The final chapter is entitled ‘Touching Statues’, where the responses surveyed are direct and physical. Evidence for the toppling, mutilating and dragging of statues is presented, and it is concluded that such behaviour illustrates how the power of the person portrayed was thought to be embodied or reflected by the statue itself. A conclusion and a bibliography (304-25) follow.

It should perhaps be stressed that this is not a book for beginners and is not at all comparable to earlier treatments of the subject. It analyses many ancient texts, has fewer illustrations than one might expect, derives from an expensive press, and the author is not writing for the uninitiated. On the other hand, it is hard not to be impressed with a study so convincing and sophisticated in its description of the complex world of role and response surrounding Roman statuary. Those involved in research will surely find it stimulating.

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The New Surveys series, coordinated by the UK Classical Association, is well known and highly useful. Each book aims at a succinct treatment of basic topics and main scholarly approaches, and each provides a fundamental bibliography, with a concentration upon more recent works. This offering lives up to the very best and manages to convey the welcome impression that the study of Roman art is now a lively and interesting occupation. Although twelve colour and forty black-and-white illustrations is not many in the scheme of things, the book’s introductory nature and readable text make it appropriate for beginners, who would benefit from using it in conjunction with a textbook.

In a short introduction (1-4) Peter Stewart (S) addresses the fundamental problem of Roman art, i.e. what is ‘Roman’ art, given that so much of it looks Greek, or is the product of Greek artists and traditions, or derives from
an empire of such vast breadth and cultural diversity? Not so many years ago, the conventional answer was that 'Roman' art was in fact another chapter in the history of Greek art, but a chapter of decline and inferiority in comparison to the high point of the classical period (the fifth century BC). Thankfully, this depressing assessment is now generally considered to be both wrong and immensely disrespectful. Contemporary scholars such as S see Roman art as a product of Roman power, and place emphasis upon the social institutions which gave rise to various genres of art. Instead of concentrating largely on style, therefore, the concentration is now on interpreting Roman art in the context of Roman society. One consequence of this new approach is that the intentions of artists and patrons have become less interesting than the reception of art by different audiences. In a relatively short book S does very well to illustrate how works of Roman art were produced to support various social rituals and relationships in different settings.

There are six chapters. The first (5-28) deals with portraiture, both republican and imperial, on the grounds that this genre is most readily associated with Roman requirements and sensibilities. This is surely true, but S shows that Greek artists and traditions were nonetheless vital in this field too. Roman portraiture was based on the concept of likeness, but this concept is a relative and changeable one and its importance does not necessarily imply a distinctive cultural desire for forensic realism in portraiture. The famous 'veristic' portraits of the republican period have been misinterpreted along these lines by scholars who severely underestimate their ideological component, or read into them some of the critical character assessments of particular individuals made by later historians. The original Roman subjects and their clients could hardly have missed such subliminal negativity if indeed it did exist. For S, Roman portraits are not 'uncomplicated "windows" onto the past and its personalities ... [but] ... symbolically charged and artificial constructions' (23).

Ch. 2 (29-52) focuses on public monuments and ranges from imperial palaces and monuments in Rome, such as the imperial fora, the Arch of Titus, the Ara Pacis and the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, to notable monuments in Italy and the provinces, such as the Arch of Trajan at Benevento and the Sebastion at Aphrodisias in Caria. There is a good discussion of narrative techniques in relief sculpture, including the 'invisible stories' (44-50) told by the relief bands on the columns of Trajan and Marcus Aurelius, which were largely unreadable from ground level. If their purpose was only partially narrative, however, S ventures no supplementary ideas. Given that the Column of Marcus Aurelius has fewer bands, is this an economy measure or (as S seems to imply, 50) an artistic device to promote
visibility for a narrative that was only expected to be partially followed? There are questions that can still be asked about even the most famous Roman monuments.

