

dibattito, tutt'ora in atto, sull'autenticità del cd. papiro di Artemidoro (chi scrive è propenso a ritenere che probabilmente si tratta di un documento falso).

Mika Kajava

RABUN TAYLOR: *The Moral Mirror of Roman Art*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2008. ISBN 978-0-521-86612-5. XIII, 274 pp. GBP 52, USD 97.99.

Mirrors are magnetic, as stated by Rabun Taylor; they attract the gaze in their reflected world full of paradoxes, being at once Self and the Other, true and deceptive, beneficial and baneful, surface and depth, active and passive. Such a complex cultural construct, the mirror image in antiquity has attracted and continues to attract persistent scholarly attention. Comprehensive catalogues of the phenomenon of the reflected image in Roman art were compiled already in 1940 by Lilian Dreger and in 1990 by Lilian Balensiefen, and they still serve as a base for the present study. The volume also participates actively in the ongoing discussion on the themes with such scholars as Shadi Bartsch, Nancy De Grummond, Françoise Frontisi-Ducroix, Willard McCarty and Jean-Pierre Vernant. The author, assistant professor in the Department of Classics at the University of Texas, Austin, has earlier dedicated volumes to different aspects of Roman construction, in particular water distribution and control. In this interdisciplinary study too, water is strongly present, but this time as a surface for reflection, with profound cultural meanings embedded. The main emphasis, as suggested by the title of the volume, is on Roman art, particularly on Campanian wall paintings of the Imperial era, although the images discussed range from Attic and Italic red-figure vases to late antique mosaics and reliefs. The meanings of mirrors and reflections in ancient written sources are also explored throughout the volume.

Taylor begins by proposing (p. 1) his initial dilemma: why is reflection in ancient art almost never casual? The author observes how reflection was very rarely used as a simple naturalistic prop, suggesting that it was too important a discursive tool for casual decorative use; the metaphorical potency of reflection would be safeguarded by reserving its use for special genres of myths. According to Taylor's initial proposition, the mirror is not an artifact of everyday use, but a coded device, first and foremost the "moral mirror", a teacher, *praeceptor*. Reflection, in fact, rather than the mirror, should be the key word of the volume, as physical mirrors constitute a minority of the material under examination, the main part being reflections on water, shields, or metal bowls.

This erudite and eminently readable quest of the author after moral, religious, ritual and social meanings intertwined with the reflected figure is divided, besides a general introduction, into five main chapters, each concentrated on a cycle of myths with the mirror image in a crucial role, and a sixth chapter of conclusions. A separate appendix on Medusa and the Evil Eye, a bibliography and an index are included as well. The Introduction (pp. 1–18) sums up previous research on the subject, concisely presenting the ancient mirrors as artifacts and giving five "mnemonic associations" to characterize the active Roman mirror image, the subject of his study: it is magic, metamorphic (i.e., assisting personal inner or outer transformation), metaphorical, magnetic (i.e., a captivating force), and moral.

The first chapter, The Teaching Mirror (pp. 19–55), examines the various roles of reflec-

tion in the construction of gender. The discourse starts from the theme of the teaching, philosophic mirror, prevalently male, and then proceeds to the cosmetic mirror of Venus, thoroughly female. The dualistic differentiation between the ideal Roman man as a reflected *doing*, and the Roman woman as a reflected *being*, the former concerned with physiognomic self-knowledge and self-improvement, the latter with cosmetic self-consciousness and self-indulgence, is well. The discourse on male mirrors, however, repeats many elements already treated in previous studies. Innovative parts are dedicated to the performative aspects of the mirror, as "a tool of the ubiquitous Roman rituals of self-actualization" and Venus' watery mirroring motives, such as the Marine triumph and doves at water basin. A few minor objections, not undermining the validity of the general argument, regard some iconographic details. Firstly, the identification of mirror panels used as back-drops in two Vesuvian paintings with actors, is perhaps too audacious (pp. 24–7, figs. 7–8); the reading of the object picked by a partridge from a box in the mosaic of the House of the Labyrinth in Pompeii is mistaken; it is clearly a necklace, not a mirror (p. 53–4, fig. 31).

In the second chapter, "Mirrors Mortal and Morbid: Narcissus and Hermaphroditus" (pp. 56–89), the attention is turned from the ideal Roman male and female reflection to a more complex "pathological reflectivity" that endangers the fragile ideal construction of gender. The major part of the discussion is taken up by the reflective figure of Narcissus, entrapped in his mirror image, with the consequent solipsistic absorption and "pathological sexual excess", perceived as female characteristics, undermining his virility, and, in the end, destroying him. The inescapable Ovidian narration of the myth is confronted with Pompeian visual representations, the authors presenting several poignant observations on the visual premonitions of Narcissus' fate and the meaning of the auxiliary figures of the torch-bearing amorines. The figure of Hermaphroditus, and that of a third ephebic youth destroyed by a mirroring pool, Actaeon, are treated at the end of the chapter, almost as an appendix.

