separate ways and that the adjective tends to take on the rich meaning of the noun only when used in its comparative or superlative form.

The main chapters are dedicated to the pagan use of *humanitas* from the Trajanic to the Theodosian age: in the age of Trajan, i.e. in Pliny the Younger, Tacitus, and Suetonius, where *humanitas* first reacquired socio-political predominance over *clementia*, promoting a new climate of respect and collaboration among Roman citizens; in the Antonine age, i.e. in Apuleius, Gellius, and Fronto, who all employ *humanitas* in less politically engaged ways, each sticking to one major aspect of it rather than exploiting its polysemy; in the pseudo-Quintilian *Declamationes Minores* and *Maiores* ('Minor' and 'Major Declamations'), where the use of the term is less refined than in Cicero and Apuleius and where its educational component hardly plays a role at all; in Eumenius' *Oratio pro instaurandis scholis* ('Oration for the restoration of the schools') from the late third century, which restores the Ciceronian sense of *humanitas*; in Firmicus Maternus in the age of Constantine, where *humanitas* is consistently conceptualized as civilization, overlooking its educational dimension; under Theodosius, i.e. in Ammianus, where the notion of feigned humanity comes into play and where *humanitas*, and the Roman empire with it, are in decline, as well as in Ausonius and Symmachus, among others, who all testify to the socio-political renaissance of *humanitas*; and in the Hermetic *Asclepius*, a text of uncertain date written in opposition to Christianity, in which *humanitas* denotes the essence of man. From Mollea's nuanced study tracing the fate of *humanitas*, it emerges clearly how closely this polysemous term is tied to the changing political climate of its times and how powerful its employment can be – an important lesson for our own times.

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Art and archaeology

Ann Marie Yasin's book, *Rebuilding Histories in the Roman World*, looks at the motivations for and the practices and effects of restoration of damaged buildings in Roman cities.[1] It takes a long view, moving from Augustus to Justinian, not by plotting a linear history but by taking a look across different themes to see how the changing face and history of buildings affected the sense of time passing for those who used and lived around them. The premise is that rebuilt buildings operate very differently from new ones because of this effect on history. The book is clearly motivated by some of the

[1] *Rebuilding Histories in the Roman World. Architectural Restoration and Temporality from Augustus to Justinian*. By Ann Marie Yasin. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2026. Pp. xxvi + 514. 130 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £130, ISBN: 978-1-009-56470-0.

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themes we have seen in recent reviews, such as recycling and reuse and, in fact, at least one of the examples from Anna Sitz's book on the afterlives of temples in the eastern Mediterranean appears here.[2]

The reliance on willing patrons for the upkeep of cities was recognized in law: legislation obliged cities to maintain the visibility of the names of patrons inscribed on the buildings to which they had attended. Social and political gain (and later, divine reward) made extensive engagement with buildings well worth the investment and, in this regard, it is perhaps no surprise that we start with the *Res Gestae* as a commemoration of a massive rebuilding project. Throughout the book, Yasin emphasizes how important the upkeep of buildings was to convey a sense of stability and notes the close link between physical and political restoration as a principle of certain emperors' rules. Buildings were not only commemorated by inscriptions permanently on them but by the annual celebrations that might celebrate the dedication of a temple or church, further entrenching the names of patrons in cultural memory.

The discussion is based on collected series of individual case studies that take us across the geographical and temporal stages of empire. Familiar, imperial projects are always balanced by smaller, local exploits, so, alongside the *Res Gestae*, we meet the collection of inscriptions that commemorate Opramoas of Rhodiapolis and the multiple rebuilds he commissioned following earthquake damage across Lycia. The multiple, successive imperial inscriptions on the Porta Maggiore at Rome are contrasted with those on the theatre at Leptis Magna. Several inscriptions, in both Latin and neo-Punic, commemorate the restoration work of Annobal Tapapius Rufus, the words of which are clearly echoed in inscriptions added by later patrons of the site, both examples showing a deliberate nod to previous patrons and conveying an air of continuity. The example of Annobal also posts a warning: some of the inscriptions to him were obscured by later renovations (195).

