

Art and archaeology

The most significant book of this review is Richard Beacham and Hugh Denard's *Living Theatre in the Ancient Roman House*,¹ a volume in which the authors' previous accomplishments, expertise in theatre and leading roles at Kings Visualisation Laboratory (which is reflected in the use of digital visualizations throughout the volume, both to recreate architectural spaces and to test the viability of painted architecture), is brought to bear on domestic space. The subject, epic length, and format of the book immediately evoke the memory of Cambridge University Press's last major publication on wall painting, Eleanor Leach's 2004 *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples*² and the comparison shows up very sharply the development of attitudes towards both wall painting and its theatrical referents in the last twenty years. In Leach's book, much was made of the theatrical influence on Pompeian interiors, particularly in the architectural Second Style and the Fourth Style. Leach relied on the theatre in order to search for signs of actual theatrical influence on frescoes painted in these styles, for example discussing whether their scenographic 'sets' were based on permanent or temporary theatres, and then to tie the way the two styles presented theatrical performance to the political circumstances of the times in which they flourished. Leach saw Second Style as a reflection of the active competition of elites during the late republic whilst Fourth Style was symptomatic of the tyranny of the Neronian age, in which these same elites were now largely reduced to passive spectators of the emperor's performance.

The book updates Leach not only by adding paintings and evidence not available to her (Marcus Venerius Secundio, whose mummified ear was one of the first social media hits of Gabriel Zuchtriegel's Pompeii superintendency plays a role here [69]), but by adding nuance to the relation to theatre. Even whilst carefully showing the theatrical influences on familiar walls, occasionally giving in to that same permanent vs temporary theatre debate, Beacham and Denard rigorously defend their pitch that these theatrical inflections are not an imitation but rather a playful and deliberately ambiguous intimation of theatre, which reflects the inherent theatricality that suffused all aspects of Roman life. They coin a new phrase, 'theatricalism', to denote this nuance. Theatricalism is all-encompassing, infusing not only the iconography but the sense of perspective and understanding of mimesis on which these paintings rely, the architectural layout of the house, and the performances played out in it. It affects all the senses, not simply sight, creating what the authors coin an 'erotics of theatricalism' (3) and it is understood by architects, homeowners, and guests alike. In order to demonstrate the all-pervasive nature of this theatricalism, the book starts by exploring both the architecture and nature and the patronage of entertainment in the Small and Large Theatres at Pompeii before turning to the theatrical nature of political and social performance in Rome and then to the architectural layout and decoration of houses in Pompeii. The final chapter brings together all these aspects in the discussion of that

¹ *Living Theatre in the Ancient Roman House. Theatricalism in the Domestic Sphere*. By R. C. Beacham and H. Denard. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xxx + 515. 266 black and white and colour illustrations. Hardback £100, ISBN: 978-1-316-51094-0.

² E. Leach, *The Social Life of Painting in Ancient Rome and on the Bay of Naples* (Cambridge, 2004).

area of the house most obviously given over to both social and theatrical performance: the *triclinium*.

The preoccupation with theatricalism (albeit a novel term) is not what makes this book distinctive. It responds to the long-running association of Pompeian painting with the theatre and marries it to the increasingly popular exploration of the theatrical nature of Roman political and social life, a move already underway in Leach's book – around the same time as Janet Huskinson published her great article on the theatricality of the decoration and activities in imperial dining rooms in Antioch on the Orontes, an article not referenced here because of its focus on the Greek East.³ The real contribution here is to synthesize, advance, and distil consideration of the theme into its purest form until there is nothing other than theatricalism, which no aspect of Pompeian domestic life can escape. Throughout, the extent of knowledge on show and the ability to weave together different strands of inquiry is incredibly impressive. The authors move gracefully across the different areas, exploring in detail a huge number of examples, demonstrating an intimate knowledge of Pompeii as they go.