The third chapter, "The Mirror of Dionysos" (pp. 90–136), takes the discourse into the realm of mystic mirrors, tools of spiritual change and gates to the transcendent, as well as concrete cult objects in the "mystagogue's tool-kit". The myth of Orphic Zagreus is discussed at length, and interesting Italic evidence is brought forth in order to propose that the mirror-bound death of the baby Zagreus was actually re-enacted in the mystic initiation, with the mirror effecting and symbolizing the initiate's inner transformation. In this chapter as well, two appendix-like subdivisions on the mechanisms of transformation follow. These are analyzed using the concept of *lamination*, coined by the author for the process of "purposeful conflation into a single, multivalent signifier of two or more distinct things that accidentally share formal similarity" (p. 108). This proves to be a valid analytical tool for addressing some perplexing iconographic problems, credibly ascribing to single elements various coexisting strata of meanings and double readings. The first example involves the handled *phiale* often shown in funerary scenes of South Italian vases – a much discussed and variously interpreted subject – for which the author suggests the interpretation that as an instrument of divination by lecanomancy it might formally and ideally be assimilated with the mirror, as a means of ritual communication with the deceased. The second example concerns a discoid object present in some thiasos scenes as "laminating" the idea of the mirror with the ecstatic *tympanum*.

The fourth chapter, "The Mirroring Shield of Achilles" (pp. 137–68), introduces the theme of reflective shields shared by the two final chapters. The iconographic shield can be seen as laminated with the mirror, for although they are metonymic for two opposite worlds,

the war and the boudoir, they share a formal and functional similarity, both being metallic discs, both being able to rebound and deflect. In this chapter, the author dedicates some spaces to the shield of Lamachus in Aristophanes' *Acharnians*, the mirroring shield in the Alexander mosaic of the House of the Faun, proceeding then to analyze two famous iconographic cycles connected with Achilles himself: Achilles on Skyros and Thetis in the forge of Vulcan. In the fifth chapter, "The Mirroring Shield of Perseus" (pp. 169–96), the author takes a look in the eyes of Medusa, starting again from the discussion on the mythological narrative and its iconographic counterparts, with digressions on various interpretations of the myth starting with Freud. Differently from the shield of Achilles which shows shadows of the past and the future as a means of moral correction, the shield of Perseus is interpreted only as a medium for diminution, with limited effect of absorbing force, not effecting change on the interiority of the protagonist.

The task undertaken in the volume is not easy, as it involves the discussion of a whole series of some of the most debated ancient images, from the frieze of the Villa of the Mysteries to the Alexander mosaic, dwelling in the myths of Narcissus and Perseus which are unexhausted sources for new interpretations. Nevertheless, the book is successful in its complex enterprise of analyzing the reasons of the non-casuality of the mirror image in Roman iconography. The inner division in chapters and paragraphs lacks some structural clarity to guide the reader, but among the merits of the volume are its rich and well selected illustrations as well as the new arguments and tools offered for the discussion on the imagery of reflection; it thus succeeds in perpetuating the fascination of the Roman mirror images.

Ria Berg

BARRY HOBSON: *Latrinae et Foricae. Toilets in the Roman World*. Duckworth, London 2009. ISBN 978-0715638507. X, 190 pp. GBP 14.99.

Barry Hobson's book, *Latrinae et Foricae: Toilets in the Roman World*, focuses on Roman toilets, their distribution, function and significance. Although the title mentions Roman world, the emphasis lies mainly on Italy, and on Pompeii and Ostia in particular. This is understandable because of the richness of the available material in, as well as author's extensive familiarity with, these sites, but might come as a disappointment to some. In order to compensate for the imbalance, the volume starts with an introduction in which known remains of toilets in various parts of the Roman world are presented, in a guide-book manner. The beginning constituted the most puzzling part of my reading experience. Whereas it shows that toilets were widespread, which does not come as a surprise, given that we talk about highly urban settlements, it also shows that they were varied in construction and style. The reader is left with too many questions as no explanations are given at this point. At the end of my reading experience I was left to wonder, whether it would have been better to start with the second to last chapter, *Who cares about latrines?*

Hobson's style is casual, yet informative. However, one notices Hobson's background as a doctor (GP) by the occasional use of rather specific scatological and medical terminology (especially in chapter *Motions, maladies and medicine*). The contrast is pronounced when the glossary contains explanations of terms such as "atrium" or "diachronic". The volume is very up to date, it includes, e.g., a reference to the recent studies of Herculaneum sewers, the final