

5-19-2020

Michael Anderson and Damian Robinson, eds. House of the Surgeon, Pompeii: Excavations in the Casa del Chirurgo (VI, 9-10. 23). Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2018. Pp. 664. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-78570-728-5) \$110.00.

Patricia Baker
p.a.baker-3@kent.ac.uk

Follow this and additional works at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj>



Part of the [Classics Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Baker, Patricia (2020) "Michael Anderson and Damian Robinson, eds. House of the Surgeon, Pompeii: Excavations in the Casa del Chirurgo (VI, 9-10. 23). Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2018. Pp. 664. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-78570-728-5) \$110.00.," *New England Classical Journal*: Vol. 47 : Iss. 1 , 22-24.
Available at: <https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj/vol47/iss1/6>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Classical Journal by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.

distracting: e.g., “The poet is intent on further displaying...” (57), “...the poet wanted ... to create...” (58), “Homer wishes us to see...” (75), “the poet wants us to consider” (77), “...what the poet means to do is ...” (92), “the poet wants us to see...” (96), “the poet wishes to...” (117 and 134), “the poet may have wanted...” (142), “the poet’s intention is...” (157), “...the poet...wished to show” (159), “the poet ... meant to show...” (p. 183).

Despite succumbing at such times to the intentional fallacy, Porter’s meticulous philological examination usefully revisits familiar terrain and adds many valuable new insights. Although directed toward scholars and including extensive and thoughtful discussion of relevant scholarship, the book provides translations of all quoted Greek passages, and Porter’s clear, lively prose will make it appealing to undergraduates and non-specialists as well. (In quoting the scholarship, however, Porter assumes that readers have a working knowledge of French, Italian, and German). Porter’s systematic, sequential commentary on significant passages in the epics results in considerable repetition of arguments, and his concluding chapter provides a detailed, repetitive recapitulation of the entire discussion. The extensive repetition, though wearing at times, might however be useful for undergraduate and non-specialist readers unfamiliar with this material.

Most valuable is Porter’s persuasive reminder that knowledge of Agamemnon’s entire story informed an ancient audience’s reaction to any given scene’s description of Agamemnon’s words and actions. The nature of the oral tradition necessitates that we read the *Iliad* as Homer’s original audience must have heard it, with the events of the *Odyssey* firmly in mind. The consistency of Homer’s depiction of Agamemnon’s character makes the audience see him as unlikely to be capable of change or improvement as a leader.

Porter never suggests that Agamemnon’s character portrait, his traditional “proclivity for distasteful despotism” (157), calls into question either the other warriors’ willingness to follow his leadership or the willingness of the external audience to accept such destructive and self-destructive characteristics in their own leaders, but as authoritarianism gains ground in the twenty-first century, the question seems well worth asking.

Emily Katz Anhalt
Sarah Lawrence College

Michael Anderson and Damian Robinson, eds. *House of the Surgeon, Pompeii: Excavations in the Casa del Chirurgo (VI, 9-10. 23)*. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2018. Pp. 664. Cloth (ISBN 978-1-78570-728-5) \$110.00.

A popular understanding exists that Roman atria style houses came into existence around the third or second century B.C.E., and the House of the Surgeon (Casa del Chirurgo), is regularly identified as a prime example of this iconic Roman architectural

style. Archaeological studies on the Casa del Chirurgo were undertaken in the 18th and 19th centuries, and the dwelling was given its name because of a set of medical tools found within it. At this time, archaeologists dated it to the mid-third century B.C.E. and established that it was a housing style for the elite. However, as pointed out in the recent excavation report, *House of the Surgeon, Pompeii: Excavations in the Casa del Chirurgo (VI, 9-10. 23)*, edited by M. Anderson and D. Robinson, the original interpretation as an elite dwelling and its date are problematic.

The report presents the findings of an Anglo-American field project on the building that ran between 1994 and 2006. The idea for the project began in 1993. At this time, Pompeii's *Soprintendente*, Professor B. Conticello, called for international support to help fund and restore the maintenance of the houses at the site, and a team from the University of Bradford, UK, answered the call. They held their first season of exploratory fieldwork in 1994 to determine the potential for leading an excavation in the insula. At this time, they joined with the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and together the teams worked on the Casa del Chirurgo until 2006.