Although the book does not progress chronologically, Yasin is careful to foreground changes over time: the arrival of Christianity changed patrons' preoccupations and their understanding of the rewards of architectural patronage as they looked more to salvation than earthly memory, and there is something in the stereotypes of the economics of late antiquity: changing circumstances might well have dictated that restorations might become more piecemeal. Most interesting, perhaps, is the development of increasingly dramatic and poetic descriptions of the change to a building brought about by restoration. Inscriptions pile on sensory appeals to bring the transformation to light: for example, Quintus Basilius Flaccianus's restoration of a pool in the baths in Calama (now in Algeria), whose work transformed a sluggish trickle to a 'thundering torrent' (290).

Another aspect of restoration explored here is the fallacy of restoration as duplication of what went before. The sort of improvements implied in the inscription at Calama often meant updating and elaborating all or part of a building to bring it into the present, and Yasin considers the ways in which such novelties might sit with surviving elements or memories of earlier phases (the daring domes of both Hagia Sophia and the Pantheon being excellent examples). Innovation might also take the form of new materials and Yasin spends some time tracing the impact of marble in Augustan Rome, not only in

[2] Anna M. Sitz, *Pagan Inscriptions, Christian Viewers. The Afterlives of Temples and Their Texts in the Late Antique Eastern Mediterranean* (Oxford, 2023).

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terms of marble blocks but actual sculpture dragged from Greece, as in the case of the Temple of Apollo Sosianos. Such a contrast can be found back at Leptis Magna, where Annobal's once-fancy limestone inscriptions looked increasingly archaic next to the second-century marble upgrade of the *scaena*.

The final chapter looks at buildings that were not so much restored as repurposed, often entailing what the patrons would have imagined as rescue from ruin and material and architectural upgrade, but also those adaptations and reuses that are often regarded as part of the long-term decline of buildings. In some cases, this involved turning temples into churches and churches into mosques, in others turning civic into industrial and domestic complexes (often regarded as part of a narrative of the long-term decline of civic infrastructure in late antiquity). The gigantic hippodrome at Gerasa perhaps only served as a racecourse for around 100 years before serving much longer as workshops and homes for the local community. Here reuse forgot the previous use of the building, as the *caveae* were made into workshops or slowly filled with debris.

The book is incredibly long and it does feel that some sections might have been better standing alone (the section on roads, for example). The overall effect is also very episodic: each theme is presented by two or three case studies and, given that many of these only occur once, it is not so easy to make connections between them. The enterprise works best when previous examples return: for example, when the Pantheon and Hagia Sophia – which both have complex histories within and beyond antiquity and, as such, are used to explain the premise of the book in the introduction – become pertinent later in the volume.

Architectural Networks in the North Aegean looks not at the reuse of architecture but the inception of architectural developments on the islands of Thasos and Samothrace and the coasts of Macedonia and Thrace.[3] This area has been overlooked by archaeologists, leading to less knowledge about its civic infrastructures (Ognier, 106), but it was extraordinarily active in architectural development in the fourth and third centuries BCE, not least as the Macedonian kings became more powerful players in the Aegean and the Sanctuary of the Great Goddess at Samothrace attracted increasingly large crowds. The first pseudodipteral, double *in antis* Ionic temple was on Lesbos (Kourtzelis, 40) before Hermogenes was effecting successes in Asia Minor. Both kings and the Great Goddess invited architectural innovation, the former generating the need for palaces not required in other Greek *poleis*. The development of a theatre at Aigai shows Macedonian wealth and concern to express civic status and culture (reflected in Euripides' visit to Philip II's court). It caught the wave of development of stone-built theatres across the Greek world, but its large orchestra suggests it might have played the role of some kind of particularly Macedonian political gathering space as much as theatrical performance, particularly since it was built close by the palace (70).

