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THIRD-CENTURY BURIALS. B. Borg *Crisis and Ambition. Tombs and Burial Customs in Third-Century Rome*. Pp. xx + 308, ills, maps, colour pls. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013. Cased, £105, US\$185. ISBN: 978-0-19-967273-8.

Jeffrey A. Becker

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THIRD-CENTURY BURIALS

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B. has produced a synthetic volume that makes important contributions to the study of Roman imperial funerary culture within a contextualised framework. More importantly, B. focuses on the third century C.E., offering an analysis that treats, chiefly, funereal evidence from Rome, Ostia and Portus in order to test to what degree the burial conventions of Early and Middle Imperial Rome continued, and to what degree new trends may be observed in the archaeological record. Since funerary customs provide an often unrivalled window onto the beliefs and traditions of culture groups, this approach is extremely fruitful. With that said, the study of Roman funereal habits, and all their related facets, poses no small challenge as the corpus is as vast as it is varied. General English language surveys of imperial funereal culture are limited in number and some venerable examples (e.g. J.M.C. Toynbee, *Death and Burial in the Roman World* [1971]) are showing their age. B.'s work is likely to provoke both thought and discussion, as the tumultuous third century was a key transitional period in the Roman world.

Overall B. ostensibly sets out to explore the oft-cited notion of the third century C.E. as a time of crisis in which not only was the Roman world experiencing debilitating political and economic unrest, but also one in which the conventions (and quality) of material culture were changing. She finds that it was 'a period that links the high imperial age with late antiquity, explains how the latter came into being, and that deserves to be studied in its own right for precisely these reasons' (p. 278). Some factors traditionally seen as influencing this period of culture change include the rise of Christianity and the social activities of new (and perhaps less traditional) elites, along with the constant flux brought on by the socio-political and economic crises of the day. By addressing funerary customs B. seeks to examine whether any such crisis was, in fact, a reality, since funerary habits provide a reliable baseline for discussing patterns of human behaviour. A large percentage of the text is devoted to careful and meticulous description of the physical remains of tombs and their typology, along with sarcophagi and painted interior decoration. While this survey alone is of great utility, B. in the end shows that the third century C.E. has a funerary culture in its own right and that it is not necessarily a debilitated period.

The text is divided into seven chapters. The introduction reviews the *status quo* of the third century C.E., while Chapters 2–4 review the physical remains of tombs, including traditional tombs, catacombs and hypogea, and discuss innovation in design. In Chapter 2 (p. 10) B. argues that traditional practices and tomb types continued longer than presumed by many scholars. B. reviews the Vatican Necropolis, for example, and finds that evidence for *ex novo* third-century construction is scanty, which makes the argument about continuity somewhat speculative. Mausoleum Phi and Mausoleum Chi, both dating to the third century, are found to be of high quality construction, thus continuing earlier traditions. Tombs from the Via Appia show that accommodation for cremation burials 'was made well into the mid third century' (p. 20). In addressing third-century innovation, Chapter 3 identifies the emergence of new trends, namely the adoption of above ground monuments (e.g. sarcophagi set atop pedestals) as well as mausolea that improved upon the design of so-called 'temple tombs'.

These freestanding monuments take advantage of topography, as is evident from Ostia where the monument of C. Domitius Fabius Hermogenes looms near the Porta Romana. Freestanding tombs are often adorned with *tituli* celebrating the career of the decedent. The so-called Tomba di Nerone on the Via Cassia is another example of such a monument. Here the sarcophagus of P. Vibius Marianus (c. 260–270 C.E.) sits atop a high podium. Acroterial decoration is another feature of these freestanding monuments. The Tomba di Nerone highlights the use of sarcophagi as monuments in their own right, designed either to be set up outdoors or in porticoes that framed a precinct. Such display placed the career of the decedent on view to passers-by.

Chapter 4 addresses the expanding popularity of underground tombs during the third century. Here new practice breaks with tradition in that third-century hypogea are both more elaborate and larger than earlier rock-cut chamber tombs. A notable development is a preference for having the entrance and the gallery of tombs on different levels. That said, a great deal of variability is to be found in the archaeological record. B. revisits a debate among scholars about Roman catacombs, specifically their chronology and whether catacombs were exclusively for the purpose of Christian burial. B. agrees with E. Rébillard ('Les formes de l'assistance funéraire dans l'empire romain et leur evolution dans l'Antiquité tardive', *Antiquité Tardive* 7 [1999], 269–82) in believing that the use of catacombs by pagans on a wide scale occurred even after 313 C.E. (p. 121).

Chapter 5 addresses the important topics of use and re-use, in particular examining gentilician tombs of senatorial families. The phenomena of long-term use and re-use resulted in modifications to tombs, some of which substantially affected the aesthetics of original tomb designs. This habit of modifying old tombs might be seen as a sign of decline, but B. argues that re-use was actually appealing and may well be linked to perpetuating and maintaining familial status through ancestral connections. Chapters 6 and 7 address the use and context of sarcophagi, with a particular interest in iconographic issues as they reflect social status. B. highlights changes in themes chosen to decorate sarcophagi, with third-century motifs reflecting generally 'positive messages' (p. 209). In B.'s view, these themes suggest an attitude that emphasised peace and abundance. B. discusses issues of viewership and sarcophagi, citing instances where the sarcophagus was used to display the body of the decedent, but does not seem to reach a definitive conclusion about the role of sarcophagus iconography in Roman society. The interior appointment of tombs experienced changes during the third century, with Christian iconography mixing with non-Christian iconography. These two iconographic schema share an interest in idyllic scenes that may reflect upon a paradise-like afterlife. This shared interest can make differentiating the 'Christian' from the 'non-Christian' difficult when explicit biblical references are not present (p. 268).

The thorough review of tombs, and of previous scholarship, is welcome, especially for an Anglophone audience. Each chapter begins with detailed description and often there is more description than conclusion. The illustrations are clear and abundant, although some drawings are not accompanied by a north arrow and scale bar. Absent from the volume is a discussion of the graves of ordinary citizens; this omission leaves the reader wondering about third-century burial traditions for non-elites.

The volume's conclusion returns to the themes addressed and finds that the third century C.E. is, in fact, not a period of crisis (at least in funereal contexts) and that there is demonstrable continuity with preceding phases of Roman culture. In the third century social elites continued the practice of creating tombs, even maintaining ancestral links to long-standing tombs and tomb complexes. B. succeeds in suggesting that the funeral culture of the third century C.E. is deserving not only of its own evaluation, but of a better and greater contextualisation with respect to the patterns and processes of Roman mortuary

practices. Scholars and students of Roman funeral practices and tomb typologies will find this volume both useful and rewarding.

Oxford, Mississippi

JEFFREY A. BECKER
jeffrey.becker@gmail.com