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Excavating the Roman Rural Poor. Philadelphia: University of
Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2021.
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Unavoidably, some major themes in Alfaro's work have not received space here. Among them are *machismo*, queerness, and religion—each of these are enormous topics with robust bibliographies and intense lived realities which could not be adequately treated within a single volume whose emphasis was Alfaro's engagement with ancient drama. To this point, I will conclude with the words of Alfaro himself (p. 286): “[T]here is a cultural reality at play here. I am doing a Greek adaptation, but it is much more important, I think, to know about Latinx culture, community, ritual, and manner of speaking.”

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Kim Bowes, ed. *The Roman Peasant Project 2009–2014: Excavating the Roman Rural Poor*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology, 2021. Pp. 824. Hardcover (ISBN 9781949057072) \$120.00.

Classical archaeology is a discipline that has faced profound changes for the last two decades. Nevertheless, its dominant narratives are still deeply rooted in the interpretation of material remains left almost exclusively by activities of the ancient elites, from which recent scholarship is still struggling to move on. Even very influential recent publications have been renewing elite-centric approaches to antiquity through the development of a well-developed theoretical apparatus (see, for example, Terrenato 2019). This pattern leaves archaeologists of the Greek and Roman worlds with many important steps to be taken in shaping our knowledge of the ancient world; first and foremost towards deconstructing our perceived sense of familiarity with the Roman world, which both academia and popular culture picture as something naturally inherited by and deeply embedded in today's western society. Since a critical history of the world cannot simply correspond to the narratives built around the material remains left by the ruling classes, Roman archaeologists need to critically investigate both the theoretical frameworks used to produce such a crystallised knowledge of the Roman world, and the

methodology of data collection. This is crucial to enhancing our chances of successfully detecting and interpreting the presence of non-elite groups within the archaeological record.

The Roman Peasant Project 2009–2014: Excavating the Roman Rural Poor, edited by Kim Bowes, is a choral effort to answer such neglected yet crucial research questions. The book intends to offer a bottom-up history of the Roman period focusing on the lives of peasants, by holding a perspective as close as possible to peasants and as far as possible from the elites (p. 16). Focusing on the results of an archaeological project run over a period of six years, with a multidisciplinary approach involving landscape and bones studies, ceramic and botanical analyses, the project involved the collection and interpretation of first-hand data coming from a landscape survey and the excavation of seven sites in Tuscany highlighted during the survey phase. While Bowes' volume fully succeeds in distancing itself from elite-centred narratives, the admittedly challenging goal of focusing solely on the signs of lives left by rural peasants proved harder to accomplish in a single archaeological project, no matter how consistent and stratified. Ultimately, this book breaks some new ground and will produce even better results if similar projects decide to follow the theoretical and methodological frameworks set out by Bowes.

The main strength of the volume is its structural and methodological clarity, accompanied by a remarkable theoretical consistency. The clarity and consistency displayed by every contributor made this book a very pleasant and well-structured read, in which it is remarkably hard to get lost, despite it being over 700 pages in length. Part 1 ("Old Questions and New Data" and Part 2 ("A New Synthesis") are in close dialogue with one another. The book starts off exposing in detail the questions central to the research project: can the lives of non-elite rural groups of Roman times, particularly peasants, be archaeologically detected? The hypothesis formulated to tackle this question is that "even the poorest rural dwellers would leave some material traces" (p. 14) that can be highlighted through a combination of survey, geophysics, and thereafter thoroughly investigated through excavation. To test this hypothesis, the project worked on three other questions: where, and above all how, Roman peasants lived, in terms of diet, economy, agricultural activities; how they related to their environment, and how much they were shaped by it—using the useful concept of locale—and finally how poor they actually were. The last question, central to the project's design, does not rely on an overly simplistic definition of poverty, but maturely answered by defining poverty as a spectrum and taking into account parameters such as access to land, information, food, goods, and mobility.

The data, uniformly obtained for all seven sites investigated by the project, come from survey, remote sensing, and excavation, resulting in a vast diversity of typology which includes ceramics, faunal and botanical remains, coins, small finds, glass, and building materials; all presented in a way that is effective and relevant to the book's framework. Such remains are discussed in a dedicated and easy-to-find subsection within the analysis of each site, curated by specialists on the subject. In addition to thoroughly describing the research questions asked, and constantly reminding the reader of which questions the analyses refer to, the editor also lists some potential research questions that were not included, and justifies their exclusion from the project accordingly: amongst the latter are the power relationships between the elites and the Roman peasants, and the use of ancient texts. These exclusions, for instance, are justified with the intention to focus on the many horizontal relationships that characterise the daily life of peasants (p. 17), which are deemed by the editor to be usually obscured by the excessive focus on vertical relationships and hence by elites-oriented archaeological reconstructions.

Bowes' honesty and methodological transparency are exemplary: she freely admits when some of the research questions turn out to be the wrong ones, either because they are not conducive to understanding the lives of the rural non-elites, or because they are not answerable with the types of data collected. For example, Bowes remarks upon the near-total absence of evidence concerning human remains, which would have been particularly desirable in order to answer questions on the Roman peasants' lifestyle. This lack of evidence,

however, is not treated as a data flaw that compromises the research question, but rather as a) evidence in itself, useful for looking into the lack of “any clear evidence for activities or places that could be described as religious or ritual” (p. 588) in the rural landscape (e.g., temples and burials) and b) as an opportunity to investigate the peasants’ diet with the available data coming from animal bones and pollens.