The area also differs from the rest of the Aegean in terms of its colder and wetter climate. The management of rainwater is the topic of Andrew Farinholt Ward and Vincent Bailey's chapter. In the city of Thasos, house floors had to be raised to stave off the ingress of groundwater after rain whilst elaborate arrangements guided water around

[3] *Architectural Networks in the North Aegean. Thasos, Samothrace, and the Formation of Hellenistic Design*. Edited by William Aylward, Jacques des Courtils, and Bonna D. Wescoat. Madison, WI, University of Wisconsin Press, 2025. Pp. ix + 307. 104 b/w illustrations. Hardback $119.95, ISBN: 978-0-299-35010-9.

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the theatre at Maerioniea (Thrace) and seasonal torrent water on the sanctuary at Samothrace (Karadima et al.). The combination of political and climatical exigencies led to some innovative architecture, such as the propylon of Ptolemy II in the sanctuary at Samothrace. It has an early Corinthian order in its west porch and Ionic capitals with vine scrolls in its east, and the whole edifice perches over a vaulted tunnel designed to drain away water that rushed through the ravine during rain seasons. People would have had plenty of time to admire these features: Samuel Holzman reckons it would have taken about twenty minutes to funnel a full theatre audience through the monumental doorway (118).

Mbonyo-Kiefer (249) traces local peculiarities in the popularity of bucrania motifs in the region (present, for example, on both the propylon and the rotunda of Arsinoe II at Samothrace), ascribing them to Macedonian practices of bull sacrifice. A preoccupation with bucrania, long before they appear in architecture, is found in the small lead bucrania found in Thrace and Macedonia; and the image appears not only in relief but also painting.

My favourite chapter, because the Nike of Samothrace is one of my favourite Hellenistic sculptures, was inevitably Philip Katz's chapter (17) on maritime monuments in the area. These fall into two types: the votive ships, in which actual ships were dragged onto shore and put on display in *neoria*, purpose-built sheds; and 'ship monuments' in which Victories often alighted on apparent ship prows. Being so familiar with seeing the Nike of Samothrace in glorious isolation in the Louvre and being able to put her into this wider web of monuments was really useful. Not only was she not unique, she was probably not a victory dedication. Instead, Katz suggests that the votive boats signified victories, a practice eagerly adopted by the Macedonian kings, hence their proliferation at this time, whilst the ship monuments were broader proclamations of and thanks for communities' links to the sea. The agora at Thasos probably had a similar monument. Far from unique, the Nike of Samothrace is representative of the assertion of maritime prowess in the region.

One of the interesting features of the book is that, as much as the region shares characteristics through its networks, the areas under concern are all very different. Macedonia, of course, is an emerging kingdom. Thasos and Samothrace are also different because in Thasos buildings had to be largely provided for by the city and local patron, whilst at Samothrace the sanctuary's prestige attracted major donors (des Courtils). However, Thasos had something which Samothrace did not: an abundance of marble. The sheer bulk of marble needed to be imported from Thasos to Samothrace to build the propylon of Ptolemy II is conveyed by the logistics: Holzman (115) considers the imagined 1,448 blocks, representing 30 boatloads, taking a day to shuttle from Thasos. More dramatically, he also considers the topographical effect on Thasos: its marble crags literally disappearing as the building grew across the sea. Taken together, Chapters 1 and 6 offer great insight into a lesser-explored end of the Aegean at a crucial moment in time.

Eva Mols' book, *Style and Assemblage in Roman Archaeology*, takes us from the Aegean to the Tyrrhenian to consider Pompeii's Egyptian and Egyptianizing objects.[4]

[4] *Style and Assemblage in Roman Archaeology. Egypt at Pompeii*. By Eva Mols, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xiv + 317. 39 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £99, ISBN: 978-0-19-891280-4.

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These objects are selected as a case study through which to make a bigger point about how to approach style as a feature of objects in Roman archaeology. Mols asks us to look beyond style as an all-encompassing category that dictates our interpretations to think more about context, function, and material; in other words, to consider an object's relationship with the humans who use it and the context in which it finds itself. The Egyptian repertoire at Pompeii lends itself as a great testing ground. Mols shows convincingly how contemporary attitudes to Egyptian archaeology (not least following Napoleon's expeditions that coincided with intense early excavation at Pompeii), which fetishized and orientalized Egyptian culture, have shaped our opinions of how Pompeians related to and thought of Egyptian style and iconography. Mols detects the result to be that we tend to categorize anything vaguely Egyptian in the city as either having religious significance (a reflection of the popularity of the cult of Isis) or as a celebration of the exotic other.

