DOCTORAL THESIS REVIEW

"Gerulata: The lamps. Roman Lamps in a Provincial Context"

Research submitted by Mr. Robert Freer

Candidate to the title of PhD at the Charles University, Prague

Reviewer:
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To be used with all rights and privileges pertaining thereto.
R. Freer's research constitutes, in many aspects, a pioneer work, which will, in our opinion, become a "milestone book" for every scholar desiring to approach a corpus of lamps from a well-defined site or zone in its full richness.

As a matter of fact, much more than being a "common" catalogue of the lamps of a Roman relatively small settlement (Gerulata), R. Freer introduces the reader into the enormous variety of information that can be extracted, with patience, knowledge and a very open-minded approach, even from a "mid-size" corpus (209) of quite modest quality Roman lamps proceeding from a small settlement.

I. THE CATALOGUE

Starting from the catalogue itself, we can underline the accuracy and the completeness of each single monographic notice, fitting not only the highest regular standards adopted in lychnological publications, but providing also, in the short data set under the artifact's image, the provenience on the site area and, for the funerary ones, the nature of the grave's "occupant" when it is known.

Each lamp type is introduced by an accurate description of its characteristics, date range, production areas as well old & recent scholar debates etc. The choice of the author to adopt the broad and internationally known typology of S. Loeschcke, associating it when necessary to other more precise regional typologies, and explaining the reasons of it, is worth to be underlined in a moment when most scholars are still very confused when it comes to chose a primary typology, leading even recently to a huge number of mistakes.

The excellent and comprehensive synthesis following the catalogue and focused on specific and unavoidable lychnological topics, such as the analysis of the grave context and other materials found with the lamp, the discussion on the potter's marks, the analysis of the discus-scenes, is a precious tool for lamp researchers as well as for archaeologists dealing either with the site of Gerulata or with a more micro- or macro-regional approach of Roman ceramics in the middle Danubian area.
II. THE REGIONAL VALUE OF THE RESEARCH

We have to praise the author's choice of this particular corpus. As a matter of fact, the whole Danubian region comprised between Carnuntum and Singidunum (with the exception of Aquincum) has been almost totally neglected since quite a century.

We hence face, here also, a "première" which will be of primordial usefulness for researchers. By assuming the challenge - and successfully achieving it - of devoting a research in a so difficult bibliographical environment, the author assumed, at the beginning of his work, a major risk to end with very modest results.

Only his open-mindedness and his rich knowledge of the actual international bibliography allowed him to overcome all the difficulties linked to this "terra (quasi) incognita".

III. THE INTRODUCTORY AND CONCLUSIVE PARTS

The historical background introducing the lector to the site of Gerulata and its history is remarkable by its synthetic, stylistic and up-to-the-point redaction. The same can be said about the elements gathered in the conclusion. The association of the Classical Archaeology approach (iconographical analysis, behavioral aspects, appropriate use of ancient sources) and the Roman Provincial Archaeology approach (statistics, typological, chronological, geographical classifications and synthetic tables + macro-economic elements such as imports vs. local productions, ceramological considerations etc.) makes of the work a real example of how the lychnological problematic should be dealt in its whole and complex usefulness.

IV. WEAK POINTS

There are no major weak points in any of the parts of the volume. The author's ambition to draw such a 360° debate around a corpus of lamps explains easily - by rational reasons of time - why some pages, mainly in the "history of lamp-making" section are a little bit too briefly resumed.
Maybe some too "strongly affirmative" phrases where a more balanced phraseology would be welcome in the Preface, which is (too) clearly addressed to "Classical Archaeologists". In fact, the author's work is itself a perfect answer to his criticism towards Classical Archaeology weaknesses if applied stricto sensu.

But it is, in our opinion, also a very good lesson for the "Roman Provincial Archaeologists", who excels in the domains of cataloguing, ceramology, socio-behavioral analysis but often lack of the most basic knowledge of Classical Archaeological matters such as history of art and myths, iconography etc.

V. CONCLUSION

Specialist on the very topic of ancient lamps since more than 20 years, and directing PhDs in the field since the last 5, we have not witnessed such a quality research at this stadium of a scholar's curriculum. This is written in full honesty and without any exaggeration.

The lonely similar PhD which has the same quality, but had to be limited by the amount of funds, is the masterpiece of Marcus Heinrich Hermanns, Licht und Lampen im westgrieschen Alltag. Beleuchtungsgerät des 6.-3. Jhs. V. Chr. In Selinunt (PhD Köln, 2004, published Marie Leihdorf Vg., Rahden, 2004).

Elsewhere, we can quote the PhD of Hella Hella Eckardt, Illuminating Roman Britain (PhD Reading, 2000, published Monographies Instrumentum 16, Montagnac 2002) or the PhD-based exhaustive research of Serena Massa, Aeterna Domus. Il complesso funerario di età romana di Lugone (Salò), Museo Civico di Salò, 1997, which has the same spirit yet is not dedicated to lamps only. Both researches, pre-conditioned by the typical forma mentis of the British, respectively Italian schools, do not reach the capillarity and the depth of Mr. Freer's achievement, a perfect mix between the Provincial Roman field archaeologist and the Classical Antiquities specialist.

The exhaustiveness performed in the research is to be found, as far as our knowledge leads us, only in multi-disciplinary team researches on specific archaeological sites. The care taken in illustrations and tables are a plus – often underestimated while it takes a huge amount of time – to underline the most important results and open further researches.
RECOMMENDATION

We unconditionally recommend the approval of the research led by Mr. Frecer for the title of PhD, and suggest, if we may, a Summa cum Laude.

Sibiu, the 24th of August, 2016

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