In pursuing the theme of theatricalism in such a rigorous way, it inevitably does feel at times that the close focus has distracted the authors from increasing challenges to the assumptions we make about Pompeii and other emerging concerns in the study of its domestic spaces. The whole premise of the book depends on maintaining a tight tie between the politics and society of Rome and life in Pompeii, and the authors take an enthusiastically Zankerian approach to the infiltration of Augustan culture. Thorough evidence is presented for the relationships between Pompeians, both individually and collectively, and the imperial family, which perhaps renders it unnecessary to insist without evidence that imperial statues were definitely part of the Large Theatre façade in Pompeii (48).

There are, however, perhaps problems in marrying literary sources depicting life in Rome with the architectural evidence in Pompeii. The authors do not tackle emerging scepticism that events like the morning *salutatio* (168), at which a Roman patron formally received his clients, took place in Pompeii. It also always seems a little problematic to assume that Pompeian and Roman political elites experienced imperial rule in the same way. The final chapter rather echoes Leach in linking changes in the nature of theatricalism in the Neronian period to the senatorial elite's increasing exclusion from the political arena (428), but presumably this effect would be somewhat reduced on Pompeians busy acting on their own city stage.

One of the effects of concentrating so closely on the homes of this office-holding elite at Pompeii, matching individuals to properties, meticulously tracing their political careers, and, in particular, connection to spectacle, means that theatricalism is only really considered in terms of the lives of that elite. It does beg the question of how theatrical intimations worked for homeowners who were not office-holders. In this respect, there is perhaps a tinge of what Lauren Hackworth-Petersen would call 'Trimalchio vision' in the repetition of the idea that older styles were favoured by blue-blooded elites whilst the nouveaux-riches preferred the novel and flamboyant for their own interiors (105).⁴

³ J. Huskinson, 'Theatre, Performance and Theatricality in some Mosaic Pavements from Antioch', *BICS* 46 (2002–03), 131–65.

⁴ L. Hackworth-Petersen, *The Freedman in Roman Art and Art History* (Cambridge, 2006), 10.

The book's methodology might best be illuminated by contrasting it with an edited volume I covered in my last review: J. A. Baird and April Pudsey's *Housing in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Material and Textual Approaches*.⁵ The focus of that volume was to move away from assessing houses in terms of empty architectural spaces to think more about the objects and humans inside them. At times Beacham and Denard have perhaps missed the chance to think a little about the way these grand interiors, which they persuasively argue are suited to the social performance of the *paterfamilias*, actually coincided with the much more jumbled experience of daily domestic life. They do certainly acknowledge that the compositions painted on the wall acted 'as a surround for human occupancy and furniture' (316), but it does seem rather odd that this is not considered more, particularly since one of the great opportunities of digital visualizations is to experiment with different effects on spatial experience caused by differing levels of occupancy and clutter. A number of the visualizations reproduced as illustrations do put humans into the spaces, principally as reclining diners, and these are put to good use. For example, visualizing the position of the chief guest at a dinner party helps show how the wall painting behind him may have framed him (225), but no time is given to thinking about how daily activity and mundane clutter might undermine or play against these carefully choreographed sets.

Nevertheless, this is an important book with a rigorous central thesis that is extensively and meticulously explained in a beautifully presented volume with a high number of colour illustrations. It provides a new and sophisticated take on the theatricality of Pompeii, and it will, I suspect, come to be seen as a perfect reflection of early twenty-first century preoccupations with the theatrical and performative in our understanding of life in the ancient world.