For Mols, the antidote is to concentrate on the relation (or entanglement) between object and human, thinking about how the functions and associations of different types of object, usually lumped into the 'Egyptianizing' category, might have functioned very differently in Pompeian perceptions. The four types of objects chosen are Isiac deities and Isis; Bes and Ptah figurines; Pharaonic pieces and Nilotic scenes. By looking at how the context, material, iconography, and function of these objects interplay we can imagine their entanglements with the humans that owned, viewed, or interacted with them and shaped the 'relational perception'.

Given that Isis (a heavily Mediterraneanized Isis, of course) was a popular deity at Pompeii then would she have been conceived as foreign at all? Instead, Mols looks at how the context and location of her appearances match those of Venus-Pompeiana. Both are never seen on mosaics or in narrative scenes, whereas Aphrodite appears in all kinds of media and narratives, suggesting a cultic role for these two deities. Moreover, there appears to be a distinction between types of Isis. Isis is often found in flashy, painted shrines as in the House of the Gilded Cupids along with other Egyptian gods: in that case famously with Anubis as well as Harpocrates. On the other hand, Isis-Fortuna is only found with Graeco-Roman deities. Medium also plays a role in the concept of deities: Mols points out that whereas most *lararium* deities were bronze, Venus is almost always marble, suggesting that the material was thought to be particularly appropriate to her (75).

Material is equally important in the chapter on Bes and Ptah. These characters almost always appear modelled in blue or green glaze ceramic and never in a cultic place; almost always in gardens; and sometimes in bars. They were often not displayed alone but as part of a set of varied objects (as at the House of Octavius Quartio), often mostly animals, made of the same medium. The glaze is not typical in Egypt so this appears to play to local taste. Mols thinks that maybe these figures had more in common with other dwarf-type images (that we know were popular in Hellenistic art in general and are found on Pompeian *tintinnabula*, perhaps suggesting an apotropaic nature). That is not to say that Bes was devoid of 'Egyptianness' – he appears in painting in the Temple of Isis and as an image on bronze *sistra* – but that in his blue-glaze form and the contexts in which these objects were deployed, he acquired other connotations beyond ritual.

In seeking these kinds of connections between other objects in Pompeii, it is not that the 'Egyptian' loses all valency but that it is perhaps secondary. Mols compares the ridiculous pygmies in Nilotic scenes, often found in *triclinia* (inside and out), with

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cupids (that most famously are all over the *triclinium* in the House of the Vettii). Both are non-human, miniaturized figures, an ontological status that allows them to do things that it would not be appropriate for 'real', painted humans to do. That is not to say they are interchangeable: cupids do not engage in sexual activity or get eaten by hippos or crocodiles as pygmies so often do, but even their apparently more innocent pursuits, such as manual labour, seem to have been considered beyond the pale for 'real' humans in Pompeian wall painting.

Whilst Nilotic scenes feature Egyptian content, they are never delivered in the Egyptian style that we see elsewhere in wall painting, for instance, in the pharaohs and *pinakes* of the Villa of Mysteries or the House of the Fruit Orchard. Here, when Egyptian style is intentionally stressed as DIFFERENT, Mols suspects that the emphasis is more on the games of wall painting and deliberate plays of illusion and mixes of styles and effects. Egyptian is chosen as just another register in the strange worlds. That is to say, it is not Egypt *per se* that is 'weird', it is its adoption in the games of wall painting that make it so. One of the final examples is of an object which is undoubtably Egyptian, not only in style and form but also provenance. It is a greywacke slab bearing hieroglyphs referring to a sacred banquet during the reign of Psamtek II that was repurposed as a threshold in the House of the Double Lararium. As an object, it may well have been appreciated as a historical import, but even so it was purposed to fit Pompeian expectations. Greywacke looks very similar to lava or basalt, which were often used for threshold stones, and its alien form and strange hieroglyphs fit well the liminal world of thresholds, which are often heavily demarcated with apotropaic symbols in mosaic. Such artefacts prove an excellent vehicle for exploring these different types of entanglements that might shape users' and viewers' perceptions of the objects they handle, far beyond the style in which they are fashioned.