Significantly, this volume sets up an important theoretical apparatus aimed at defining the word central to the project: peasant. A well-rounded definition is arrived at by thoroughly reviewing the figure of the peasant in the historiographical and archaeological tradition. The reference to the initial photograph (p. 2), taken in 1921 by Giovanni Bartolotti in Campana alle Vergini, Agro Pontino, frames the search for Roman peasants in an effectively vivid and imaginative way, while also warning the reader about the risks of essentialist modern rhetoric that tends to treat peasants as a monolith. In doing so, this volume follows previous attempts to challenge the supposed “timelessness” of peasants, such as McCarthy 2013 did for the context of Roman Britain. That photo, however, highlighted the plight of the rural poor in Italy and in Europe in general, inspiring the authors to draw attention to the rural poor in antiquity *and* modernity. Indeed, solidarity towards the rural workers neglected by history is not only explicitly expressed at the beginning of the volume (p. 1), but the idea that the lives of rural peasants should and need to be analysed, studied, and revealed permeates the volume as a whole is the distinguishing feature of the Roman Peasant Project.

Taking on board, and critically discussing, socio-cultural reflections of Marxist traditions, especially the British and Italian ones, the book makes use of the word peasantry to embrace all inhabitants of rural areas and does so by excluding all archaeological contexts with secure connection to the elites such as baths, temples, villas. Certainly, this is done with clarity and it is logically straightforward to link the presence of elite-associated contexts to the risk of building elite-centred narratives. However, the assumption that sweeping away elite-related contexts will make the rural peasants more visible in their life in a sort of unspoilt environment untouched by the elites, excluding the power relationships from the narratives of their lives, is one that brings back the concept of purity and as such needs reviewing. It must be stated that the editor herself is fully aware of the mechanical implications of this choice, realising that, being the project mainly an economy-centred one based on accessibility of goods and foods, escaping power relationships, even in archaeological contexts that seem peasants-related only, is practically impossible.

The manner in which this volume deals with the biases of an approach centred on elite-free contexts is just one of several examples of its scientifically rigorous and self-aware approach for future research projects to build on. Indeed, the editor expresses the need to apply strong interpretive frameworks, even with all of their limitations, in order to advance an even more important agenda which should be more widely adopted in archaeological research of the classical world: that is, to go beyond the limits of the purely empirical and to incite further interpretive work, as “lists provoke no responses” (p. 638). This is perhaps the main takeaway of the book, which invites all archaeologists to find a balance between our own presentist preconceptions and the lived experience of the past.

Worth singling out from the volume are chapter 14 (“Diet, Dining and Subsistence”) by Bowes, MacKinnon, Mercuri, Rattighieri, Rinaldi, Vaccaro, given the authors’ remarkable efforts to interpret material culture as evidence of a dynamic rural society. Likewise, section 18.7 of the Conclusions chapter, written by Bowes and Grey, provides a complex answer to the potentially essentialist question of “how rich or poor were Roman peasants” (p. 629), suggesting that “Roman peasants had some important capabilities” that are sometimes unseen—or interpreted as belonging to pseudo-elites—as “archaeology as a discipline has probably underestimated the material footprint of peasants” (p. 633).

There are no major omissions or errors readers should be aware of in this book. However, some of the theoretical frameworks mentioned in the first chapters were not explored as thoroughly as others. For instance, although Antonio Gramsci’s approach to

subalterns is only briefly mentioned in relation to Carandini's slave society interpretation of the Roman villa at Settefinestre and dismissed as "less methodologically innovative" (p. 9) and not truly fitting the aims of the book because of its entrenchment in power relationships, it could be reviewed in a potential follow-up of this research project. Gramsci's Notebook 25, which aims to recover the traces of subaltern activities aimed towards maintaining their (horizontal) relationships or fixing them after their breakage caused by the elites' intrusion (vertical power relationships), could be particularly helpful in reconstructing horizontal relationships between peasants.

The notes, apparatus, images, diagrams, and bibliography are all very rich and conducive to the fulfilment of the volume's stated aims. The bibliographic references are up-to-date, including relevant works published within a year's time of the book's publication. Older references are not neglected either but engaged with critically and coherently.

The Roman Peasant Project is a must-read for both senior scholars, who might be interested in and have the opportunity to create similar multi-year research projects, as well as for early career researchers and advanced students of the Roman world who want to move beyond the classificatory approaches still so frequent in archaeology, and towards fully embracing interpretive stands.

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Shadi Bartsch, translator. *The Aeneid*. New York: Penguin Random House, 2021. Pp. 464. Hardcover (ISBN 9781984854100) \$35.00.

Ambitious in scope and diligently researched, Shadi Bartsch's new translation of Virgil's *Aeneid* cleverly captures the ancient poem's style and imbues it with a critical sensibility for a modern Anglophone audience. This edition comes with the stated aim to provide a valuable resource to students and teachers of Classics who do not read Latin (LV). Opportunities for ancient language learning are increasingly rare outside of private education. Nevertheless, an eager audience for the stories of the ancient world has long existed and never truly diminished. To make this epic accessible, Bartsch renders the Latin into digestible, idiomatic English while simultaneously evoking Virgil's intricate wordplay. Using deceptively simple literary devices, like alliteration, anaphora, and anacoluthon (LIV), Bartsch stays true to the story's original poetic format. Though her intentions are to capture the spirit of Virgil's epic to non-Latin readers Bartsch still emphasizes that this is her version of this story (LV). Bartsch thus sets herself the challenge faced by every translator before her: to strike a balance between the scholar and the poet.

Bartsch's *Aeneid* is an accessible and enjoyable read, and it boasts many scholarly merits as well. This new edition draws out the complexities of Virgil's poem through four main themes. First, the complex relationship between the colonizer and colonized as understood through Bartsch's modern and sympathetic perspective; then a discussion of Bartsch's treatment of Aeneas's perplexing epithet: *pius*; then how she deals with gender and gender expression, and femininity in particular; finally, a brief note on the meta-narratives within the *Aeneid* and Virgil's use of ekphrasis.