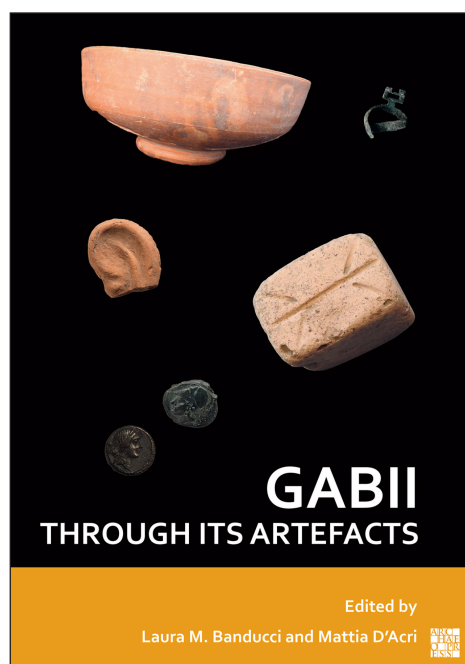


Book Review

Banducci, Laura M. and Mattia D'Acri (eds). 2023. *Gabii through its Artefacts*. Oxford: Archaeopress; 978-1-80327-604-5 paperback £45 ebook Open Access.

This collection of essays explores the artefactual record of ancient Gabii, a settlement situated 18 km east of Rome along the *Via Praenestina*. Structured into three sections, the volume presents findings from three excavation projects to rebuild facets of city and community life from Gabii's pre-Roman beginnings through the Imperial and Late Antique period. The book opens with a brief introduction by the editors, outlining its main rationale: to draw attention to Gabii's rich material assemblage and, by combining scientific analysis with theoretical inquiry, provide new insights into the city's activities and the daily experiences of its inhabitants.

The first section includes seven chapters on the Gabii Project. Laura Banducci starts with an overview of the project's focus on a central urban quarter, tracing its development from the eighth century BC to the fifth century AD. Six case studies follow, each analysing different object types and their role in understanding everyday life at Gabii. Mattia D'Acri examines Opaque Red Ware, an understudied category of early and mid-Republican fine ceramics. The study links Gabii's prevalent cup form to communal rituals, though it ultimately prioritizes a



broader ceramological analysis over cultural interpretations. Christina Cha's chapter uses the distribution of loom weights to reveal household textile manufacturing, while also considering the meanings behind the engravings on these quotidian tools. Next, Matt Harder employs the project's online database to track chronological and spatial patterns of black gloss, terra sigillata and African red slip, placing Gabii's daily pottery consumption within local and long-distance trade networks.

In a longer chapter, Shannon Ness and Elizabeth Robinson reflect on monetary practices and personal wealth through the site's numismatic evidence. Their analysis of diverse coin deposits questions the intentionality behind these deposits and evaluates Gabii's integration into a broader monetary economy. The presence of halved-coins, non-Roman denominations and lead tokens suggests localized economic traditions. Brittany Proffitt shifts focus to a personal artifact, a ring key, likely used to secure a woman's dowry, to identify female visibility within Gabii's public life. In line with the volume's goal of reconstructing 'unique individual stories' (p. 2), this small yet important object represents a single case of female wealth and autonomy in Gabine society. The final chapter in this section, by Zoe Ortiz, diverges somewhat from the volume's overarching goal. Ortiz's study of a Julio-Claudian sculptural group is less concerned with offering new interpretations on the statues' civic relevance and concentrates more on debating the identification and function of its archaeological setting.

The second section turns to archaeological materials recovered during excavations led by the Louvre. After Steve Glisoni's introductory comments on the project, which centred on the area around the forum and the sanctuary of Juno Gabina, two case studies are presented. Isabelle Hasselin Rous focuses on terracotta artefacts found in and around the sanctuary, bringing religious and ritual experiences in ancient Gabii into the spotlight. The discovery of figurines and anatomical votives, likely locally produced as suggested by the presence of a mould, attest to a Republican and Imperial urban community engaged in cultic practices of devotion and healing. Marjolaine Benaich and Martin Szewczyk return to the Julio-Claudian statuary group, on display in the Louvre, presenting an in-depth (perhaps too long) stylistic and typological analysis, followed by a discussion of the evergetic context in which these statues were gifted to the city.

The third section comprises seven chapters on materials from the Tor Vergata/Soprintendenza excavation project. Macro Fabbri details this collaborative fieldwork, focusing on three locations within the city, the *arx*, the fortification, and an extra-urban sanctuary, and reconstructing Gabii's occupational history from the early Iron Age through Late Antiquity. Three chapters then assemble the ceramic evidence,

each dedicated to a specific type: *impasto* (Paolo Ghigliardini), *impasto rosso* (Rocco Bochicchio) and *bucchero* (Laura Protani). Although these studies — perhaps better consolidated into a single chapter — introduce new findings on urban occupation phases and ceremonial practices, especially through pottery shapes associated with wine consumption, their approach leans more toward typological analysis than toward telling new stories about the Gabine community. Valeria Ducatelli's study on terracotta votives, used during passage ceremonies from the *arx* and sanctuary, enriches the discussion on Gabii's cultic experiences. Her findings complement those of Hasselin Rous, emphasizing Gabii's role as a production centre for these ritual artefacts. Closing the section are three chapters devoted to *amphorae* (Rocco Bochicchio, Pamela Manzo), stamped bricks and coins (Fabrizio Terrizzi), which accentuate Gabii's commercial links on regional and extra-regional scales and describe the use sequences of these archaeological contexts.

This volume stands out for its qualitative analysis of everyday objects, shifting attention away from built structures, which often take centre stage in discussions of ancient cities and urban life. The contributions are of outstanding quality, delivering expert examinations of specific object classes, accompanied by a rich collection of images and maps. One of the volume's clearest strengths lies in the way it contextualizes artifacts both within Gabii and its immediate environment while also situating them within a wider regional and interregional comparative framework, connecting Gabii with archaeological data from many other sites across Italy and the Roman provinces. As a result, the book is an invaluable resource for scholars studying pre-Roman but particularly Roman and Late Antique material culture. Despite these strengths, some critical observations can be raised. While many chapters introduce new perspectives on the site, some — especially those analysing object assemblages such as pottery — place greater emphasis on typological classification than interpretative analysis. Additionally, the volume claims to adopt theoretical approaches to study objects, such as object biography, but engagement with these frameworks across the volume is limited, with no real discussion or background offered on these concepts. Furthermore, the majority of the chapters deal with objects recovered from secondary deposits. Even if the authors acknowledge the challenges associated with redeposited materials, this complicates definitive conclusions about function and chronology and thus makes it more difficult to entirely reconstruct the original use and meaning of some of the artefacts discussed. This, in turn, prompts an important question about the book's main goal: to what extent can archaeological artefacts be meaningfully analysed in isolation from their stratigraphic and architectural contexts? In conclusion, the individual chapters deserve recognition for highlighting Gabii's diverse material

evidence, but the volume might have been enhanced by a concluding chapter that addresses both this issue and synthesizes its broader contributions to our knowledge of daily life at ancient Gabii.

Adeline Hoffelinck
Department of History, Art History and Classics
Radboud University
Adeline.hoffelinck@ru.nl