The aim of the new edited volume, *Palmyra, the Mediterranean and Beyond*, is to focus on the city's interaction with the west.[5] The premise makes most sense in the economic and social sense, trying to work out the lines of communication from Palmyra to the Mediterranean and to the diaspora of Palmyrenes in various western cities and provinces. It feels much less comfortable when it involves trying to disaggregate the 'western' from the 'eastern' in stylistic or iconographical terms.

Palmyra is such an exciting site, but it is often hard for non-specialists to penetrate because of the lack of accessible publications. The city was a major city on the caravan route, from which it derived its wealth. We picture it (as do many of the contributors here, following the example of Pliny the Elder, 2) as a city between two worlds, the Parthian to the east and Roman to the west, but of course this is not how the population would have seen themselves. Even its description as an 'oasis settlement' on the caravan route sounds impossibly exotic to most Greek or Roman specialists and, from that point of view, there is something similar here to attitudes towards the Egyptian that Mols tackles.

It does seem completely mad that we can trace the caravan route from the Far East to Palmyra and then not know how everything moved further west, a problem that both Jean-Baptiste Yon and Leonardo Gregoratti explore in their papers (33, 110).

[5] *Palmyra, the Mediterranean and Beyond*. Edited by Rubina Raja. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp xiii + 237. 66 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £90, ISBN: 978-1-009-53208-2.

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Gregoratti suggests that the presumptions of a major route to Emesa are mistaken and that in fact the more important route was northwards to Epiphania. The regular maintenance of the road and the accumulation of inscriptions marking the border from Trajan onwards reflect the kinds of proliferation of milestones observed by Yanis in her section on road restoration and the opportunities they afford for patrons to leave their mark.

In his exploration of the famous Tax Tariff, an inscription in Greek and Aramaic, that shows local taxes, John F. Healey (141) reveals something of local life: the commodities exchanged include people along with foodstuffs and fuel, and the entrepreneurs taxed include sex workers along with craftspeople. Katia Schörle's chapter (127) on broader trade networks is compelling: it shows how Palmyrenes integrated themselves into global trade through both vertical and horizontal means. The former means grabbing control of as many links in the chain as possible, with evidence of Palmyrenes owning ships in the Persian Gulf to exploit the crossing to India. Horizontal integration was more about expansion to new partners and places, particularly into Egypt, a key point for moving goods into the Mediterranean.

One of the key parts of the book is not only about the mobility of goods but of Palmyrenes themselves: communities in Numidia, Egypt, Dacia, and Dura Europos, and individuals, of course, coming to South Shields with their gods and scripts. This conversation begins in the Seland chapter before Eleanora Cussini discusses Jewish Palmyrenes (187), who either dead or alive ended up in the necropolis of Beth She'arim in Galilee. Finally, Nathaniel Andrade shows how Palmyrene military units took with them their gods, whose worship remained central to the unit's identity long after recruitment to them was much more diverse (212). The chapter ends with the example of Publius Aelius Thiemes, who became duumvir of the Dacian *colonia* in which he lived. He set up a dedication to Asclepius and Hygina, but an inscription (in Latin) tells us that he also built a temple to four Palmyrene gods. Thiemes appears to be a second-generation soldier, whose father perhaps had come to Dacia, where his son was born, as part of his military service.