In analysing Pompeian wall paintings, one of the key contentions of Beacham and Denard is that we must acknowledge that the people who lived with them *looked* differently from the way we do today. That is to say, ancient audiences understood the mechanics of sight to work in a tactile way in contradiction to our own biological understanding of sight and that they expected different things from representation. This is a concern shared by both our next volumes. In *The Classical Parthenon. Recovering the Strangeness of the Ancient World*,⁶ William St Clair likewise wants to ask us to shift our perspective as we gaze on the ancient world's most famous architectural achievement. In this posthumous publication, finished on his behalf and served with a brief preface by Paul Cartledge, he sets out to bring back the 'strangeness' of the iconic building. In order to understand the importance of the Parthenon better, we need to try to look at it through the eyes of classical Athenians, to stop thinking of the temple and its artworks as an artistic and technical project, and to consider it more in terms of what the Parthenon's craftsmen needed to create in order to satisfy the demands of the *demoi* who commissioned it. The project is ultimately to be understood as answering their will and intentions rather than as the expression of those craftsmen; St Clair, justifiably, is set against a romantic concept of the artist that pushes us to consider Pheidias as the

⁵ J. A. Baird and April Pudsey (eds.), *Housing in the Ancient Mediterranean World. Material and Textual Approaches* (Cambridge, 2022).

⁶ *The Classical Parthenon. Recovering the Strangeness of the Ancient World*. By William St Clair. Cambridge, Open Book Publishers, 2022. Pp. xiv + 325. 39 black and white illustrations. Hardback, £27, ISBN: 978-1-800-64345-1; paperback £18.99, ISBN: 978-1-800-64344-4.

master hand behind the decoration. Furthermore, in order to shift our academic focus, we have to look for alternative approaches from our usual academic, formal analysis. The solution here is to explore the topic through two rhetorical exercises that Athenian audiences might recognize, one a declamation characterized as a ‘Thucydidean Speech’, imagined to have been delivered by the commissioners to the assembly (complete with audience interjections and responses), and the second a rhetorical exercise, delivered about 500 years later by a somewhat cocky student on the subject of the historical lessons of the Parthenon. These pieces show a real depth of understanding of the two genres and the extent of St Clair’s scholarship (both exercises are extensively footnoted so that factual information and rhetorical devices can be justified by reference to ancient sources). The exercise, however, is inevitably a little disingenuous since the speeches are carefully constructed to set up the subject of the final chapter, a reinterpretation of the meaning of the so-called ‘peplos scene’ from the East frieze, in which the theme of autochthony, a recurrent emphasis in the commissioners’ speech (137), will play a central role.

As Cartledge notes in the preface, there is plenty of room for speculation on the meaning of the Parthenon frieze, since our common explanation that it depicts a Panathenaic festival relies on acknowledging that this is an exceptional theme in temple sculpture, which must be predicated on the extraordinary nature of the Parthenon project as a whole. St Clair suggests that surely the more likely explanation would be to consider the frieze in terms of what is normal for the character of temple sculpture, as a scene of myth (207). It remains to be seen whether the proposed interpretation gains any traction. It depends on seeing a baby swaddled in the top fold of the cloth (usually identified as Athena Polias’s new peplos) represented in the centre of the East frieze, a baby who is to be identified as Ion, eponymous father of Ionians. But even if this interpretation does not take hold, experiments in getting at ancient experience from different routes are always to be welcomed and this is where the value of this volume might best lie.

Jay Johnston and Iain Gardner’s edited volume, *Drawing Spirit. The Role of Images and Design in the Magical Practice of Late Antiquity*, also aims to engage with visual images through ancient eyes.⁷ The premise is that the images in magical papyri were just as important as the texts written below, above, and around them, and that they were not simply illustrations of those texts but had their own agency and may have been as much for the view of supernatural beings as of the human consulting the papyri. The challenge, then, for academics today is how to adjust our expectations of images to experience what Johnston dubs an ‘esoteric aesthetics’ (27) so alien to our own ways of viewing. The appeal of the project to the Australian Research Council, which funded it, is easily understood since it combines fascinating material with this serious, novel approach. Unfortunately, the volume presents rather a missed opportunity to bring this material to a wider audience, feeling like a flinging together of project outcomes that make little coherent sense to an outside reader. It is not often that an introduction tells readers that they should feel free to skip the first chapter. I do have sympathy with the editors here. The chapter is heavily conceptual and some readers’ resistance to

