

**REMESAL-RODRIGUÍGUEZ, JOSÉ. OLEUM
BAETICUM. ECONOMÍA Y POLÍTICA EM EL IMPERIO
ROMANO. MADRID, REAL ACADEMIA DE LA
HISTORIA, 2024, 620 PP. ISBN 9788415789253.**

Pedro Paulo A. Funari¹

The Spanish Royal History Academy (Real Academia de la Historia) founded in 1738 gathers 36 leading historians in a variety of specialties and is one of the most prestigious scholarly institutions in the historical sciences, including archaeology. Among its activities, such as the interaction with similar institutions in other countries and the participation in the *Union Académique Internationale*, scholarly publications are an outstanding and most enduring endeavor. The *Clave Historial* Series publishes thematic volumes of the members of the academy since 1998, reaching now 50 books dealing with a wide variety of subjects, from Americanist to Arabist studies, not to mention the prevailing Spanish topics. Remesal (Lora del Río, 1948) started as a child in the deep south, Andalusia, and he was lured by the opportunity to go beyond, so that he enrolled in a Jesuit school, in Seville, where he met professor Antonio Blanco-Freijeiro (1923-1991). This early start enabled him to follow a scholarly avenue, in relation to his deep passion, relating to the ancient world, as perceived by the material evidences of the past, as in the case of the huge amount of Roman pottery, amphorae, stamps, among other evidence he was being in touch. This early enticement led Remesal to devote the whole life to

¹ Campinas State University (UNICAMP), Brazil

the subject, as we will see. He got a couple of BAs in Philosophy (1968 and 1973), another one in Geography and History (ancient history, 1975), a PhD in History (1977). Remesal continued his studies as an intern in the prestigious Instituto Rodrigo Caro (1973-75), under Almagro Basch (1911-1984) and Juan Maluquer (1915-1988), and the Escuela Española de Historia y Arqueología de Roma del CSIC (1976), then Consiglio Nazionale delle Ricerche (Roma) in 1977 and the Alexander Von Humboldt Stiftung in Heidelberg, supervised by professor Géza Alföldy (1935-2011) and supported also by Berndmark Heukemes (1924-2009). Remesal served as a resident scholar at the French Casa de Velázquez, Madrid, in the 1973/4, under Michel Ponsich (1927-2010). As early as 1977, Remesal got his PhD in history, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, supervised by José María Blázquez (1926-2016), becoming lecturer in the same university soon after, before reaching the professorship at University of Barcelona, in 1988.

Remesal's *cursus honorum*, reveals a lot about his perspectives and standpoints. Like pope Francis, Cardinal Borgoglio, Remesal comes from the end of the world, Andalusia, the poorest part of Spain, when he was born. This is not to be underestimated, for the practice in the world is his main tenet: life in the world, experience. Since his youth days in Lora del Río, Seville province, Remesal was interested in the ancient world and archaeology and as early as 1964 he collected some 500 amphora stamps from La Catria, an ancient Roman pottery kiln, collection now kept in the Archaeological Museum at Seville. In 1977 Remesal stayed in Rome and studied Roman cursive paleography with Emilio Rodríguez Almeida (1930-2016), Silvio Panciera (1933-2016) and Heikki Solín (1938-).

During this scholarly stay in Heidelberg, 1979-1980, Remesal started searching Dressel 20 amphorae produced in Baetica and founded in the

German limes, and centered around the analysis of the administrative structure of food supply to Rome and the Roman army (p. 63). He got his professorship at Barcelona University in 1988, where he founded the Ceipac (Centre for the study of provincial interdependency in the classical antiquity) and in 1993 the now prestigious book series *Instrumenta*, now with 86 volumes. The excavations at the Testaccio in Rome, since 1989, has increased exponentially our knowledge about the ancient world. This trajectory, mentioned in the prologue (pp. 11-30), explains the volume and is mentioned here for a better understanding of what follows.

Remesal has studied and published on a series of subjects, including notably on historiography (p. 195; 265). But this volume centers around his main focus on the economy and politics in the Roman Empire, studied through olive oil production, distribution and consumption springing from southern Spain. It gathers 35 chapters from 1979 to 2023, preceded by a foreword and followed by an epilogue. The original papers were published in several languages and are now available in Spanish in a single volume, enabling an easier access to his complex and original interpretation of the Roman economy and politics during the Principate. Before going to the historical subjects discussed by Remesal, let's turn to some theoretical issues permeating his standpoints.