The subject of Ch. 3 (53-73) is funerary art, a field which has been gathering momentum among Anglophone writers in recent years, though it remains dominated by German scholarship. S examines republican tombs, tombstones and statues, and subsequently moves on to sarcophagi of the imperial period. Examples of the latter from Italy and the provinces are discussed, and it is interesting in the context of what constitutes ‘Roman’ art to see that scholars have come to realise that the myths represented on these sarcophagi are best interpreted as deriving from the Greek tradition.

Chs 4 and 5 are entitled ‘Domestic Art I: Painting’ (74-92) and ‘Domestic Art II: Mosaics and Sculpture’ (93-110). The first of these opens with the familiar four-phase division of Pompeian wall-painting styles but quickly moves to other ideas for classifying the decoration of Pompeian houses. Foremost among these is the notion that wall-paintings were not so much ‘illusory’ in a spatial sense as ‘allusive’ in a class and wealth sense, so that the aim was to evoke the fabulous riches and social distance of Hellenistic kings and other mighty individuals. In other words, a social rather than artistic imperative was determinant once more. Also of note are the findings of Wallace-Hadrill and others about the links that can sometimes be made between the decoration of adjoining rooms, and in general about the inadequacy of the modern ‘public / private’ distinction when contemplating the social activities that took place in the various rooms of a Pompeian house.

The mosaics examined in Ch. 5 derive from Pompeian houses but also from public baths in Ostia. The primary concern, as elsewhere, is with the function of such decoration in the different contexts, and with what might cautiously be said about audience reception. Domestic sculpture is dealt with along similar lines. Previous generations of scholars have been interested in large- and small-scale Roman domestic works for what they might reflect of lost Greek masterpieces. The Doryphoros has become a favourite focus. Yet S shows that variation could be a virtue in the Roman world and that mechanical copying was of little interest (108-10). Accordingly, the interest now is on the use of such sculpture in the serious business of self-presentation and class competition. There seems to be a good deal of potential for such studies in the future.

The sixth and final chapter (111-31) is devoted to later Roman art. Predictably, it commences with a discussion of the Arch of Constantine,
especially the relief sculpture. No more are the short, stumpy, inorganic figures of the later period derided as emblems of decline and decay. Instead, S finds precedents in earlier Italic and provincial art. He also emphasizes the matter of clarity and that the monument works in terms of being 'an imposing and vivid representation of imperial power' (116). The perception of 'decline', therefore, is left to the judgment of the beholder. This is characteristically cautious and admirable as far as it goes, but more could have been said. The perception of decline privileges Greek art (indeed classical Greek art), is based on an organic model of development that is not inevitable, and misses the point that style can be a marker of the social background of the artist. In this case, S is right to dismiss descriptions of the Constantinian reliefs in question as 'plebeian', for this term was coined to imply 'lower-class', 'lesser' and 'inferior'. However, they do exhibit a different style and seem to derive from a different group of artists, who may have been Italic in background and may have specialised previously in sarcophagi and lesser-scale works. The military and social upheavals of the period, and the eastward migration of the imperial court, probably drew Greek artists away from Rome, so that a 'composite' monument of the kind that survives was the absolute best that could be done - more for social than artistic reasons. The remainder of the final chapter discusses Christian art as truly 'Roman' art, and outlines the survival of classical motifs and myths on 'late antique' silverware and mosaics. 'Roman' art, it seems, was always a complex phenomenon and it did not simply die out with the political demise of Rome.

S is to be congratulated. It is hard to imagine that much more could have been done, given the constraints of the series in which this compact book appears. In terms of methodology and selection of basic topics, there is much to praise. Perhaps the relative paucity of illustrations could be emphasized, and the inevitable failure to address in detail certain classes of art, such as coins, lamps, pottery, furniture, jewellery and textiles. The canvas of Roman art is simply too rich. Likewise, architecture is missing, though this is not really surprising. It cries out for separate treatment in the series. The point is that this book can only be introductory, though in that light it has many virtues, and teachers of undergraduates and high school students might profitably employ it in conjunction with a more general textbook treatment.

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