reliant on the bread dole. Quotes from key sources help populate this infrastructure with human presence.

The author is self-deprecating, acknowledging that he is not an archaeologist: urban history here is kind of a biography of Constantinople as we know her from texts. That is absolutely not to say that there is any doubt about Matthews's knowledge and familiarity with the visual and material: the extended treatment of the iconography of the column of Arcadius demonstrates this, offering a great reading of how the column demonstrates the development of the physical city. But material traces by themselves are not the focus (not least because the writers of the *Notitia* seem to have been remarkably uninterested in the decoration of the city). When read from the perspective of material and visual studies, this biographical approach to the urban fabric can sometimes feel a little impressionistic, particularly in the later chapters that focus on processions and major events. They feel a little like a compendium of things that happened in or even to Constantinople (such as an assault by giant hailstones in 404 CE) with less reference back to the cityscape itself. My own disciplinary predispositions wanted more attention to the geography of these processions, more of a sense of the movement through the topography of the city, and the visual or sensory impacts of the environment. Whilst the sources themselves offered evocative glimpses of this, it is not the focus of the author to develop this approach.

By far the most impactful point of this book is the way that Matthews relates the city to Constantine's political priorities and his relation to his Christian faith. He utterly convinces in his emphasis that the first iteration of Constantinople was NOT essentially a Christian city (and indeed it is hard to imagine what would have made a city such at that time). It is a classical city, shaped fundamentally by its walls, fora, and roads; its cultural landmarks, like the baths, circus, and the sculpture gathered from cities around the empire; and its centres of political power: the palace and the new senate house. The foundation ceremonies, as described in the sources, do not include Christian elements, and Constantine himself, we are reminded, built many more churches in Rome and Jerusalem than in Constantinople. St Irene was built in his lifetime as was the Church of the Apostles (only, of course, it was not a church but simply his own mausoleum until after his death), but St Sophia was not consecrated until 360. The real church activity seems to take place, not in the ceremonial heart of the city, but in its densely occupied commercial and domestic regions where local churches, listed first in the *Notitia*'s entry for each region, could serve the daily needs of large congregations.

In the end, this book complements the Impact of the Ancient City project by demonstrating that, like the city it documents, the *Notitia* is a palimpsest text, updated haphazardly and partially leaving contradictions and traces of the past city in its lists.

Stefanie Lenk's book on imagery in early Christian baptismal spaces in the western empire keeps us in late antiquity. There is some similarity here, too, in that Lenk focuses on how often these spaces, so crucial for inducting individuals into a specifically Christian life, did not provide a specifically Christian iconography.⁹ This was another

⁹ *Roman Identity and Lived Religion. Baptismal Art in Late Antiquity*. By Stefanie Lenk. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xxxi + 248. 109 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £90, ISBN: 978-1-009-40865-3.

book which showed the different perspectives and approaches of different disciplinary subfields. For imperial Roman cultural historians, who perhaps only stray into the fourth and early fifth century, the idea that classical culture could not co-exist with Christian belief seems an alien concept. For Lenk, however, looking backwards from the context of the fifth to the seventh centuries CE and in the specific setting of church spaces, the ongoing survival of 'Roman' culture in the Christian world becomes more problematic, the two pitched as antithetical based on the sermons of influential church fathers and later bishops. In order to escape these explicitly anti-'Roman' attitudes, Lenk proposes to use art and architecture to consider how 'lived religion' deviated from these extreme positions to fit the needs and collective cultural memories of local populations. The approach is posed as novel, rarely adopted by researchers of this era. Again, this seems shocking to hear from the perspective of imperial Roman visual studies, where the exploration of how local audiences adopted and adapted 'universalizing' classical (or what is here called 'Roman') forms and styles has been a mainstream of enquiry for twenty years or so.

The first chapter interrogates baptisteries that used 'non-Christian' or at least 'not explicitly Christian' imagery, leading with the baptismal area at Cuicul in Numidia. The complex is part of a double church complex and joined to a bath house, with which it shares its plumbing. The watery theme extends to the decoration: the font is covered with marine life mosaics. Lenk's point is that many commentators wish to 'Christianize' these images by reading them as allegory, whereas she would argue that they would most likely appeal to worshippers as familiar images of plenty and beneficence, a theme with which the elite of Cuicul seem to have been singularly obsessed, given the preponderance of fishy themes on the floors of their own townhouses. Bath suites, elaborate fountains, and other water effects were also indispensable to elite life in the city, which had recently benefitted from an extension of the water supply (and here we might refer back to Ginny Wheeler's book on late-antique water displays).¹⁰ Lenk interprets the bath suite in the church complex as a survival of 'pagan' practices of purification, but offers no real evidence for parallels to 'pagan' temple complexes in the area. Besides, if the mosaics simply recall more generic ideas of a life well lived then could not the baths maybe do the same?

