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Review of 'The Making of Medieval Rome: A New Profile of the City, 400–1420 by Hendrik Dey'

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Hendrik Dey, *The Making of Medieval Rome: A New Profile of the City, 400–1420*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2021. Pp. ix + 338 ISBN: 9781108838535

Reviewed by: Dale Kinney, Bryn Mawr College, emerita

Hendrik Dey's "new profile" of Rome in the middle ages is explicitly intended to supersede a forty-year-old classic, *Rome: Profile of a City* by Richard Krautheimer. This is a tricky endeavor, not least because Dey, although an accomplished archaeologist who has already published an important book and several significant articles on medieval Rome, has neither the decades of research and experience nor the eminence attained by Krautheimer when he began his book in 1973, at the age of 76. Dey pulls it off well, approaching his countermodel respectfully and demonstrating that what now appear to be its shortcomings could not be remedied by simple updating; the subject had to be reconceived.

The differences between the books are stark. Krautheimer aimed to write a history "through, rather than of" Rome's churches, houses, and fortifications as they arose within the ancient ruins he defined as the "inheritance." Dey's goal is to reconstruct the changing "lived experience" of the city through an examination of material culture much more broadly defined. Krautheimer's narrative was framed by ideo-political histories in the German tradition of Gregorovius, Schramm, and Caspar. Dey's is shaped by the astonishing spate of Italian archaeological publications since 1980 and the contemporaneous work of social historians like Sandro Carocci. The results are obvious in the Tables of Contents. Krautheimer's begins with Constantine (312) and ends with the decampment of the papacy for Avignon in 1308, with intermediate chapters on such topics as Pope Gregory the Great, the Carolingian renaissance, and the "new rebirth" of Rome in the twelfth century. Dey's divisions sometimes bear political titles as well ("Byzantine Rome"), but the chronology is largely determined by archaeological or

material phases: the transition to the middle ages (401–552, ch. 2); Byzantine political and cultural dominance (552–705, ch. 3); the papal republic (705–882, ch. 4); “The Long Twilight of the Middle Ages” (882–1046, ch. 5). Art historians may chafe at the collapse of the following nearly 400 years into just two blocks (1046–1230, ch. 6, and 1230–1420, ch. 7), especially at the elision of the twelfth century as a distinctive phase of artistic production. It is here that the essential difference between the two profiles comes into sharpest relief: Dey’s is relatively unconcerned with high art and intellectual constructs like the twelfth-century *renovatio*, focusing instead on the *realia* of physical existence: social structure, demographics, and the architectural instantiation of power.

Dey is particularly concerned with demographics, calling them “the single most important problem” for historians of the period covered in ch. 2. On the basis of documents related to the pork dole, he calculates a catastrophic decline in population from about 700,000–750,000 in 367, to half that number fifty years later, to a pitiful 50,000–60,000 around 535. The nadir may have been 20,000–30,000 in the eighth century, after which the numbers slowly climbed to 40,000–80,000 by 1300, only to be halved again by the Black Plague. Regarding the population’s distribution, Dey repeatedly corrects Krautheimer’s notion that it had begun to concentrate in the southern Campus Martius near the Tiber – the so-called *abitato* – as early as the sixth century; in fact, people were spread in “spots” all over the area inside the Aurelian Wall until the second half of the eleventh century, clustered near aqueducts, roads, and around major churches. Readers unfamiliar with the archaeological literature will be amazed to learn of the residential development of the Imperial Fora in the late ninth and tenth centuries, complete with massive earth-moving projects to create arable surfaces. The vitality of secular life in that period of papal degradation is one of the great revelations of post-1980 research.

The chapters from which I learned the most are those on the Byzantine period and on the de facto rule of the barons after 1230. Dey's demonstration that the Byzantine administration was neither an alien power easily brushed off by the popes nor a remote source of artistic influence is transformative. He shows that Rome was authentically Byzantine in every respect: administratively, economically, and culturally, with busy cadres of professional builders and many lay initiatives. His treatment of the barons – a “superelite” of families who used the papacy and the cardinalate to appropriate vast properties within and outside the city – is similarly clarifying. To their well-known economic and martial dominance Dey adds the physical dimension, vividly reconstructing their urban strongholds and their division of the city into clearly defined zones of power.

If there is a weakness, it is in the treatment of art and architectural history, especially in the later chapters. Periodizations are largely conventional; descriptions of churches seem pro forma and are sometimes inaccurate. The author does make good use of two superb new reference works, the chronological corpus of Roman medieval painting and the alphabetical *Kirchen der Stadt Rom im Mittelalter*, currently complete through M; but in the absence of a list of abbreviations, citations of these volumes in the endnotes (as *PMR* and *KSRM*) are inscrutable. Worse, neither is properly credited in the bibliography; *PMR* appears under Maria Andaloro, when the three final volumes were overseen solely by Serena Romano, and *KSRM* (largely the work of P.C. Claussen) is not listed at all.

Its few faults aside, Dey's *New Profile* achieves exactly what it sets out to do: to supplant but also to complement the profile by his great predecessor. Readers interested in ecclesiastical art and architecture still should be sent to Krautheimer, though his account cries out for a radical

revision of its own. For the rest – a thousand years of social, political, economic, architectural, and urban history – readers must now turn to Dey first and foremost.