AQUITANIAN VILLAS

C. BALMELLE: *Les demeures aristocratiques d'Aquitaine. Société et culture de l'Antiquité tardive dans le Sud-Ouest de la Gaule*. Pp. 497, ills. Bordeaux and Paris: Editions Ausonius, 2001. Cased, €96. ISBN: 2-910023-25-7.

This is a beautifully illustrated book, with many plates in colour, on the spectacular archaeological remains of late antique aristocratic housing, primarily rural housing, discovered in south-west Gaul. The volume opens with four substantial thematic chapters: setting the political, social, and economic scene (Chapter 1); outlining the general character of these buildings, including their evolution through time (Chapter 2); considering key types of room, like reception halls and baths (Chapter 3); and discussing their decorative elements in both marble and mosaic (Chapter 4). The book closes with a catalogue of 109 entries for the individual sites considered (pp. 335–440), each with brief discussion, further bibliography, and, where possible, a plan.

Balmelle is an expert on mosaics, which are particularly numerous and fine (though rarely figurative) in this part of Gaul, and which are here very fully discussed (and illustrated in both photographs and drawings). Her work belongs essentially to a tradition of art- and architectural history, and her book contains long and detailed typological discussions of plans and decorative schemes. Research of this kind is essential groundwork towards a fuller understanding of these buildings, but it is undeniably disappointing that it has not yet proved possible to push the material evidence further. In one area of research—the precise function of rooms—we are likely to remain disappointed. It is in the nature of aristocratic Roman rooms that they were kept scrupulously clean, and only accumulated occupation debris after their original function was abandoned. Consequently we are only likely to discover evidence of how precisely all these grand reception rooms were used if archaeologists have the good fortune to discover a building suddenly destroyed in its prime by a fire or earthquake, thereby sealing *in situ* tell-tale remains of furniture, food, pottery, etc.

However, there are other aspects of the life of these buildings where archaeological evidence could already have told us more, if they had been made a research priority. These splendidly decorated rooms are undoubted testimony to a rich local aristocracy and a traditional style of life in the fourth century. There are now increasing hints, from the stylistic study of their mosaics (pp.71–5 and 238–40), as well as from the familiar testimony of Sidonius Apollinaris and Venantius Fortunatus, that, for some landowners at least, this prosperity and lifestyle continued under barbarian rule into the fifth century and beyond. But firm datings for these mosaic pavements and their related structures, from stratified pottery or other artefacts, appear to be almost unknown, despite the existence in this region of increasingly well studied late antique sigillatas. Even unstratified pottery, which would give an indication of the date range of settlement, appears to have been either unrecorded or unstudied—it certainly makes no appearance in this volume. This is a great pity, because it would be wonderful to add firm archaeological testimony to the long-familiar literary evidence. It is also very striking, that—besides the evidence for consumption of fine marbles and mosaics—we still know almost nothing about the economic context of these buildings, the large majority of them rural villas. The work buildings, which must have been associated with the grand reception rooms and bathhouses, have not been excavated; and no field survey has been carried out to fill out the full rural context of *vici* and scattered

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https://doi.org/10.1093/cr/53.1.184 Published online by Cambridge University Press

peasant housing. The spectacular mosaics and plans so fully treated in this volume, despite the potential of modern archaeology, are apparently still floating in a chronological and economic vacuum.

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SAINTS' CULTS IN GAUL

B. Beaujard: *Le culte des saints en Gaule. Les premiers temps. D'Hilaire de Poitiers à la fin du VIe siècle*. Pp. iv + 613, ills. Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 2000. Paper, frs. 290. ISBN: 2-204-05618-9.

Gregory of Tours loved saints, especially St Martin and St Julian, his personal patrons and protectors. He was also sometimes a bit skeptical about particular saints, their relics, and their cults when adequate information was not available. These days he would no longer need to worry, since the recent explosion of interest in the saints of late antiquity, their cults, and their miracles would have removed any of his doubts. As a culmination to that new research, Brigitte Beaujard's excellent book is now the most thorough and comprehensive overview of saints' cults in Gaul during the fourth, fifth, and sixth centuries.

The first half of B.'s book is a chronological survey that stretches from Hilary of Poitiers to Gregory of Tours. The survey itself is excellent, even if the beginning and end are problematic. B. justifies her starting and ending points through correlation with two consequential transformations. One concerns the initial social appeal of cults. Since Hilary was a wealthy notable as well as a bishop, the cult of martyrs 'became a form of popular religion only much later' (p. 10). The other transformation concerns the geographical spread of cults. Until the end of the sixth century, saints' cults were largely an urban phenomenon (p. 259); then monks and monasteries took the lead in scattering them throughout the countryside: 'another world was born' (p. 10). Both assertions about saints' cults in Gaul, one that their initial support came primarily from local notables and clerics, the other that for most of late antiquity they were primarily associated with cities, are dubious at best. From the beginning, the rise of saints' cults represented a dialogue among clerics, aristocrats, and ordinary believers, or a negotiation between patrons and audiences. And to conclude this survey so abruptly at the end of the sixth century is to leave saints' cults with seemingly no future.

The second half of the book provides synthetic studies in a series of long topical chapters. One chapter examines ideas about saints and the power of relics. This discussion might seem to imply that post-Roman Gaul was isolated from the larger Mediterranean world: 'The preference for Gallic saints is obvious' (p. 289). One chapter surveys the intensely emotional personal relationships that developed between believers and their patron saints, and another the great churches that bishops constructed and the many smaller shrines. Another chapter investigates the activities of churchmen, and especially of bishops, in transporting relics and administering churches and shrines. A final chapter discusses festivals and the celebration of the liturgy. These are all excellent studies, uniformly meticulous and thorough. They are also predictably dominated by data from the writings of Gregory of Tours and Fortunatus. In any discussion of saints' cults in late antique Gaul it is difficult to escape the dominance of the sixth century.

Because B.'s discussions are eminently reasonable and her coverage so extensive, her book can now readily join the other grand surveys that have in recent decades so

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