⁷ *Drawing Spirit. The Role of Images and Design in the Magical Practice of Late Antiquity*. Edited by J. Johnston and I. Gardner. Berlin, De Gruyter, 2023. Pp. xvi + 267. 41 black and white illustrations. Hardback £67, ISBN: 978-3-110-47728-3.

theoretical approaches is frustratingly trenchant. On the other hand, seeing as the concept of esoteric aesthetics is crucial to the project and will be played out in the final chapter, skipping the chapter would seem rather ill-advised. Subsequent chapters lurch between different approaches (from essentially a catalogue to more discursive chapters) and the three chapters 3, 4, and 6, which most obviously work together through their concentration on the Heidelberg Magical Archive, are separated by an interpolated chapter on effigies. Chapter 3 introduces the Heidelberg Archive with no reference to pictures. Chapter 4 offers examples but suddenly stops with no conclusion to the series of case studies, and the analysis of one crucial image (the archangel Michael) has been deferred to Chapter 6. There are a fair few typographic and repeated grammatical errors and wrong cross references, which suggest that a much tighter editorial hand was needed here.

The material, however, is fascinating. There are two manuscript groups under consideration: the Theban magical library, purchased in Thebes in the nineteenth century, and the Heidelberg Magical Archive, which consists of nine documents ranging from single sheets of papyri to big handbooks, some of which seem to originate from the hand of the same author writing from a monastery in southern Fayum in the tenth century CE. These texts include spells and all sorts of other magical writings, a good many of which include images that work alongside text, the line between them blurring as letters and words curl around and even inside images or themselves devolve into symbols. Sometimes these images represent, or rather make manifest, divinities, demonic characters, or even the magic practitioner or victim. In some instances, the reader is instructed to repeat the drawing as part of the spell. Korshi Dosso's chapter on binding effigies, which is perhaps the most satisfying as a stand-alone piece of work, features compelling contextualization of the use of such effigies, returning to texts to note how illustrations themselves might serve as two-dimensional effigies. The final chapter allows Johnston to demonstrate the application of the esoteric aesthetic approach in the case study analysis of images of the Archangel Michael as a butterfly, an analysis that shows a willingness to look in new ways, to embrace ambiguities and not dismiss 'difficult' aspects of images as mistakes.

A particularly compelling feature of the discussions of these papyri is the complexity of cultural interactions in late antiquity. The scripts are written in a variety of languages, including Greek and demotic. They carry cultural memory from pharaonic Egypt and classical culture whilst incorporating Christian knowledge and practice and loan words and characters, such as djinn, from Muslim culture. The acknowledgement of the ways in which the Muslim and Christian worlds coincided in late antiquity is a theme that we have highlighted in reviewing the first two volumes arising from the imposing Impact of the Ancient City project.

The final volume of this project concentrates on the grid plan, which has come to be seen as so emblematic of the classical city, a sure sign of 'civilisation'.⁸ It starts by explaining how the grid city could really be termed a fantasy or invention of the nineteenth century, during which archaeologists and town planners together shaped a prevalent view that Greek and Roman cities were guided by a rational and civilized grid model. Such thinking allowed urbanization in the early Roman empire to be

⁸ *Rome and the Colonial City. Rethinking the Grid*. Edited by S. Greaves and A. Wallace-Hadrill. Impact of the Ancient City Volume 3. Oxford, Philadelphia, Oxbow, 2022. Pp. xix + 411. 128 black and white illustrations. Hardback £45, ISBN: 978-1-789-25780-9.

understood as a key way in which barbarians were shepherded into civilisation. In considering the empire's end, the same outlook allowed scholars to equate the winding streets of Islamic cities as barbaric undoings of the classical cities over which they stood. This volume seeks to address both the roles of the grid city in the ancient world and the ways in which later urban plans have looked back to it, stressing that there is no standard meaning for the grid, as those town planners and archaeologists of the nineteenth century had hoped, but rather that that meaning is generated by the way in which the grid is 'enframed', that is to say, what it is made to stand for. This means that we stretch beyond the Mediterranean for the first time. There is a chapter on the nature of the grid city in the USA and another on early understandings of urbanization of the south Americas.