The methods employed by the team were situated amongst newer means of archaeological dating and interpretation than those employed in the original excavations. Even until the 1990s, there had been little reliance on archaeological stratigraphy to date the structures in Pompeii; most of the dating was based on architectural style and descriptions of houses in Roman literature. In contrast, the team excavated below the foundations of the house to establish stratigraphic phases and dates of construction.

The published report of the fieldwork gives a thorough overview of the excavations and is laid out in an easily accessible manner. It begins with a review of the location and history of the area, providing a background to how Pompeii, the insula, and the house were studied in the past. Following this, the authors of Chapter Two provide details of how their excavations were organized. The archaeologists divided the work between rooms, and each room had a supervisor who was responsible for the excavation team and recording the area. The excavation was led as a field school, with the majority of diggers being students. The artefact analyses were undertaken by specialists in pottery, glass, numismatic, bioarchaeology, and environmental remains. Some of these specialist reports are in this publication, but others will be produced at a later date.

The remaining chapters of the study are dedicated to reporting the archaeology of the House. Chapter Three gives a brief overview of the excavation history and area of the site. A detailed description of the stratigraphy of the site is presented in Chapter Four. Nine phases of construction and use were given to the building. Phase 1 was the base layer of natural soils. The earliest construction was found in Phase 2. In this phase, terracing and an early Pre-Surgeon structure was identified as an atrium style house. The third phase was the construction of the Casa del Chirurgo and dates to sometime around 200-130 B.C.E.

Phase Four (c. 100-50 B.C.E.) had new rooms, concrete flooring, and wall decorations added to the house. Another phase of redecoration dating to the end of the first century B.C.E. or beginning of the early first century C.E. is identified as Phase 5. At this time, shops were added that possibly indicate the developing economic importance of Pompeii. The owners also incorporated a common trend into their home when they extended the view from the fauces into the garden. Phases 6 and 7 (mid-first century C.E. to C.E. 79) saw two further periods of redecoration. Phase 7 is identified as the changes that took place after the earthquake(s) of C.E. 62/3. Phase 8 is post eruption, which shows little evidence for looting. Finally, the early 18th- and 19th-century excavations are represented as Phase 9.

Chapter five is the most substantial chapter of the book, and gives a full description of the stratigraphy at the site, each room that was excavated, and what was found in each of the phases. This section, like the entire report, is well illustrated with clear plans of the archaeology of each room and a map of its location in the house. Photographs are also given for most of the rooms, particularly showing important aspects of the walls, structural attributes, and drainage, for example.

Following this are chapters on the particular finds from the house. H. E. M. Cool presents highlights in her report of the glass vessels and small finds. The full report of these artefacts is published in a volume dedicated to finds from the entire insula. R. Hobbs, who notes that only 59 coins were found in the dwelling, reports the numismatic artefacts. This made up to 4% of coins from the entire insula. H. White records the plaster fragments and presents ideas about how individual rooms were decorated. The mosaic and marble inlay decorations are written about by W. Wootton. The faunal remains studied by J. Richardson show evidence for more sheep than pigs; while chickens and eggs became popular at later dates of occupation. C. Murphey's studies of the archaeobotanical remains shows evidence for fruits, grasses, nuts, pulses, and weeds. Finally, R. Veal examines the evidence for fuel and timber. A variety of trees and shrubs, many from the mid Apennine region were found: hazel, walnut, plum, grapevine, olive, oaks, maple, ash, and beech.

This new archaeological report is an important addition to studies on Roman dwellings and Pompeii. Its reinterpretation of the structure significantly shows that it was not an elite style of housing and that it was used for a wide variety of functions over an extended period of time. The report is useful for anyone requiring detailed information of the dwelling and insula in which it stood. The substantial work of the writers and the entire team is to be commended for the detail presented in an accessible and informative manner.

Patricia Baker
University of Kent, UK