Two chapters consider the art of Palmyra in attempts to consider its 'western' inputs. Rubina Raja (1) catalogues examples of a particularly distinctive Palmyrene artefact: the clay *tesserae* which seem to have served as tickets to sacred banquets, sometimes even including guides to the measures of food and drink on offer. This is one occasion where distinguishing between west and east seems odd. A key feature of the tesserae is the imprints of seal rings in them (presumably belonging to the priests) which feature familiar deities (Athene, Tyche etc.) in classical style, but as Raja points out some show the influence of the near east (where glyptic of course was so popular) – so it seems a bit mad to separate them, especially when these imprints featured alongside the main tessera image of priests depicted in local style and costume. It seems hard to imagine that Palmyrenes would have looked at the imagery in this binary way. The strangeness of this disaggregating approach is consolidated in Maura K. Heyn's chapter on the most famous art of all from Palmyra, its funerary reliefs (167). The original premise of Heyn's investigation was that the portraits would follow a paradigm from Rome with a local twist. Of course, as Heyn stresses, this does not turn out to be the case, but it does seem astonishing that it could have been floated as a tenable idea in the first place, given contemporary approaches to local art across the empire. In the end, Heyn traces how the

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Palmyrene examples might speak to influences coming from other provinces, such as Pannonia and Egypt.

This is not the volume to help non-specialists discover Palmyra. Some papers do fill in a bit of back story: Elvind Heldaas Seland opens the chapter on western networks (21) with a nice overview of Palmyra's integration into the Roman empire and John F. Healey, in his exploration of the famous Tax Tariff (141), offers some great narrative on the history of excavations and collections of Palmyrene objects. However, as with many such edited collections, reading this book feels like eavesdropping on parts of a fuller conversation from which we are excluded. The papers are brief and often end with no conclusion to help readers draw a wider significance from the discussion. This is not a criticism of the intellectual content, but it just always seems a missed opportunity when volumes like this do not account for a wider audience.

Relief in Greek, Roman and Late Antique Art strikes me as rather a different kind of edited volume in that it looks as its subject more holistically, although I do wonder whether that is just because I feel more of an 'insider' in this conversation.[6] The book focuses on relief as a difficult, 'in-between' medium: between painting and sculpture, two and three dimensions. In doing so, it considers relief beyond sculpture, looking to the extent to which reliefs on other media, such as ceramics or silverware might share similar properties, even as they rely on such different techniques (stone must be carved into, metal must be hammered out). There is no word for relief in the ancient world and the first chapter proper, by Verity Platt (28), investigates the kinds of terminology employed to discuss different types of relief work in antiquity, as well as the development of attitudes towards relief from the Renaissance onwards. It might be surprising to find that the same vocabulary can be applied to the illusionistic effect of projection in paintings as to actual projections in sculpted reliefs.

Different relief media are well presented here. Guy Hedreen concentrates on vases (139), where relief can range from raised, painted lines and modelled blobs to represent hair to full sculptural additions which make the two-dimensional representation pop out into space to confront the viewer or handler, most startlingly in the case of masks. That interaction with the viewer is extended even further in Ashley Elizabeth Jones's chapter (321) in which late-antique medallions and coins are converted into amuletic jewellery to be worn against the wearer's skin. In these objects, the relief images combine with the medium of gold to double their healing and amuletic properties.

Returning to sculpture, Caspar Meyer and Chris Pellettieri (the latter a stonemason) (65) talk about what actions need to be visited on stone to produce relief. Like them, Jennifer Trimble (259) considers the actual process of creating relief as a means of understanding its intentions and effects. In thinking through the effects of carving from front to back, figures do not emerge from a background but are sculpted first, the background created behind them. The fact that figures can even be carved into that background itself (as in the example of the Lares on the Belvedere Altar) shows the instability of the base layer we often take for granted.

Seth Estrin's chapter (108) is particularly useful in rethinking the distance between relief and freestanding sculpture, considering the relationships between archaic funerary

[6] *Relief in Greek, Roman, and Late Antique Art*. Edited by Nathaniel B. Jones, Milette Gaifman, and Jaś Elsner. Cambridge and New York, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xxvii + 361. 101 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £110, ISBN: 978-1-009-50576-5.

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markers: the freestanding *kouroi* and the warriors carved on grave *stelai*. He points to the moments in which the carved relief figures look to bust beyond their frames, toes protruding beyond the relief into our lived space. If the carved figure protrudes outward, the *kouros* protrudes upwards, stuck squarely to his plinth and glaring forwards with a similar fixity to the stone from which he is carved. Many markers further muddled the distinction by mixing the two: *kouros* plinths may have reliefs carved on them while three-dimensional sphinxes perch atop many *stelai*.

