

PDF hosted at the Radboud Repository of the Radboud University Nijmegen

The following full text is a publisher's version.

For additional information about this publication click this link.

<http://hdl.handle.net/2066/43629>

Please be advised that this information was generated on 2021-06-20 and may be subject to change.

Jens-Arne Dickmann, *Pompeji. Archäologie und Geschichte*. Munich: Beck, 2005. Pp. 128; ill. 20. ISBN 3-406-50887-1. €7.90.

Reviewed by Miko Flohr, Radboud University Nijmegen (M.Flohr@let.ru.nl)

Among Pompeianists, Jens-Arne Dickmann is well known for his monumental study of elite housing (*Domus frequentata: Anspruchsvolles Wohnen im pompejanischen Stadthaus*, Munich 1999) and for his more recent work, together with Felix Pirson, on the Casa dei Postumii (VIII 4, 4.49). D. now has written a booklet about the archaeology and history of Pompeii. It is not a guide and does not aim to describe individual buildings or objects. Instead, it is an interpretation of the functioning of the city throughout the various stages of its history. Despite its small size (128 pp of barely 4 x 6 inches), the book covers a wide range of topics, and though it has primarily been written for non-specialist readers, most issues are discussed in considerable depth. While part of the story has been based on his own research, D. incorporates many ideas of his teacher, Paul Zanker (e.g., *Pompeji: Stadtbild und Wohngeschmack*, Munich 1995), and several other scholars, mostly Germans and Italians. D. has a pleasant style of writing with few long sentences. The book is well-edited and contains virtually no irritating errors. The maps are informative, without too many details. There are only a few pictures, but these are well-chosen and clear. At the back of the book are a short but useful index and some bibliographic references.

D. starts with a short first chapter that introduces the reader to some of the ancient and modern factors that shaped the present condition of the material remains of the city. The subsequent discussion of the city itself begins on a macroscopic level and then gradually zooms in: from the urban to the public, from the public to the private and from the private to the individual. The second chapter deals with the layout of the city as a whole. D. describes the genesis of walls, gates and street grid, the organization of urban traffic and the provision and disposal of water. The next chapter is devoted to the public buildings of the city: the forum, the temples, the baths and the theaters. D. does not content himself with describing these buildings in their final phase, but constantly emphasizes their development over time and its implications for the history of public life in Pompeii. The fourth chapter deals with the level between the public and the private. In its first part, D. takes a position in the debate about the functioning of the Pompeian economy and considers the functioning of some of the individual trades. He emphasizes the fundamental dependence of Pompeii of its hinterland for much of its consumption. The second part of the chapter is based on the work of Felix Pirson about rental apartments (*Mietwohnungen in Pompeji und Herkulaneum. Untersuchungen zum Wohnen und zur Sozial- und Wirtschaftsgeschichte der Vesuvstädte*, Munich 1999) and concentrates on the social factors that shaped Pompeian neighborhoods. In the fifth chapter, D. writes about his own research, the private houses of the urban elite. It reads as a (very short) summary of his 1999 book. D. describes the trends and developments in the design and functioning of elite residences over the last two centuries of the city's existence. The short final chapter discusses the monumental tombs in the city's two cemeteries. D. notices a change in the Post-Augustan period, when, after a time of exuberant and individualistic monumentalisation, an increase in conformity and modesty can be observed.

While there is little in this book that has not been written before, it serves its purpose in providing a short overview of current ideas about Pompeii. Though some important scholars (Maiuri) are explicitly referred to, D. has chosen not to reference work by the scholars he uses for his argument, but the specialist reader will easily distinguish D.'s own ideas from the echoes of other research. It is the selection of viewpoints chosen and literature used that make books like this highly interesting. D. knows the current discussions and manages to incorporate a lot of recent literature, but he does not hesitate to give his own view. It is certainly admirable that he points the reader often to details that would otherwise not easily be remarked (e.g., the stairs behind the statue of the Doryphoros in the Samnite Palaestra (63)). He often lets the reader follow the scholarly thinking process by explicitly describing a specific problem and discussing the evidence that helped the scholars solve it, as in the case of the date of the fortified wall that surrounds the town. This certainly adds to the readability of the text.

However, there are also some critical observations to be made. Firstly, D. tends to present his story as 'the truth'. He does not often admit that certain problems have not yet been solved or that certain theories are not really supported by material evidence from the site. The reader may get the false impression that we understand Pompeii in all its aspects and that we know how things were and how the city worked. It would have been more in line with current developments in Pompeian scholarship if D. at some points had laid more emphasis on all our uncertainties. Claims for which there is no direct evidence, for example, Della Corte's unwarranted claim of the use of the east portico on the Triangular Forum as a running track, (62) or the interpretation of the first floor of the portico around the Forum as providing the best places for the spectators of the games held on the forum (39). These theories, interesting though they are, should have been presented as the opinions of individual scholars and not as facts.

Further, D.'s approach to the city has a strong emphasis on buildings and monuments produced by and for the urban elites. The public monuments around the forum, the baths, the temples and the theaters are discussed in depth and at great length (45 pp). Commerce, production and the urban economy are briefly and superficially discussed in merely eleven pages. One wonders why, when D. clearly is interested in the visual effects of the arrangements of urban space (see his description of the new forum as a 'scenery', p. 40), he almost completely ignores one of the most visible factors in Pompeian street life: the shops and the workshops, their tenants and their clients. More than economic phenomena, commerce and production are social activities that had a central position in city life. The emphasis on the happy few also pervades (and undermines) D.'s analysis of Pompeii's private houses. D. starts with discussing the Casa del Fauno (VI 12, 2.5) as a model for the houses of pre-Roman Pompeii and then takes the Casa del Labirinto (VI 11, 9.10) and the Villa dei Misteri as typical examples for the domestic architecture of the Late Republic and, finally, illustrates first-century AD developments with the Casa di Fronto (V 2, c), the Casa dei Vettii (VI 15, 1) and the Casa degli Amorini Dorati (VI 16, 7.38). This is misleading: with the exception of the Casa di Fronto, all these houses are extremely large and extremely atypical. These houses may be appropriate for illustrating that large Pompeian houses were designed to impress visitors, but D. overemphasizes this aspect of Pompeian domestic culture. D. tends to overlook the practical aspects of living in these houses. Houses were, in the first place, built to be inhabited. One wonders what the visitor to the excavations, after having read this book, will think of the functioning of the many houses of average size, such as the Casa del Sacello Illiaco (I 6, 4), the Casa della Caccia Antica (VII 4, 48) or the Casa del Poeto Tragico (VI 8, 4), let alone the small ones like the Casa dei Ceii (I 6, 15) or the Casa dell' Orso (VII 2, 48).

A final consideration concerns the literature D. has not used. Though the book is well-documented, there are a few points where recent developments have been overlooked. In some cases, this leads to errors. For example, the functioning of the *Castellum Aquae* has long been subject of debate, but it was made very clear by Cristoph Ohlig a few years ago (*De Aquis Pompeiorum*, Nijmegen 2001, reviewed in BMCR [2002.11.13](#)) that it did not function as described by Vitruvius, but it divided the water geographically, not functionally as postulated by D. (30). Further, while it is beyond doubt that in Pompeian houses the atrium could have a representational function (111), recent work by Penelope Allison (most recently in *Pompeian Households, an Analysis of the Material Culture*, Los Angeles 2004, 70) has shown that it had a primarily utilitarian function within the house.

However, my contras do not outweigh my pros. D. has written a fine booklet that can serve very well as a first introduction to the site and gives a comprehensible and very affordable overview of how a traditional German classical archaeologist sees Pompeii.