

H. Fertik, *The Ruler's House: Contesting Power and Privacy in Julio-Claudian Rome*. Johns Hopkins, 2019. ISBN: 9781421432892.

Fertik's study of public and private power in the Julio-Claudian period uses houses as "a space that makes us think" to explore "how Romans thought about the house and what houses made them think about." (1) This is a well-chosen and innovative approach to explore Roman perceptions about the changing power relationships in the 1st century CE. It allows Fertik to discuss a wide-ranging collection of sources, highlighting different perspectives on the *domus* as presented through various literary genres and analyzing the literary constructions of the *domus* with its archaeological remains. The book is divided into a series of case studies, which take the reader from discussions of families, to the physical presence (or absence) of the emperor and his house, to daily life with the ruler and those ruled. This structure creates a logical progression through material that is otherwise not presented in chronological order. By focusing on themes rather than on "the house" in terms of particular emperors, Fertik can discuss trends across this period and compare how the sources present the various emperors' engagement with the public and private aspects of their power.

Chapter 1 begins by looking at how Lucan engages with family themes in his *Bellum Civile*. Instead of focusing on the disruption of family life, a theme commonly discussed in civil war narratives, Fertik discusses the creation of new familial ties between both the soldiers as a group and the soldiers and their commanders. Of particular interest is Fertik's discussion of Pompey's "funeral" where Cordus takes the place of Pompey's family in overseeing the funeral rites. This chapter develops the idea of devotion and the creation of familial bonds between ruler and ruled which is then woven through the rest of the chapters.

Chapter 2 continues the theme of family and devotion by examining Augustus' creation of an "imperial household" and his role as *paterfamilias* for all of Rome. It focuses on the development of the *domus Augusta* and how the composition of this imperial "family" differed depending on who was commissioning the statue group or monument and where it was located. Fertik also discusses the issue of authority and how much control the emperor really had to restrict who was "in" and who was "out" in terms of the imperial family membership.

Chapter 3 shifts the focus to physical space in relation to the emperor's *domus* and compares Augustus' living arrangements on the Palatine with Nero's infamous Domus Aurea. It argues for the public nature of these spaces and how the emperor was never really permitted a private space, while also showcasing the different literary portrayals of these two emperors. This discussion is concluded, and contrasted, by a brief consideration of the famously absent, invisible, and private emperor Tiberius and his villa on Capri.

Chapter 4 is devoted to the works of one author, Seneca. It examines both his philosophical works, specifically *De Clementia*, and his tragedies. Fertik uses these

works to examine how imperial power is constructed through the co-operation, conflict, and engagement from both the ruler and the ruled. This creates an excellent bridge between the discussion of imperial palaces in Ch.3, which focuses on the visibility and performance of the emperor's home life, and Ch.5 which will examine how power dynamics were manifested in private houses in Pompeii.

Chapter 5 returns to a discussion of physical space, but this time from the perspective of the private houses in Pompeii. Revisiting the themes from tragedy and mythology, this chapter examines wall paintings and decorations. It analyses how the spectrum of public to private spaces can be viewed, enhanced, or restricted through decoration and the placement of the viewer within the house. Although largely focused on the Julio-Claudian period and the writings of Vitruvius which also date to this period, there are some jarring examples taken from Cicero's works. A case is made for the ways in which Republican aristocratic houses are negotiated by visitors and how this lays the foundations for how houses might continue to be used in this later period, however, the focus back on Cicero does seem slightly incongruous.

The final chapter is devoted to banqueting, an event in which power is on display while also situating the ruler amongst the ruled. The chosen case study, which takes up the majority of this chapter, is Trimalchio's *cena* from Petronius' *Satyricon* with a brief concluding discussion of Seneca's *De ira*. Although the chapter begins with an anecdote from Suetonius' *Life of Claudius*, Suetonius' treatment of emperors' banquets is largely missing from the discussion, an absence that is regrettable as his presentation of each of the Julio-Claudian emperors and their banqueting preferences would greatly support and enhance the conclusions made here. This chapter highlights the delicate balance which is played out when the ruler shares space (and bodily needs and functions) with the ruled, especially in terms of what is required of a "good" ruler, and how those circumstances and actions can be parodied.

As I hope can be seen from this brief summary of the chapters, the work follows a logical progression and there are clear uses of sign-posting and transitional paragraphs which guide the reader. In part, this structure reads more like a PhD thesis than a book and is likely a relic of the work on which this book is based. Nevertheless, it does make the argument and structure of the work extremely easy to follow. The *index locorum* is comprehensive and a helpful resource if you are looking for specific passages and how they relate to the overall argument. A quick glance does show how heavily weighted this project is towards Neronian texts. This is likely due to the PhD's original focus on Neronian Rome which was then expanded to include the whole Julio-Claudian period for the book. Many academic publishers have shifted away from footnotes to endnotes and this book follows this trend. However, the most important passages (in both Latin with an English translation and reference) can be found within the body of the text. Engagement with and the presentation of the secondary scholarship also reads like a PhD dissertation, but this turns out to be helpful in this instance as you can clearly identify from where arguments come without continually flipping back to the endnotes.

There are a number of challenges associated with a topic such as this. Although it does examine imperial power through the lens of the *domus*, there is still a question of how to define the limits of such a study. Does one only focus specifically on how writers of the period examine these issues (such as Lucan and Seneca), or include later sources which may provide better examples how power relationships are presented (Tacitus and Suetonius). This book has tried to focus mostly on the writers of the period, but expanded those discussions to include later (and earlier) sources where relevant. While some chapters are stronger, more focused, and better argued than others, overall this book provides an excellent examination of the nature of imperial power and the delicate balance and negotiation required by both rulers and the ruled during this formative stage of its development under the Julio-Claudian emperors.

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