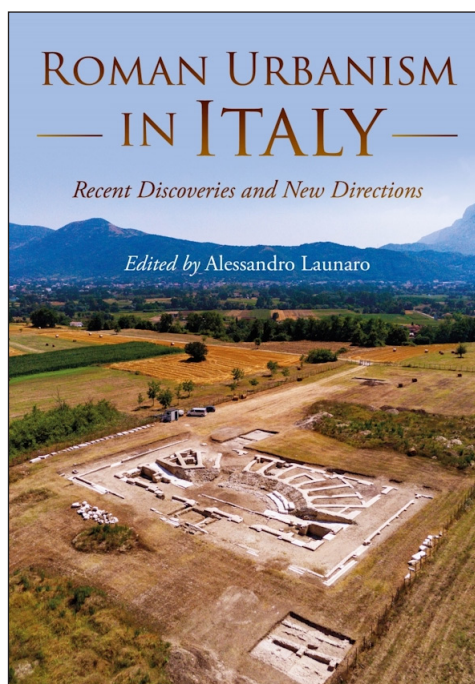




Book Review

Launaro, Alessandro (ed.). 2023. *Roman Urbanism in Italy: Recent Discoveries and New Directions*. Oxford: Oxbow Books; 979-8-88857-036-4 paperback £42.

Roman Urbanism in Italy: Recent Discoveries and New Directions, edited by Alessandro Launaro, is aptly named, providing an excellent overview of many recent discoveries related to Roman urbanism in Italy, with some chapters touching on pre-Roman urbanism as well. The book is the published output of the 2022 Laurence Seminar at Cambridge, organized by Launaro and Martin Millett. It is organized into five thematic/chronological sections ('Parts') with a total of 15 chapters, including the volume's introduction and conclusion. As noted in the introduction, the goal of the volume is to challenge long-held stereotypes about Roman urbanism in Italy. This reevaluation is based on recent data from a select few urban centers across a broad geographical area, with an eye to urban trends from the early and middle Republic to Late Antiquity. The editor and authors are also keen to demonstrate the utility of new methods and techniques, particularly non-invasive ones.



The first section presents current methods and approaches used by archaeologists investigating urban sites and ancient Italian urbanism in general, drawing on data from recent projects at Falerii Novi in the Tiber Valley, the Caelian hill in Rome, and Aquinum



as case studies illustrating these techniques. These chapters present the utility of non-invasive archaeological methods, particularly geophysics, surface survey, and remote sensing, and the deployment of GIS to combine complex spatial and stratigraphic datasets in the study of Roman urbanism in Italy. Chapter 2, on Falerii Novi (Millett), draws on almost unparalleled GPR data to look at the city's urban fabric and track changes to it over time, and is excellent overall. At the same time, for a volume seeking to challenge traditional stereotypes, I was surprised to read about the origins of Falerii Novi lying in Rome's efforts to pacify the Faliscans by forcibly relocating them from Civita Castellana (Falerii Veteres). While this is most recently challenged by Maras (2024) and Terrenato and Opitz (2024) in their publications on both sites, the notion that competition among local elites and their connections to Rome resulted in two 'Faleriis' has been floating around for a number of years now. Chapter 3 (Ian Haynes, Paolo Liverani, Thea Ravasi and Stephen Kay) presents a detailed overview of the methods and techniques employed by the international team investigating the eastern Caelian (the Rome Transformed Project), an amuse-bouche for those of us eagerly awaiting publication of the project's results. That said, the chapter would benefit from more and bigger figures, and the conclusions are few and quite preliminary, but the point is to focus on archaeological method. Giuseppe Ceraudo's chapter (4) on Aquinum also provides an excellent methodological overview, although again more visuals would be welcome, as would be discussion of more diachronic archaeological data sets.

The second section, 'Beyond the Textbook', looks at three commonly referenced colonial sites, Cosa (Andrea De Giorgi), Fregellae (Francesca Diosono) and Alba Fucens (Cécile Evers). In each instance, the standard narratives of Roman colonization within Italy and the nature of such colonies are challenged. Cosa, for example, initially once the paradigmatic example of an early Roman colony, is revealed to be something quite different. The relationship among these colonies and pre-existing, indigenous settlements and societies is also presented, as is their articulation with other Roman centres. This is seen most clearly in the case of Fregellae, where the presence of non-Latins within the colony is suggested by a range of archaeological data. Finally, the method of planning, peopling and renovating colonies is also noted in each chapter. Particular attention paid to the situation at Alba Fucens, whose forum, it is argued, was planned from its foundation, but which was renovated in the context of several important social transitions in the larger Roman world. This is a theme found in many other chapters throughout the volume. Overall, this section advances knowledge about Roman colonies and colonization, addressing significant, long-standing questions.