Urban planning is most often enframed by the political ideologies of the planners. Irad Malkin discusses the importance of the grid to early Greek colonies in offering 'equality' as plots, equal in size if not in quality, were distributed by lot to the colonists. In Edward Zychowicz-Coghill's chapter on the planning principles behind the foundations of Kufa and Baghdad in the seventh and eighth centuries, equality still plays a role but in very different political contexts. In Baghdad, the circular geometry of the city revolves around the palace of the caliph, and equality for the inhabitants means each having equal proximity to the ruler. Keith D. Lilley explores the grid in the medieval context of the reign of Edward I. The relationship between urban planning and the king's power is symbolized by the rod, held by monarchs at their coronation. This rod is not simply an abstract symbol of power but a literal measure, which guided the measurement of plots, into which land was divided to create cities, and which become a literal manifestation of the order that the king bestowed on his realms (75).

Another key point of the book is that, whilst a city might be designed as a grid, it will be shaped and developed by generations of inhabitants. This is the case, for example, in J. Andrew Dufton's investigation of several Roman colonies of North Africa, which have spilled over their limits or gained new foci within a few generations. Javier Martínez Jiménez talks about the gradual encroachment of buildings onto streets in towns in late antique Spain and the sacrifice of orthogonal grids to create axial vistas towards churches, whilst Efthymios Rizos notices how an increasing preoccupation with security in late antiquity changes urban planning in the East as great *horrea* ('warehouses') and barracks appear within cities. The volume ends by demonstrating the role of the grid city as part of the 'civilizing' mission of modern colonialism. Said Ennahid explores the role of the grid in colonial projects in Morocco, whilst Robin Cormack tours New Delhi and Khartoum (though, rather inexplicably, in terms of its architecture rather than urban plan). This is the last volume for the project, which has generated an enormous amount of quality scholarship that not only illuminates our understanding of the ancient city but has served as a model of how classicists could work productively with scholars beyond their own disciplinary boundaries.

My favourite book of this review period is Jane Draycott's *Prosthetics and Assistive Technology in Ancient Greece and Rome*,⁹ which explores human ingenuity in living with and adapting to impairment. The literary evidence for ancient prosthetics is slight

⁹ *Prosthetics and Assistive Technology in Ancient Greece and Rome*. By J. Draycott. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2023. Pp. xxi + 202. 46 black and white illustrations, 5 tables. Hardback £63, ISBN: 978-1-009-16839-7.

