MARTIN PITTS, *THE ROMAN OBJECT REVOLUTION: OBJECTSCAPES AND INTRA-CULTURAL CONNECTIVITY IN NORTHWEST EUROPE*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2019. Pp. xv + 244, illus., maps, plans. ISBN 9789463728201. £90.00

Since the Romanisation wars of the 1990s, how to understand and explain the changing nature of societies in the Roman provinces has been an ongoing problem for archaeologists. In this rich and lucid book, Martin Pitts offers one template for a new, object-oriented, way forward. In recent years, P. has been one of the principal and most successful advocates for using globalisation theory to understand the Roman empire, and globalising outlooks certainly underpin what he is doing here. But this book is not another battle cry for globalisation; it largely takes for granted that the Roman empire was globalising, and focuses instead on exploring the material consequences – indeed, the material *drivers* – of that globalisation. P., like others associated with the 'material turn' in archaeology, is above all concerned with what objects *do*, and so one of his key questions here is not what provincial 'objectscapes' represent, but rather how they operated, and how the increasing standardisation of objects during the first centuries B.C. and A.D. contributed to societal convergence in the northwest.

To this end, the book focuses on the objects circulating in, as P. puts it, the provincial interface between (what would become) Britannia, Gallia Belgica and Germania Inferior – an area extending from southeast Britain to the Rhineland. The overarching story that emerges is as follows: Beginning in the late Iron Age, the societies of northwest Europe start to converge towards a 'loose' standardisation of objectscapes. We see, for example, strikingly similar repertoires of objects in elite graves across the region. For the most part, however, this standardisation is at the level of object category (e.g. a preference for bowls or jars), rather than involving identical, standardised types. The real 'object revolution' then comes in the Augustan period (*not* in the immediate aftermath of Caesar's conquests), with a take-up both of standardised objects of 'Mediterranean genealogy', as P. puts it, and an explosion of regional pottery types in the form of so-called Gallo-Belgic wares. Sites across the board show a move towards standardised objectscapes, while falling into two distinct categories. The first category aresites, in particular forts and *coloniae*, whose objectscapes are becoming 'deterritorialised' (a rather different, and in P.'s hands more subtle and powerful, concept to 'Romanised'). In the second are sites whose objectscapes continue to be dominated by Gallo-Belgic wares and assemblages with a regional profile. The story for the later Julio-Claudian period is largely one of convergence between these two groups (with the concomitant decline

of Gallo-Belgic wares), as the communities of the northwest recombined and reconfigured object repertoires to suit the needs of their changing societies. The end of the first century then sees both the peak of objectscape homogeneity across the Roman northwest, but also the re-emergence of strong regional patterns in select places (e.g. among the Batavians). For P., these are linked phenomena – globalisation and glocalisation working in tandem.

In addition to P.'s consistently careful and thought-provoking analyses of his datasets, one of the real strengths of *The Roman Object Revolution* is the way in which it succeeds in truly decentring Rome when thinking about provincial society. *Terra sigillata*, for example, is refreshingly treated not as a smoking gun for Romanisation, but as one component of a constantly shifting material package, with the interest lying not in its presence or absence, but in what it is found *with*, *where*, and *when*. In so doing, P. successfully moves us beyond reductive, one-note interpretations of the cultural resonances of different types of objects.

As always with a book of this ambition, there are some gaps and lingering question-marks. There are, for instance, unexplored implications for the fact that most of his data comes from funerary contexts. P. is clear that he is not setting out to understand funerary ritual and the treatment of the body in the Roman northwest, which is fair enough – but nonetheless, those practices will be shaping his dataset, and I would have valued more discussion of that. A bigger question hangs over the use of Alfred Gell's concept of 'inter-artefactual domains', introduced in ch. 1 and deployed throughout the book as an explanation for how objects change. Although P. stresses in ch. 1 that the idea should not be used as a *deus ex machina*, it does start to strike the reader that way, or at leastthe mechanisms by which these domains operated feel underdeveloped. It feels like a next step would be to focus more closely on those mechanisms: if we agree with Gell and P. that objects function within, and are shaped by, inter-artefactual domains, how exactly does that work? What is within the black box? Finally, I remain uncertain about the ways in which globalising outlooks can gloss over the dynamics of imperialism. These, however, are the sorts of questions that arise from scholarship that succeeds, as this book unquestionably does, in pushing our conceptual boundaries and opening up new avenues of thought. To this end, *The Roman Object Revolution* is in the best tradition of Roman provincial archaeology as a playground of ideas, and I am deeply excited to see what comes next.

ELERI COUSINS

Lancaster University

e.cousins@lancaster.ac.uk