Section three, 'Not your standard Roman town', looks at two very interesting exceptions to various 'rules' of Roman urbanism in Italy: Lucus Feroniae in the Tiber Valley (Chapter 8, Kay, Sophie Hay and Christopher Smith) and Septempeda in the

Marche (Chapter 9, Frank Vermeulen). In both instances, the data presented challenges the urban history and form of both sites. Lucus Feroniae was mostly a site for public buildings and a sanctuary amidst rural and suburban villas, similar to the much smaller Forum Novum across the Tiber, while Septempeda, despite its topography and location with respect to transport infrastructure, had a much longer and more vibrant urban floruit than has been previously assumed. As is typical for the volume, both projects draw almost exclusively on non-destructive techniques, particularly geophysics, but demonstrate how these datasets can be combined with excavation data and historical evidence (what little of it there might be). These chapters quite clearly challenge previous narratives of their history and nature, and display, through comparison to other, similar sites, the diversity of Roman urbanism in Italy in the late Republican and Imperial periods.

Section 4 looks at three towns, Lunae in Liguria (Simonetta Menchelli, Paolo Sangriso, Silvia Marini and Rocco Marcheschi), Interamna Lirenas in the Liri Valley of Lazio (Launaro) and Aeclanum in Campania (Ben Russell and Girolamo De Simone) with an eye to understanding changes to their urban fabric over centuries. Again, the new information about these sites is quite interesting as is the application of current methods to their study. The chapter on Lunae focuses on the excavation of a *domus* and renovations to it over time, as well its immediate urban environs, providing the reader with insight into changes in the use of private and public space over centuries. The chapter on Interamna Lirenas combines geophysical, survey and excavation data in an effort to understand demographic fluctuations and major renovations to the urban plan and public spaces, the result being a much better understanding of the town's role and the role of similar Italian urban centres in the economic and commercial networks of the early and middle Imperial periods, an important contribution. Russell and De Simone's chapter on Aeclanum combines detailed GPR survey and excavation data to understand the town's overall layout, its relationship to the Via Appia, both with respect to its physical layout but also to social organization and economic history and noting how the road may have played a role in the town's decline and eventual abandonment. These three chapters work well together to highlight the complex history of Roman urbanism into the middle and late Imperial periods, how urbanism was connected to broader issues of economic and social history, and how tenacious Roman cities were into the Empire's decline. It is also noted how many of the observations made in these chapters about urban history in Roman Italy can be applied to other cities across Italy.

Section 5 looks at the situation among Roman towns in Italy during Late Antiquity, with interesting case studies from Aquileia in the Friuli-Venezia Giulia region (Patrizia Basso) and Parma in Emilia Romagna (Alessia Morigi). The data presented for Aquileia is fascinating and, for someone who does not work on the late antique period, highly

informative, particularly concerning the organization of public spaces and changes to the region's and Empire's commercial networks. The chapter in Parma, focusing on what has been thought for a very long time to be a Roman-era bridge, is written in the genre of a murder mystery, complete with reveal. In keeping with the other chapters, it does demonstrate how a combination of non-invasive and invasive techniques, as well as legacy data, can be marshalled to answer complex questions, but the tone of the chapter is slightly different, focusing on a single element of Roman, medieval, and early modern Parma, in an effort to assess a standard historical narrative.

This is an important and stimulating volume, and the contributions are of a high quality. As John Patterson notes in the conclusion, throughout the volume the authors ask important questions about the nature, organization and history of Roman urbanism, including the relationship between town and countryside, transport networks, topography, migration, pre-Roman urban traditions and long-term economic trends. As noted above, preliminary answers to these questions are presented throughout, but there is more work to be done. It is also clear that the combination of new, non-invasive techniques with legacy and contemporary excavation datasets in a careful and thoughtful manner is the key to advancing this research. At the same time, the inclusion of more, and at times better, figures in almost all chapters would be a welcome addition, although the colour plates at the end of the volume are all clear and quite useful. But this is a minor quibble and one that could be had with most archaeological publications, especially edited volumes of conference proceedings. To end on a positive note, most chapters, except for Morigi's, are organized the same way, with introductory sections on the history of research at each site discussed, the topographical context, the relevant historical sources (when applicable), followed by a more detailed presentation of each author's current research and results. This makes it easy to see connections among chapters throughout the volume, which is greatly appreciated and something that more editors of conference proceedings should do.

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