

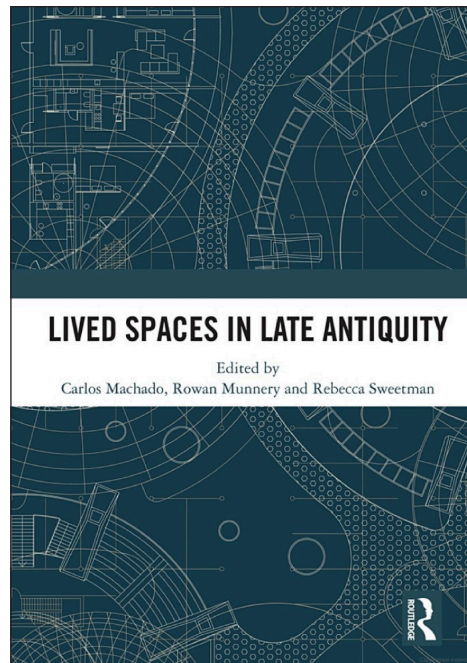
Book Review

Machado, Carlos, Rowan Munnery and Rebecca J. Sweetman (eds). 2024. *Lived Spaces in Late Antiquity*. Abingdon: Routledge; 978-1-138-38530-6 hardback £135.

Lived Spaces in Late Antiquity comprises the conference proceedings of an online event held from 8 to 10 December 2021, organized by the School of Classics at the University of St Andrews, Scotland. The volume consists of 16 chapters, featuring an Introduction and 15 papers arranged thematically into four sections.

Late Antiquity (here from the late third to the eighth century AD) poses a perennial challenge for scholars, often entangled in the dichotomy between ‘Catastrophists’ and ‘Continuitists’, as exposed by Bryan Ward-Perkins (1997). Scholars in the field of late antique studies often express dissatisfaction with such binary categorization and dedicate considerable effort in their book introductions to disavowing this polarization.

Instead, they propose alternative theoretical frameworks in an attempt to transcend these limitations. The editors of *Lived Spaces in Late Antiquity* follow this tendency and confront the conundrum in the Introduction by advocating for a shift from monumental architecture to the space experienced every day by ordinary people (p. 2–3). This departure from the traditional focus on grand structures acknowledges the tendency to overlook the majority of the population, particularly the lower classes, whose lives often remain obscured in both archaeological and literary records. Embracing a theory



of studying individuals within their urban and lived spaces (Lavan 2003: 184), the book challenges the prevailing scholarly emphasis on elite classes, redirecting attention towards the broader populace (p. 3).

The volume advocates for a comprehensive approach, integrating disciplines such as literature, history, epigraphy and archaeology to construct a more nuanced understanding of late antique society. The papers are variously aligned with the theoretical framework presented in the Introduction. Some embrace it completely and successfully shift the focus from monuments to their users, revealing the potential of archaeological evidence to illuminate the lives of marginalized populations. Notably, authors like Bowden, Raja, Berenfeld, Sweetman and Videbech demonstrate that archaeological remains can speak volumes about the lower strata of society with careful analysis and imaginative interpretation. Chapter 4 (Berenfeld) focusing on the Caelian Hill in Rome effectively immerses readers in the bustling streets and squares of the neighbourhood, meticulously examining the developing architecture and its impact on the perceptions of passers-by.

Other chapters struggle more to extract from available sources and evidence the perspectives of people living in these spaces. Some chapters elude the connection to the daily lives of ancient people (König; Zanini) or leave it in the background (Castiglia; La Rocco; Ogus). These chapters deal more with the notion of space, its perception and/or its transformation over the *longue durée*. While limitations in available evidence can create challenges, a critical necessity sometimes arises to interpret beyond the data. This is exemplified by Viermann's research on relics in Constantinople, which demonstrates the need for imaginative effort to consider the population's perspective.

This opens a question about the organizational structure of the volume, which is surely coherent and interesting; however, one might argue for a slightly different organization. For example, the two chapters dealing with Mediterranean navigation (Brown; Munnery) merit being read together. Also, it is particularly unfortunate that the three excellent chapters about Rome (Berenfeld; Machado; Videbech) are not placed in sequence, as they draw a neat picture of the city in Late Antiquity by bringing together archaeology and literature. Nevertheless, the book offers a comprehensive overview of Late Antique society, encompassing diverse geographical regions and social contexts. By juxtaposing case studies spanning from Britain (Bowden) to the Horn of Africa (Castiglia), from the Iberian Peninsula (La Rocco) to the Levant (Raja), and also from both capital cities (Berenfeld; Machado; Videbech; Viermann), smaller provincial towns (Martínez Jiménez), countryside villas (Zanini) and the Mediterranean Sea (Brown; Munnery), the volume offers a vast and heterogeneous overview of the late antique world. This allows for the emergence of similarities in how humans perceive and experience the spaces according to their needs, regardless of the context.

The varying degrees of engagement with the theoretical framework exposed in the Introduction underscore the challenges inherent in reconstructing ancient urban spaces. Nevertheless, the book serves as a valuable resource for scholars, complementing recent works on the subject and placing itself in the wake of the recent immense and already seminal *Public Space in the Late Antique City* (Lavan 2021). By advocating for a shift ‘from monuments to people’, *Lived Spaces in Late Antiquity* advances our understanding of this pivotal period, particularly within archaeology. In essence, the volume encourages scholars to transcend traditional paradigms and embrace imaginative approaches to reconstructing the past. By eschewing simplistic narratives of continuity or catastrophe (p. 4), the book invites readers to explore the multifaceted lived experiences of individuals in late antique environments, ultimately underscoring the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration and lateral thinking in unlocking the everyday life of late antique society.

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