Experience in the world is the first main tenet. Experience comes from ex- + *perior (“try, dare, risk”), itself from Proto-Indo-European *per- (“to go through”) or from pariō (“to give birth to, bear”), from Proto-Indo-European *perh3- (“to provide, produce”). *Experiri* thus means at the same time to do, to go through and to test. It is related to ancient Greek πρόπος, passage; πείρα, experience, and ancient Latin *porta*, *portus*, *peritus*, *periculum*. In German *fahren*, *erfahren*, in English fare, ferry, to try a thing; viz., either by way of testing or of attempting it (Charlton T. Lewis, Charles Short, A Latin

Dictionary, s.v. *experior*). Experience is thus action in the world, a journey into the practice and reality, but it is also to test hypotheses and to trying interpretations from through the study of the material world. This is stressed time and again throughout the volume, in relation to premodern ways of doing things, from pottery running to traditional agricultural practices (p. 213; 506). This move may be related to the anthropological and ethnographic (p. 49) approach relating to techniques of the body (Marcel Mauss 1872-1950), and gestures (André Lérois-Gourhan 1911-1986), different in the past (Paul Veyne 1930- 2022), accessible only by provisional hypotheses. The second term of the motto “experience in the world” is what to understand by world. The world is understood as the material world, in the shape of archaeological evidence taken as an independent (p. 583) and ever-growing source (p. 211). This follows Mikhail Rostovtzeff (1870-1952) earlier and Geza Alföldy later on in taking the archaeological evidence as key (p. 113). The materiality of the past is available directly and may complement, but also contradict the textual tradition. One of the implications of this is the fact that interpretation is ever-changing and that things and people are always entangled (Ian Hodder 1942-). Then there is a down-top analysis, starting with the ordinary and mundane, as the amphorae and inscriptions present on them, including enslaved and freed people (pp. 101-103), tenant farmers (*coloni*) also studied as social actors with their own agency.

As a consequence, another tenet is micro (p. 43; 123; 179) and macro or global (p. 75; 145) analysis in tandem. Micro history is usually associated with Carlo Ginzburg (1939-) or Emmanuel Le Roy Ladurie (1929-2023), and rightly so, but micro is a key feature of any archaeological endeavor, for archaeology is quintessentially the study of ordinary artefacts or *instrumentum domesticum*, as it is known in classical archaeology and the *instrumentum*

scriptum (p. 392). The other side of the coin is macro and Remesal always tries to bridge the micro/macro divide, overcoming it, again like Paul Veyne. Transcending this divide means studying documents and producing general interpretive moves, provisional, as it is inevitable, but still a step forward. Then there is a transdisciplinary approach: philosophical, philological, historical, archaeological, epigraphic, but also including the hard sciences (p. 297; 299; 584). This relates to the attention paid to the discussion of the earlier scholarly debates, so important for understanding the emergence (*Entsehung*) and provenience (*Herkunft*) of concepts and interpretive frameworks: such as the invention of modern archaeological survey by Dressel as early as 1878 (p. 450; 550) or the Bayesian econometrics as a way of accessing a different rationality (p. 595).

Now, turning to the main topics discussed, it is worth starting by the perspective from periphery, not the center. Due to several reasons, the Roman empire has been often considered from the center, as in the famous Ranuccio Bianchi Bandinelli's *L'arte romana nel centro del potere* (1969). There are three aspects in this traditional interpretive move, starting with the notion that power is a top-down force and this is in tune with the idea that controlling the state and its power it is possible to impose power relations trickling down. This a modernist, Illuminist approach, implying the control of the center of power and forging out a project of future from this new position, as in the case of the French Revolution, but even more so in the Russian Revolution. French historian François Hartog proposed that this modern approach implied progress and French historian Michel Foucault, among others, questioned this as teleological and underplaying multidirectional power relations. Power is everywhere and comes from everywhere. In this intellectual context, instead of explaining power relations in the Roman Principate from the sole center,

a provincial standpoint enabled new analytical perspectives to develop. Remesal centered in the Roman province of Baetica and in its relationship with provinces and Rome, showing interdependency (p. 78; 83; 209; pp. 231-235), instead of simple centralized power. At the same time, agency by locals, elites or otherwise, is also stressed.