The second chapter moves to examples of baptismal areas bearing decoration that seems more decidedly 'non-Christian', in that they recall pagan mythic narratives or aspects of Roman civic life disliked by many of the church fathers: at Henchir el Koucha, circus horses; at Myrtilis Iulia in Lusitania, Bellerophon and the Chimaera; and at Milreu, a marine *thiasos*. The villa at Milreu has popped up several times in recent reviewed volumes: it is considered by Ginny Wheeler as a villa with remarkable late-antique water features and by Beth Munro as a site undergoing dismantlement. Here, we see another aspect of the recycling of the site, with what appears to have been a mausoleum opposite the villa repurposed as a baptistery. In the course of that repurposing, the existing mosaic frieze of hippocamps prancing in a fishy sea was clearly deemed non-offensive enough to remain.

In these chapters, the case studies are deftly handled, but it is sometimes hard to see how the discussion captures a 'non-elite' experience of religion and culture. Pretty much

¹⁰ Ginny Wheeler, *Water Displays in Domestic Spaces across the Late Roman West* (Oxford and Philadelphia, 2025).

all the comparative evidence comes from highly elite settings, predominantly houses and villas, and the survival of classical culture is almost always couched in the terms of 'paideia', a term that deliberately excludes the wider public. The Bellerophon at Myrtilis Iulia is interpreted as being chosen because it fitted in with more general themes of hunting, popular in villa mosaics, and was 'thereby connected to Roman elite culture'. Non-elites seem somewhat excluded here. The people swept up in this category knew these motifs not from formal education, texts, or fancy dining rooms, but from bath houses, theatrical shows, and decoration on low-value items such as lamps and ceramics. As a result, the argument seems to rest not on demonstrating a non-elite grasp of Roman culture but potential conflicts between two different sorts of elites: the wealthy who led the social and political life of their communities and lent land and money to build new churches; and an increasingly influential church hierarchy, the members of which sometimes worked with and came from those other elites and sometimes chastised them. Non-elite populations perhaps feature here in as much as the church became an alternative venue in which they could get a glimpse of and temporarily share in an environment of lavish material wealth, repurposed not for the immediate enhancement of a homeowner but for the glory of God.

The final chapter rather abandons the non-elite altogether as the case study of the Orthodox and Arian baptisteries at Ravenna is interpreted as a case of one bishop translating into visual imagery the text of another. This case study offers the first explicitly Christian imagery of the volume: the baptism of Christ in the Jordan by John the Baptist, a scene repeated in each baptistery. The 'Roman' element of the scene in both cases is the depiction of the river Jordan as a personification, in bust form in the Orthodox baptistery and as a full figure in the Arian. That is not to say the chapter does not offer a satisfying reading: the personification of the Jordan is not taken simply as the ongoing influence of traditional cultural norms, but his deferential attitude towards Christ is interpreted as showing classical culture itself bowing before Christianity. The bigger role attributed to Jordan in the Arian example is taken to imply an Arian determination to claim that classical culture for its own. Here is found a solution to the relation between Christian and 'Roman' cultural juxtapositions.

From rebirth into the Christian faith to death in classical Athens we end with Emily Clifford's brilliant *Figuring Death in Classical Athens*.¹¹ Clifford does not want to investigate how Athenians respond to and remember the dead, a familiar topic, but death itself. In an age of enquiry, how could living Athenians come to know what death was and how it was experienced? And how could the deaths of particular others help imagine death more generally and even one's own demise, an event nobody would ever survive to reflect upon. Attempts to grapple with individual and collective deaths became particularly pressing across a century when the state was governing the circumstances in which people die (whether executing individuals or sending populations to war) and how their bodies will be deposited and mourned.

Art and literature become crucial in this discussion because representation is the ONLY way death can be examined. Representations offer, as Clifford puts it, 'virtual' encounters with death, and a series of case studies, numerous enough to explore

¹¹ *Figuring Death in Classical Athens. Visual and Literary Explorations*. By Emily Clifford. Oxford and New York, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xxi + 287. 37 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £88, ISBN: 978-0-19-894790-5.

differences and developments, allow the extended investigation of such representations: Plato's account of the death of Socrates; Sophocles' imagining of the death of Oedipus in *Oedipus at Colonus*, and Thucydides's account of the plague are set against images of death on *kylikes* and *lekythoi* and the west frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike. It is rare to find fully ambidextrous Classicists, who are equally as adept at literary and visual analysis, but all of these case studies are elegant and powerful. Crucially, Clifford does not just consider content, but the ways in which different genres and media (for example, ceramics and marble) afford different routes to consider death.

The first case study, a literary example, sets up some of the key difficulties of knowing and showing death. Examining the death of Socrates as depicted in the *Phaedo*, Clifford considers how and why death is so elusive. Despite the long build-up to Socrates's entirely anticipated end, an account of his distressed and attentive companions, our eye-witnesses, and even the description of the creeping effects of hemlock on the sophist's body, the actual death is not directly witnessed by anybody since it appears to happen when Socrates is fully covered. It is also only relayed to us at third remove: not by Socrates or his corpse, nor by *Phaedo* but by Plato who was not there.