In considering neo-Attic reliefs, Carolyn M. Laferrière (199) shows how their use (or rather lack of use) of depth and background create timeless and spaceless worlds: they flatten the space, presenting blank backgrounds or objects and people thrust the front of the plane. Another foot escapes over the edge of the frame, that of a maenad dancing in profile in a procession, captured as Laferriere says in a 'moment of becoming' as if she could slip from the world of the relief, and the imagined Greek world from which she comes, into Roman space. Nicola Barham (288) takes us back to the funerary portraits of Palmyra, noting how the large eyes and looming heads and arms of the dead appear to pop out of the front of the tomb into the space of their visiting descendants. In considering them in their original context, Barham is able to consider their force as a collective. There is also an underplayed connection back to Platt's opening chapter (28) in these figures which literally seal the tombs of the dead they represent.

Nathanial Jones and Nikolaus Dietrich (1) play on the relations between two- and three-dimensional media in very different ways: the latter looks at the way in which conventions of photography reduce the three-dimensionality of sculpture, fixing favourite points of view so that they become relief-like in their dimensionality, as other viewpoints are discarded and discouraged. Such a practice is not inevitable. Pre-photography, artists captured sculpture in a range of angles and added objects and people to increase the sense of dimensionality around them. As Dietrich says (166), they stressed that the sculpture existed 'somewhere' instead of the 'nowhere' of much academic photography. Jones (232), meanwhile, concentrates on wall painting and the challenges painters set themselves in depicting relief objects in their scenes. Like Trimble (259), he talks about how relief encourages a sense of 'hypermediacy' (Jones in the case of paintings and Trimble in that of a marble krater), a term that particularly suits the Roman love of framing and layering of media and images within any one representation.

Verity Platt's chapter in the relief volume acts as a prelude to her latest monograph, *Epistemic Impressions*, which takes much further the role of the idea of *typos* (impression) in relation to images on seal stones.[7] The key premise is the authority of an image created by stamping rather than by *mimesis*, imitation of form, which can only exist in a hierarchical relationship with that original form, in the sense that it is always inevitably inferior to it. Producing an image by stamping is 'an indexical act of production' (16). This creates an ontological authority that is paralleled by the social authority of the image when it is recognized as coming from the seal ring of an individual.

Like Emily Clifford, whose book on death we reviewed last time around, Verity Platt is one of those rare scholars who can deal equally as expertly with the visual and the

[7] *Epistemic Impressions. Making and Mediating Classical Art and Text*. By Verity Platt. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2025. Pp. xxii + 417. 95 b/w and colour illustrations. Hardback £119, 978-0-19-284658-7.

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literary.[8] Essentially, this book is a literary exploration of the role of the 'impression' in philosophical discourse and epigram. The book traces the extraordinary stickiness of the stamp of a seal in philosophical discourse as a metaphor for the way in which perceptions imprint on the mind. When philosophers change ideas, they appear to do so by rearranging rather than departing from the metaphor. The seal stone becomes an epistemic object, an object that sits between the conceptual and material (20). Epigram, meanwhile, is the perfect medium for discussing glyptic because it itself is intermedial – like images stamped from carved gems, it was born in stone (87). The images on seal stones, both real and described, often play up this idea of transmission: depictions of musicians and poets demonstrate communication. Throughout, the epigrams stress the intense materiality and physicality of the seal stone: its ability to transmit itself and the close association between the image engraved upon it and the stone from which it was made; from pegasi soaring through blue chalcedony skies to cattle grazing in green jasper, material and image are intertwined.