Why Baetica? First, for it has produced unique archaeological evidence since the 19th c. and then for the province was key for functioning the Empire since the late Republic. Archaeological evidence started to be studied in the late 19th century at the Guadalquivir valley, in southern Spain, and in Rome, notably with the activities of Georges Bonsor (1855-1930) (p. 146) in Spain and Heinrich Dressel (1845-1920) at the Monte Testaccio and elsewhere in Rome. In Southern Spain, amphora stamps were founded in high numbers, coming from ancient kilns at the banks of the Guadalquivir (ancient Baetis) and the Genil (ancient Singilis). At the same time, Dressel studied thousands of amphora stamps and painted inscriptions bore in the newly labelled Dressel 20 amphorae. Dressel soon understood that the spherical Dressel 20 were from Southern Spain, carried olive-oil, and were in production for a long time (at the Testaccio, mid-2nd to mid-3rd c AD). This early archaeological evidence was followed by an every increasing one. In Southern Spain, since the 1960s, hundreds of archaeological sites (pottery kilns, farmsteads, towns, among others) and thousands of artefacts (amphora sherds, stamps, inscriptions, among others), most of them dating from the Principate, but also including earlier and later periods. The modernization of Spain, particularly since the 1960, contributed to a continuous and ever-increasing data producing. Testaccio has been studied again since the 1970's and even more so when the excavations were set up by Blázquez and Remesal in 1989. The publication of

several volumes of excavations reports and hundreds of studies has produced an unparalleled corpus of evidence (p. 164).

Remesal has contributed a lot, in the last decades to increase this corpus and to study it. He stresses that the Roman province of Southern Spain (Hispania Ulterior, first, Baetica, later) was key to Caesar in his rise during the civil wars. Lucius Cornelius Balbus Maior (p. 220), from Gades (Cádiz) was the first Roman consul (40 BC) born out of the Italian Peninsula, possibly of Phoenician descent, and close ally of Caesar. For a couple of centuries Spain was key to the success of the Principate (p. 445), followed by a growing African acme and later accession to central power, substituting the term *princeps* (first) for *dominus* (slave owner): from an open society (p. 594), with social mobility (p. 104), to an increasingly interventionist one (p. 373). The urbanization in Spain was followed by another one in Africa (pp. 24-25), a policy of Spanish emperors Trajan and Hadrian leading to African colonate (p. 139). Remesal takes the Roman world as multinational, shaped by aggregation (p. 222), as mentioned by emperor Claudius, as in the Lyon Table.

The key to Roman economic, social and political history is set at the control of food supply or *Annona*. Pompeius (106-48 BC) most glorious act was the control of the *cura annonae* (Plin. Pan. 29,1) (p. 354), understanding *Annona* as means of subsistence, beyond cereals, and as a general term for food supply (p. 109; 126; 329). The main thesis is that the *praefectura annonae* was concerned with the supply to the citizens of the city of Rome and the military, since probably Augustus and his reorganization of the administration. According to Suetonius (Aug. 42, 3):

impetum se cepisse scribit frumentationes publicas in perpetuum abolendi, quod earum fiducia cultura agrorum cessaret: neque tamen perseuerasse, quia certum haberet posse per ambitionem quandoque restitui. atque ita posthanc rem temperauit, ut non minorem aratorum ac negotiantium quam populi rationem deduceret.

Remesal prefers to translate *aratores* by provincials, understanding food producers anywhere in the Empire (p. 599). This delicate equilibrium was kept during a long period, from then on until the late Second Century AD, when the state started to serve the state itself (p. 518). If history is to raise issues, *histoire problème*, if Remesal came to propose this overall interpretive scheme this was due in large measure to his study and interpretation of the archaeological evidence. The epigraphy of Dressel 20 amphorae was the main, if not the only one, to set Remesal in motion to propose daring and innovative interpretive frameworks. From the start, he studied the *minuzie epigraphiche*, proposing the use of the *tria nomina* way of ordering stamp letters, and studying stamps, *tituli picti* and graffiti at the same time (p. 26). The ensuing huge corpus of studies, not only by his former students, now leading scholars themselves, but even by scholars disputing aspects of his interpretation, attests to the relevance and endurance of his contribution to the understanding of the Roman Empire at its apex.

Turning again to the end of the world, where I am, the concluding remarks must refer to legacy, to the future. We are all provisional, coming from the ancestors, but sometimes able to help and shape the future. This move may include actions and interpretations, but also those who benefitted their bringing up, disciples or otherwise, but always related to Remesal, and this is astonishing, considering the wide range of his reach. This volume enables us to gather how the Roman Empire may be seen in different ways, from the

Resenha

center, or from the periphery. Periphery and center not only in ancient times, but in modern ones. Center is always provisional, as it is periphery. Spain has been the center of the world, in the late 16th and early 17th centuries, much less so later on. Germany, periphery for a long time, has been the leading European center, since, at least, the last several decades. Remesal studied the Spanish archaeological evidence in Germany and produced innovative interpretations. Coming from Brazil, again from the end of the world, I was able to study the unique evidence kept in Britain thanks to the same kindness of the custodians, in my case British, in the case of Remesal, German. Reading this volume, anyone will consider that everything is possible, and this is no mean feat. And there is still a lot to do (p. 122; 612).