The first visual case study consists of a series of *kylikes* and *lekythoi* that attempt to show death in painted form and here we see how art might offer a more direct encounter with death, holding a mirror to these vessels' handlers. The tondo of the Getty cup shows the body of Ajax attended by a woman who holds up a veil or shroud above him. The acts of obscuring and revealing the scene caused by filling the cup with wine and draining it mirrors the covering or lifting of this fabric over the body of Ajax, who as the wine drains is increasingly starkly on show, his feet breaking out of the tondo, overlapping its patterned border, breaking into the drinker's space. On the Louvre cup, the outer walls show the fall of Troy and the imminent death of old Priam, whose bearded and seated appearance mimics that of Phoenix accepting a drink from an attendant in the tondo. But even as Phoenix enjoys a drink in the victorious camp, his mirroring of Priam might prefigure his own death, which cannot be so far away. Equally, the handler of the cup, a recipient of a vessel like Phoenix, might find his own mortality when confronted by Phoenix at the end of his drink. The prefiguring of the death of painted figures and their living viewers becomes more insistent on *lekythoi* which are often encountered in funerary contexts, heightening the disposition of the viewer to look for death. On the examined *lekythos*, two human figures in profile face each other across a sturdy stele that occupies the centre of the scene and confronts us head on, a symbol of the absence that death is. Commentators are often inclined to see the nude male as the dead whom the other figure, a woman bearing objects, has come to remember. But, as Clifford says, this is perhaps irrelevant. Even if the woman is imagined as living, her encounter with death prefigures her own transience, a transience exaggerated by the medium itself, the delicate paint that makes ghosts of the depicted human forms.

As the final case study, the west frieze of the Temple of Athena Nike is used as an example of an increasingly urgent need to know death in the context of an increasingly deathly century. As opposed to the Parthenon metopes, battle becomes not a mythical or allegorical episode (no monsters here) but an existential fight for each combatant, regardless of allegiance or identity. All the figures are inflicting, avoiding, or succumbing to death. One dead figure lies on the floor, his head hidden by a boulder: the human recedes as he is sandwiched between the stone from which he is carved and the represented boulder that obscures him: the material and pictorial frame conspire to eat

him up (156). The lack of specificity applied to the individual identities of the combatants allows viewers to make what they will of the death around them, Are the corpses one of their own or of enemies? Distant ancestors or contemporary friends? (189). Clifford's book is a challenging and inspiring read: a lesson in how we might grapple with the difficulty of showing and knowing antiquity.

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Philosophy

David Horan has gifted us all with the publication of a new translation of the dialogues of Plato.¹ The beautiful two-volume edition is the culmination of a monumental sixteen-year effort. It collects thirty-two dialogues and all the letters attributed to Plato, with a foreword by Professor John Dillon and a brief, beautiful, and fitting introduction by Horan. The list of dialogues includes all those considered authentic, as well as some of disputed authenticity, including *Cleitophon*, both *Alcibiades* dialogues, both *Hippias* dialogues, *Minos*, and *Epinomis*. The only thing that I missed in the printed edition was more space in the margins for the many marginalia that I intend to add.

Horan joins a very select list of individuals that have taken upon themselves the daunting task of translating all of Plato's dialogues and, as Dillon points out, 'not since the great enterprise of Benjamin Jowett, in the late nineteenth century (first edition in 1871, to be exact), has a single individual, to my knowledge, taken on the challenge of translating the whole corpus single-handed into English' (8). Both Dillon and Horan, of course, are quick to acknowledge that this achievement received many helping hands from fellow scholars, editors, friends, and funders. Still, readers used to collected translations such as Cooper & Hutchinson's² will quickly notice the difference (and many advantages) when jumping from one dialogue to another and finding the same style and principles of translation applied across them. Moreover, the Foundation for Platonic Studies, which funded the publication of the printed volumes, also gives free access to all preprints of the translation on its website (www.platonicfoundation.org/translation/) – no doubt an unmatched resource for students and teachers.

According to Horan, his overall aim is captured by the motto 'to move the reader toward Plato rather than leaving the reader in peace by adjusting the writings of Plato' (25). In this way, he departs from traditional renderings of specific well-known terms. For example, instead of translating *aretē* as 'virtue', he chooses 'excellence', for *technē* he

¹ *The Dialogues of Plato: A New Translation*, 2 vols. By David Horan, Cork, Gandon Editions Kinsale, 2025. Pp. 1,318. Hardback €60.00, ISBN: 978-1-910140-50-5.

² Cooper, J. M. and Hutchinson, D. S. (eds.) (1997), *Plato Complete Works* (Indianapolis, Hackett Publishing Company).