(and so the same anecdotes are repeated several times across the volume) because, as Draycott points out, medical treatises in antiquity focused on treating the immediate symptoms of disease or accident rather than advising on long-term survival or quality of life (9). Nevertheless, she has been able to find 107 literary references and fifty-four archaeological examples of prosthetics, covering a broad chronological and geographical range that must reflect exhaustive research. The examples are sorted into chapters that work through different parts of the body for which the author has evidence of prosthetics, starting with limbs and progressing to the face (teeth and even noses) and hair. Each chapter follows a similar format, first looking at reasons why people might come to be in need of a prosthetic for the particular body part before examining the evidence for the types of prosthetics adopted and considering the attitude of the wearer and the public to their use. Perhaps unsurprisingly, the chapter conclusions tend to become a bit repetitive, since there are different attitudes to some kinds of injury or correction (a false hand on a war veteran perhaps attracting more empathy than the amusement to be had from ill-performing cosmetic prosthetics such as wigs and the vanity of people who used them). Nevertheless, those conclusions are reinforced through repetition. They tell us that, whilst more frequently called for prosthetics such as false teeth might be quite standardized, more complex prosthetics were local/personal solutions resulting in a huge variety of types. For example, the evidence for lower limb prosthetics includes: the Cairo toe, a wooden toe fastened by leather to the foot of a woman who was still wearing it when her tomb, in which she had been laid sometime in the first half of the first millennium BCE, was excavated; and a foot prosthesis made of leather stuffed with hay and moss and shoed with a wooden sole attached to a skeleton in a fifth- to seventh-century CE grave at Bonaduz in Switzerland. Thanks to the author for pointing out the efficacy of the soft stuffing to soak up pus from what appears to have been an unhealed damage (65)! It is also clear that prosthetics were a normal part of life, and that people were used to seeing them: Ovid and Martial knew where you could buy wigs (in front of the Temple of Hercules and the Muses), indicating that everybody else in Rome did too (113). Finally, the fact that prosthetics are so often found in tombs, not as grave goods but in the position on the body where they had served in life, offers crucial insight into the way that wearers understood them not as added extras but as crucial parts of their body (particularly important for the owner of the Cairo toe, who would have needed her full body present for it to be transfigured for her afterlife). In one of my favourite examples, we even get to match a prosthetic to a name. From the remains of her tomb, we can imagine Aebutia Quarta, who lived in Rome in the late first/early second century CE, swishing around the city in a top-notch auburn wig held in place with a golden hairnet (119–20) that, when excavated, was still in place atop her skeleton. The final chapter looks to the extent to which living property of a person, enslaved humans or domesticated animals, could play the role of the prosthetics, reminding us that the ability to live with impairment was wealth specific.

The final book of this review is Dorian Borbonus and Elisha Ann Dumser's edited volume, *Building the Classical World. Bauforschung as a Contemporary Approach*.¹⁰

¹⁰ *Building the Classical World. Bauforschung as a Contemporary Approach*. Edited by D. Borbonus and E. A. Dumser. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. xxiii + 280. 152 black and white and colour illustrations. Hardback £56, ISBN: 978-01-90-69052-6.

German approaches to the disciplines of art history and architectural history have often diverged from those of Anglo-American academia, and this book is an American–German attempt to emphasize the potential of *Bauforschung*, the methodical analysis of buildings, by showcasing what it has to offer. A series of case studies cover four main thematic interests: ‘construction processes, design principles, building traditions, and historical context’ (12), which together allow us to see how the approach helps us to understand architecture both in its immediate archaeological context and in terms of its ‘broader practical and symbolic significance’ (11). The numerous chapters cover these different aspects across a wide period and, as is increasingly the case with many edited volumes, are pretty short, meaning that they are sometimes a little unsatisfying as stand-alone pieces. The most engaging chapters are those that reveal the true ingenuity of architects and craftsmen. I really enjoyed the investigative flair of Hansgeorg Bankel’s chapter on the Augustan aqueduct at Minturnae, which interrogates the peculiar nature of the pairs of horizontal bricks inserted into the tufa of each pier of the aqueduct. Several explanations are considered, and the favoured answer is that they are markers added to the building to settle an argument between different building teams as to how the gradient should best be managed to optimize water flow. Another chapter, by Hermann J. Kienast, works out how the roof stayed up on the Tower of the Winds without any help from timber, whilst Klaus Rheidt’s chapter aims to work out how the absolutely colossal pieces of stone used in the construction at Baalbek were transported and manipulated. The photographs of the megaliths still in the quarries, rather understatedly called ‘large stones’ by the author, are incredible. Lynne Lancaster’s chapter is compelling not only for its architectural information but the way it reminds us that different kinds of innovation are often interdependent. In the third century BCE, developments in bathing that saw demand for heated pools in bath houses necessitated architectural innovation, since wooden roofs could not deal with the continual vapour caused by permanently filled pools. Two different vaulting techniques using terracotta tiles emerged, their distribution across the Mediterranean enabled by increased connectivity and urbanization. In first-century CE Gaul and Hispania, these terracotta kits were made in the same workshops that were springing up to churn out the amphorae needed to hold the results of agricultural production that had surged in the wake of urbanization (145).

