

ARTEFACTS FROM A HOUSE IN POMPEII

BERG (R.), KUIVALAINEN (I.) (edd.) *Domus Pompeiana M. Lucretii IX 3, 5.24. The Inscriptions, Works of Art and Finds from the Old and New Excavations*. (Commentationes Humanarum Litterarum 136.) Pp. 324, b/w & colour ills. Helsinki: The Finnish Society of Sciences and Letters, 2019. Paper, €30. ISBN: 978-951-653-433-9.
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This volume concentrates on the finds from the House of Marcus Lucretius (IX 3, 5.24) in Pompeii. Originally excavated in 1847, the house is the largest of a city block that is the subject of the University of Helsinki's long-running *Expeditio Pompeiana*. This book is the first in a major series of publications by this project, and it is a fascinating and thought-provoking study that is a major contribution to Pompeian research. Most notably, the analyses of the domestic assemblage of finds by Berg, which form the major part of the volume, clearly demonstrate the value of painstaking detective work on artefact assemblages and their skilfully considered interpretation. Berg challenges us to rethink any convivial notions of the Roman house, where its faithful retainers were buried at the end of their lifetimes of service in the family tomb, and instead to confront the harsh realities of household slavery. Rather than a picture of a cosy Roman-era Downton Abbey, the *Domus M. Lucretii* presents an almost claustrophobic atmosphere of mistrust that comes from having a slave population inside the house and the attendant fear for, and perhaps fear of, personal property. Indeed, a graffito in the garden depicts a labyrinth with the inscription *Hic habitat Minotaurus*, celebrated in the chapter by P. Castrén on the wall inscriptions as an illustration of the family being interested in culture: but could it also have a darker meaning, picking up on something of the horror for those trapped inside the house?

The property found its name due to the discovery of a wall painting of a letter preserving the memory of the conferral of an honorary office on Marcus Lucretius. Located in a wide corridor adjacent to the garden, the inscription was carefully placed to be read by people moving through the space linking the reception rooms around the property's two atria. It acted in concert with the architecture and decoration, notably the famous marble sculpture of its garden, examined by Kuivalainen, to promote a picture of long-standing wealth and status for the family of Lucretius. This is traced across time and space in the city by Castrén, which solidly roots this volume and the University of Helsinki's project within the long tradition of Finnish scholarship on Pompeii. The wall inscriptions are catalogued by A. Varone, adding eight newly discovered and previously unpublished examples.

The majority of the volume concentrates on the house in 79 CE, through the study of its artefacts in their 'lived context'. It begins, however, with the sobering admission that the detailed and well-illustrated catalogues within the volume only contain about 12% of the finds that were recorded in the original inventory records and early publications. These do not provide an entirely exhaustive or systematic record of the excavated material as there were great differences in the selection, retention and hence documentation of different types of artefacts. The early records are also not consistent with Berg noting the curious example of a small marble table listed in the highly accurate account of the excavation by Edward Faulkner: no such table is recorded in *Pompeianarum Antiquitatum Historia* (PAH), the 1862 publication of the daily excavation journals or in other subsequent object lists from the house. Furthermore, the transferral of the finds to the National Museum of Naples (MANN) in 1847 resulted in the loss of the connection between many objects

and their place of discovery. In the intervening years many artefacts have simply lost their inventory label tags, and their fates can be compared to the statuary left in the peristyle; while much is now weather-damaged and some has been stolen, most has survived in context allowing it to become a touchstone in discussions of garden ornamentation.

Berg consequently turns to the difficult and painstaking process of dealing with the documentary record to augment the relocated finds in the MANN. Here she follows in the footsteps of pioneering students of artefact assemblages such as P. Allison and J. Berry (Joanne, not Joan, as mentioned several times in the text) to reconstruct what was recorded in 1847. Berg comes to a total of around 500 objects that are classified using broad non-interpretative categories and then by functional criteria. This provides a clear model for the use of the early excavation records and an extremely handy set of equivalences for terms used in the nineteenth century to describe objects and their modern analogues.

