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Book Review

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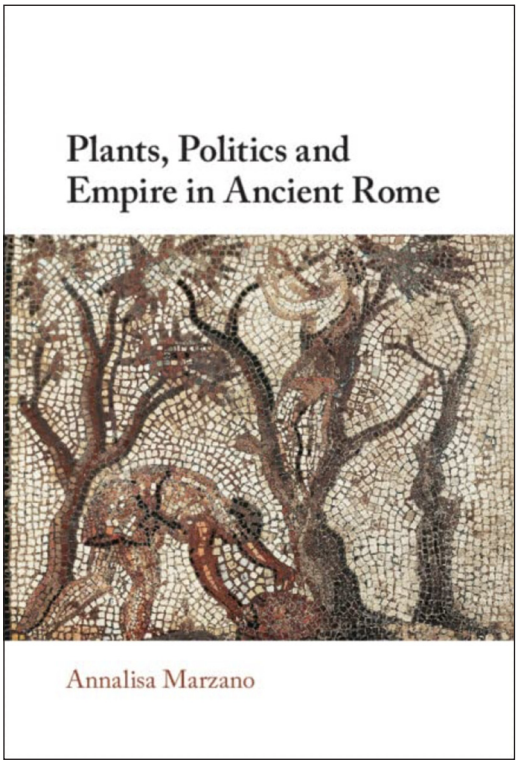

Plants have been a key entry route for Classical studies into environmental humanities for the last decade, and this book makes a substantial contribution to this growing field. In particular, Hunt (who is uncited throughout) has produced a number of pieces examining the role of trees in ancient Rome (2012, 2018), and re-opened the field with her 2016 monograph. Marzano presents an Augustan 'horticultural revolution', building on the narrative of an Augustan arboreal revolution established at conferences from 2012 onwards. While that revolution was more cultural and driven by imperial messaging, including, for example, the centralization of the Romulus and Remus myth by moving the Ruminal fig, the plants on the Ara Pacis, and the trees of the Mausoleum of Augustus, Marzano's revolution is broader. She illustrates, across 308 pages of wide-reaching writing, a tonal shift in gardening practice in the Augustan period as horticulture on the whole became a political activity, possibly a reaction to the growing prominence of plants in narratives of power in the late Republic.

This book is strongest when examining the hard archaeological evidence, and the economic history of trees, rather than their socio-cultural qualities and contexts; this is especially apparent in the discussion of grafting and the following chapter on peach trees. Here, the discussion of our historical evidence of grafting is strong, and the summary of the archaeological evidence for the peach is thorough. However, the discussion of Livia's role in creating a new tree, the *ficus liviana*, runs counter to recent scholarship on Roman women of the early Imperial period. Marzano reports that Livia could be the creator of a new tree or fruit type because of her transition 'into the male — and public — sphere in other areas of action' (p.152). This is a dated understanding of the role of Roman women, who had held public roles since the first priestesses and the Regina Sacrorum, and whose role in the late Republic and early Principate has been the subject of sustained recent study, beginning with Russell (2015) recategorizing the traditional zoning of the house, and more recently examined by Webb (2019) and two collections of essays (Woolf and Cornwell 2022; Flower and Osgood 2024).

After this foray into Roman cultural history, the book picks up again with two regionary analyses, both succinctly presenting a range of issues within the broader narrative of these areas: Campania and Cisalpine Gaul (Chapter 6), and the Iberian Peninsula and Gaul proper (Chapter 7). Information comes thick and fast at the reader, providing a précis of various comparative sites and their archaeological surveys, and conclusions or hypotheses are reached throughout, including on the transportation of fruit (p. 201–202). This section would be improved with maps of key sites for those unfamiliar with the areas, which would be helpful across the book, especially given the implications of climate on horticulture and agriculture in any given area.

And it is really in agriculture that we find this book's strengths, especially where we leave the urban centres and enter the rural landscape, where archaeology is more prominent than literature, and cultural change is much slower. Here, in discussions of provincial agriculture and the economies of trade in plant produce, Marzano teases a rich and complex view of an area of ancient environmental humanities that has not yet been fully exploited. I do not think this book has uncovered all the arguments that can be made on this body of evidence, but that is not a criticism: there is only so much one monograph can do within its covers, and this book tries to do a lot.

It is this breadth that is perhaps the chief weakness of this monograph. There are too many places where the archaeological analysis and cultural evidence are presented alongside each other to produce an argument that could have been more convincing through increasing discussion of both. It may be that this would have worked better as a two-volume work of 200 pages each, one covering cities and power and the other focused on agricultural practices. Instead, the non-environmental specialist

reader lurches between disciplines at a speed that can sometimes confuse and disrupt the argument (which remains a strong one), especially in Chapter 3, examining the Augustan horticultural revolution, which shifts from agricultural models of the nineteenth century to the wordplay of Varro, a small veg patch in Transtiberim and then to large-scale farming outside the city in its first section. This breadth also leads to occasional oversights. In Chapter 2, 'Plants on the Move', Marzano argues that Pliny's comment, 'This type of tree [the balsam] was shown to the city by the Flavian emperors, it is a remarkable fact, we have led trees in triumph since the days of Pompey Magnus' (*Historia Naturalis* 12.111, not 112 as cited),[1] which points to Pompey displaying both the balsam and the ebony (12.20) in his triumphal procession, and the Flavians repeating the display of the balsam. This is a popular mistranslation, and Van Der Blom (2023: 381, note 27) lays out the passage in a recent chapter, and cites those translators who recognise that Pompey is included by Pliny (*HN*. 12.111) as the originator of the arboreal display in the triumphal procession.

A central requirement of Marzano's overall thesis is that the urban, imperial element of Roman society in the late Republic and early Principate had a direct hand in rural activities. This is really only argued twice, once in Chapter 4, 'Grafting Glory', and again in Chapter 8, 'Viticulture versus Arboriculture'. Neither of these arguments are extremely well developed, and both deny an element of agency or outside influence to the local farmers in the provinces, presenting them as relatively impressionable, especially in the latter chapter, which continues a discussion of a '"Romanized" provincial elite' (p.279) being influenced for a short time by what had been planted before.

This book is, ultimately, too broad and too brief to fully problematize and ask questions of pre-understood notions, especially in contexts like women and the natural world. There are a number of good beginnings of arguments here, especially on agriculture in provincial areas, and it is a shame the author did not choose to take a tighter focus in order to explore only a handful of these. This book is especially strong in its discussion of economy and what the trade of plant products can tell us about the role of plants in the Roman world, and I would recommend it as an excellent presentation of the rich variety of evidence on Roman environments.

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Note

[1] Pliny (*HN.* 12.111) writes, '*ostendere arborum hanc* [the balsam] *urbi imperatores Vespasiani, clarumque dictu, a Pompeio Magno in triumpho arbores quoque duximus*'.

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