The final chapters return us to an aspect of the first book of this review: the role of digital modelling. The last, by Stephan Zink, draws on a wide range of visualizations in different media to explore our changing understandings of and attitudes towards polychromy in Greek and Roman architecture. These visualizations range from the academic in the strictest sense, the elevations and drawings made by the academicians from the *École des Beaux Arts*, to TV sets built for HBO’s early twenty-first century drama series, *Rome*. Debates about colour have become particularly pertinent to contemporary digital modellers, who must decide how to respond to uncertainty about original colours of buildings, often by moving away from colour altogether from a fear of being wrong and, in doing so, unfortunately reinforcing a still popular idea of a ‘white’ antiquity. The chapter reminds us how all these different modes of recreation, whatever their register, act on each other in shaping our consciousness of ancient material environments. It also accidentally demonstrates the power of the model in re-casting the original in our minds. Fig. 13.12, a plate from the Niccolini brothers’ famous series of volumes on Pompeii (*Le case ed i monumenti di Pompei*),

which ran across four volumes from 1854 to 1896, bears the label with which it appeared in the volume itself – ‘Casa della Reg. VIII, Isola 2, Pompei’ – but the interior displayed here is not a careful and accurate recreation of that house or any other in Pompeii. Instead, the image reproduces the interior of the Pompeian Court, a Pompeian house built as part of the exhibits for the Sydenham Crystal Palace in South London in 1854.¹¹ Unwittingly, Zink has perfectly demonstrated the influence of successive layers of modelling on our vision of the ancient world.

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Philosophy

The Ancient Commentators of Aristotle series has recently published three important volumes. The first two are the last instalments of Simplicius’ commentary on Aristotle’s *Physics*, the culmination of a monumental endeavour that started in 2001 and now comprises twelve books. One of these two final volumes contains the translation of Simplicius’ *On Aristotle Physics 1.1–2*,¹ the other is a detailed *General Introduction* to the whole commentary,² both authored by Stephen Menn. In his acknowledgements, Menn explains that the translation began as a joint work with Rachel Barney, who contributed, among other things, by revising early drafts, composing the paragraph summaries, and collaborating on the endnotes. Unfortunately, we are told, she had to withdraw from the project, leaving Menn to finish it and take all responsibility for the final product. The translation is accompanied by an eighteen-page preface by the series editors, Michael Griffin and Richard Sorabji (which, in fact, offers a shorter version of Menn’s *General Introduction*), and a twelve-page note on the text and translation. The translation is, of course, careful and beautifully assembled, supplied with diagrams by Henry Mendell.

As the series editors point out, Menn’s *General Introduction* amounts to a ‘significant new monograph on Simplicius’ commentary’ (vi), which is the longest surviving text by a single author from Greek antiquity and which expands to more than half a million words (1). With lucid prose, Menn gives justice to Simplicius’ rich and multilayered text and rightly emphasizes the importance of reading well-known passages in their original context and minding Simplicius’ philosophical aims and methods in his

¹¹ S. Hales and N. Earle. “A copy – or rather a translation...with numerous sparkling emendations’: Re-building the Pompeian Court of the Crystal Palace’, in K. Nichols and S. Turner (eds.), *Whatever is to be Done with the Crystal Palace?* (Manchester, 2017), 205.

¹ *Simplicius. On Aristotle Physics 1.1–2*. Translated by Stephen Menn. London, Bloomsbury, 2022. Pp. x + 258. Hardback £85, ISBN: 978-13-50-28568-2.

² *Simplicius. On Aristotle Physics 1–8. General Introduction to the 12 Volumes of Translations*. By Stephen Menn. London, Bloomsbury, 2022. Pp. xii + 161. Hardback £85, ISBN: 978-13-50-28662-7.