Much has been written previously about the supposed scrambling of artefact assemblages as a result of the state of the city prior to the eruption with houses in disarray and goods in storage, actions during the eruption removing valuable objects such as coins and jewellery as householders fled, and in its aftermath by looters and salvagers. Some of these are seen in the House of Marcus Lucretius, for example, L. Pietilä-Castrén observes in the chapter on terracotta that the household's main lararium was found without statues, suggesting that they had been removed as a result of the ongoing renovations in the property. For the majority of the finds, however, Berg takes a somewhat different approach based around the notion of 'safe keeping', asserting that the combination of 'illogical' groups of objects with significant quantities of locks speaks of a desire to keep goods secure from largely untrusted household slaves. This builds upon other studies of Pompeian houses, where finds are notably clustered into primary storage areas, usually a lockable cupboard found in the atrium or peristyle, or in a cubiculum whose door could be secured. It is a pattern that is also observed in the House of Marcus Lucretius, where we are left with an image of rather austere and empty domestic spaces free of what *we* might think of as the clutter of everyday domestic life. This is particularly prevalent in rooms associated with public display, where objects would have been integral to the overall tableau of grandeur presented to guests. Here the details within the artefact catalogues document rare, high-quality objects that would have been deployed in lavish displays during banquets, seen in the studies of the glassware, bronze vessels and in the lighting for these events. What is apparent, though, is that such rooms were sets to be dressed with portable objects for social events and that the householders were so concerned with light-fingered pilfering that these goods were placed securely under lock and key when they were not being used.

The notable exceptions to this general pattern of 'safe keeping' of expensive objects are the statuary found in the peristyle and the rare example of a chariot found perhaps disassembled in the upper tablinum (room 23) of the house; artefacts perhaps too obvious, heavy or cumbersome to be easily stolen. They can be contrasted with the collection of terracotta statuettes, examined by Pietilä-Castrén, which mainly come from the service area of the house. These were inexpensive items, like ceramic cooking and tableware, that were vital to the running of the property and could afford to be left out. Pietilä-Castrén notes that these cheap terracotta statuettes were often given as New Year's presents at the time of the feast of the *Sigillaria*, an image that perhaps adds some nuance to the overall atmosphere of mistrust of the servile population of the house.

For this reviewer, it is the 'big picture' of what the distributions of the finds tell us about the use of the house and the life within it that is the major achievement of this volume, moving scholarship on from more pessimistic views of what can be done with household assemblages. It is evident that we have now reached a critical mass of such studies across

Pompeii so that comparisons can be made between properties and patterns examined. The concept of safe keeping is a product of this; what appear to be illogical groups of material in the case of a single house become a pattern to be creatively interpreted when repeated across many. This is also apparent in the discussion of the agricultural iron tools, which Berg compares to those found in the House of the Menander, raising the possibility of large Pompeian houses having cultivated lands outside the city. This perhaps bring us back to the slaves who would likely have undertaken this work, and it is notable that these implements were also locked away. Was this due to a sense of orderliness or something more sinister, keeping potential weapons out of the hands of those with a sense of grievance?

There are two highly detailed and extremely useful appendices that round off the volume. Appendix 1 by Berg is a catalogue of finds by room and progressively by excavation date, and also tabulated by room, which provides a wealth of information. Given the emphasis placed on the location of finds around the property and the clustering of elements together, the appendix could have been further enhanced through more artefact distribution maps. The second appendix, a synthesis of floors and wall paintings, provides more of a contextualisation of the house to its artefacts, revealing, for example, that the storeroom (R4) that plays a key role in Berg's understanding of safe keeping was, in fact, well decorated. Thus, if we only look at the wall painting, the room would be thought of as a nicely appointed cubiculum, whereas the locks and assemblage of finds tell a different story. While the paintings are well described, there is no real discussion of date, and hence it is slightly more difficult to reconstruct the 'life history' of this room based on this volume alone. What this demonstrates is the value of examining houses holistically, which for the House of Marcus Lucretius is probably somewhere further along the publication journey.

With the above in mind, the inclusion of chapters on wall plaster fragments and masks recovered from the excavations into the pre-79 CE stratigraphy is a departure from the forensic focus on the state of the property at the time of the eruption. The chapter on the wall plaster by V. Hakanen is an excellent example of how to work with mixed and fragmentary assemblages, and it contains an important discussion of how to tell the difference between material brought into the house at the time of renovations and products of the renovations themselves. This is a much larger issue and one that will also apply to other categories of artefacts from the excavations across the insula, which begs the question of whether these chapters should have been reserved for a later volume concentrating solely on the excavations and their finds. This would have had the advantage of leaving the present volume to deal with the House of Marcus Lucretius in 79 CE and keeping the excavated material coherently in one place.

These are, however, minor quibbles and in no way detract from the quality or long-term value of this publication. It has rescued the finds from the House of Marcus Lucretius at the time of the eruption and placed them – as they should be – centre stage in the property's interpretation. Through doing so, Berg and colleagues have produced more than just a study of artefacts; they have revealed something much more about the fears, tensions and even dangers of lurking inside Pompeian houses.

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