Once Chapter 1 has set the philosophical context for the understanding of *typosis* (the act of impression) in the classical world, Chapters 2 and 3 move to the *Lithika* of Posidippus (third century BCE) and the way that the epigrams in the collection play on these concepts and the material quality of the stones they describe. In Chapter 4, the examination of Posidippus's *Andriantopoika* shows how the same ideas could be extended to bronze sculpture. Whilst the production of bronze sculpture might move beyond stamping and impressing to modelling and casting, nevertheless Posidippus is able to recast sculpture less as an act of *mimesis*, as we may assume, but of indexical modelling – in other words, acknowledging the modelling in clay that then makes a type of itself in the bronze finished predict. I found this chapter incredibly powerful in helping me rethink the force behind those famous epigrams on the skill of Myron et al. Just as with the stones, the material remains crucial in activating the image: bronze creates the 'fiery gaze of Alexander' as light effects animated images, such as lions, on semi-precious seal stones. Similarly, tactility remains key and Platt explores moments in both media where attention is drawn to human interaction – both the hands-on creativity of the maker and the touch of the 'viewer'.

Posidippus sorted, the book traces the expansions of meaning of *typos* in later Hellenistic epigram before writers of the second century CE draw our attention from the seal to the sponge, another object that transfers matter in an indexical rather than mimetic way. The story here, of course, is that in which an artist (variously named: in Pliny's *Natural History* it is Protogenes), losing his temper at his inability to capture the essence of foam around a horse's mouth, flings his sponge against the painting, only to find that, on contact, its porous surface has left exactly the mark around its chops that he had been envisaging. Platt explores how this one story served the interests of a range of writers who all drew slightly different conclusions from it based on their own philosophical inclinations. The book ends in late antiquity with the way in which *typos* is reworked in neo-Platonic and Christian thought in the sense of 'typology' (Old Testament figures and narratives being *typoi* of those of the New Testament). In this chapter the material manifestation of images becomes a way of grasping and

[8] Emily Clifford, *Figuring Death in Classical Athens. Visual and Literary Explorations* (Oxford and New York, 2025).

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conceptualizing the immaterial world beyond our experience. The power of these objects and their tactility return us to Jones's chapter in the relief volume.

Like Yasin's volume, this is a very long book and it is undoubtedly difficult at times, but the clear direct quotation of texts and the very many images help ground the abstract by offering physical manifestation of the types of seals being imagined in the texts. The book is exceptional in its balance of the conceptual and material and the literary and visual.

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Philosophy

Anyone interested in Plato's 'unwritten doctrines' is in luck, thanks to the recent publication of two studies on this thorny topic. The first one is a new addition to *The Cambridge Elements in Ancient Philosophy* series titled 'Plato's Written Doctrines' and authored by Carl Séan O'Brien.[1] This short book will bring anyone up to date on the history of the debate, offering a sympathetic assessment of the Tübingen-Milan interpretation, with special attention to the contributions of Thomas Szlezák, Joachim Krämer, Konrad Gaiser, and Giovanni Reale. But the text also connects this interpretation with the earlier generations of Platonists. In this way, O'Brien describes his aim as primarily interested in clarifying 'the difficulties which the Tübingen scholars (and earlier Platonists) identified in interpreting Plato's legacy and to examine the merits of the solutions which they propose' (5).

The book is divided into six brief sections. The first one, officially dedicated to answering 'What Are the Unwritten Doctrines?', briefly presents the evidence in Aristotle's *Physics* 209b11–16, *Metaphysics* 187a15–20, Aristoxenus' report of Plato's lectures *On the Good*, and offers a passing reference to other texts. O'Brien then offers a helpful summary of his understanding of the clash between interpretive and methodological approaches, highlighting the 'significant obstacles' (7) in Anglo-American scholarship and the attractiveness of the Tübingen-Milan solutions. One of the main challenges, we are told, is the textual evidence in Plato's dialogues of a criticism of writing. This is the topic of the second section, which focuses on *Phaedrus* 247b–278e, the *Seventh Letter*, and evidence of 'deliberate gaps' (21) in the *Republic* and elsewhere, and closes with a reflection on the possible purpose of the dialogues in the Tübingen-Milan interpretation. The third section finally tackles the philosophical content of the 'unwritten doctrines', that is, the Theory of Principles in the testimonia, its alleged outline in *Philebus*, and its relation to the theory of Forms. Section four connects the

[1] *Plato's Unwritten Doctrines*. By Carl Séan O'Brien. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. 72. Paperback £18.00, ISBN: 978-1-009-50620-5.

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