

E.L. Will Book Review of
Il Monte Testaccio: Ambiente, Storia, Material
By Emilio Rodriguez Almeida

(Studi e Materiali dei Musei e Monumenti Comunale di Roma X Ripartizione Antichita
Belle Arti e Prolebemi di Cultura.)

Pp 281, figs. 99, maps 2. Edizioni Quasar di Severino Tognon, Rome 1984.

Looming just inside the Aurelian Wall on the city's southern perimeter, Monte Testaccio has been called the "Eighth Hill of Rome." An artificial ancient accumulation of broken shipping amphoras, its very mass has discouraged study. But with the current accelerating awareness that coarse pottery is an historical source, the need to study Monte Testaccio has taken on a sense of urgency. In this long awaited book, Emilio Rodriguez Almeida combines his close knowledge of the hill, of the Roman amphora fragments that compose it, and of the *Forma Urbis Marmorea* to reconstruct the story of the Emporium of Rome in all its complexity. Testaccio is the hub of the book (thus its title), but understanding the monumental dump necessitates an examination not only of its chronology and structure, insofar as its basically unexcavated state permits conclusions, but also of the surrounding area and indeed of Rome's port-system as a whole. All this the author achieves with pronounced success. At last Testaccio is on the map. Its importance to Roman economic history will now be understood by a much wider audience of archaeologists and historians.

This is three books in one, a synthesis of Rodriguez Almeida's many recent publications on Testaccio and its amphoras and the Emporium, an illustration of how the publications interrelate, and a presentation of important new evidence. Initially we are given a history of the Tiber Emporium, going back to its neonatal development in the area of the Forum Boarium and its eventual move in the early 2nd c. B.C. to a point south of the Servian Wall, outside the Porta Trigemina. Changes in the area during the Claudian and Trajanic periods are seen in the light of developments at Ostia and Puteoli. The Emporium responded to the rhythms of Roman trade, its installations and administrations changing as political and economic conditions evolved.

The general outlines of Testaccio's development in the Emporium have long been known, but Rodriguez Almeida's informed summary they come into clearer focus. Not before the Augustan Age, he feels did the hill begin its slow growth. The core of the hill, indeed almost its entire bulk, lies unexcavated, but wine caves dug deeply into its perimeter at ground level during the late 17th and early 18th cs. may well account for the early amphora fragments (pieces belonging to the 1st century A.C.) found scattered in the surrounding area, notably in the former Orti Torlonia. Whatever its initial date, the hill grew as empty olive oil amphoras, 80-85% of them from southern Spain, Rodriguez Almeida feels, and the rest African, were broken and discarded there. The author estimates that 53 million amphoras were dumped on the hill in its life of about 270 years. (That would represent, he tentatively suggest, over 3

billion, 735 million kilograms of olive oil, or 22.5 kilograms per person per year, oil having been used for so many other purposes than eating in antiquity.) The jars had been brought up the Tiber from Ostia, their contents were transferred to other containers in the Emporium, and the amphoras that could not be otherwise reused were smashed and dumped. The hill grew slowly and carefully from age to age, its greatest height reaching 49 meters. Still visible traces of lime poured on the fragments in antiquity hastened decay of organic matter and kept down odor, the author suggests. So solid was the construction of the hill, so careful the manner in which successive generations plotted its growth, that even the depredations and indignities imposed on it by later centuries have left it relatively unscathed. It has been used, through the ages, for games, for religious observances, for target practice, and, in the Second World War, even for an anti-aircraft installation. The earth removed from the Circus Maximus when it was excavated by Mussolini's archaeologists was, incredibly, dumped on parts of the S and W slopes of Testaccio, resulting in archaeological contamination of these areas. Still the hill has preserved its identity and continued to tower above its surrounds, awaiting an age in which its historical significance would be recognized.

That age has come. It began over a century ago, actually, with the work of the great German scholar, Heinrich Dressel. Dressel's pioneering publications on Monte Testaccio and on the Castra Praetoria set modern Roman amphora studies on their present course. Rodriguez Almeida's work on Testaccio has in its way been equally pioneering. He knows the site and the surrounding area intimately, and his knowledge of the Spanish jars that largely compose it (Dressel's Form 20) is unsurpassed. Dressel began the process of interpreting and systematizing the epigraphical material that is found so abundantly on the fragments. Rodriguez Almeida has continued Dressel's work, and thanks to their combined efforts the difficult painted inscriptions and graffiti are yielding the most surprising information about merchants' names, the weights and capacities of the amphoras, the system of controls governing the trade, and a wide variety of other topics. A growing list of female names, for example, refers, Rodriguez Almeida thinks, either to producers or to buyers of crops. One might add that we now know, too, that manufacturers' stamps on jars of Dressel 20 also sometimes name women, perhaps more frequently than the abbreviations used in many stamps permit us to realize. Such women would apparently be provincial equivalents of the businesswoman known to have been active in Roman Italy during the Empire, in pottery manufacturing, shipping and other areas.

The author devotes almost a third of the present volume to the painted inscriptions and graffiti from Testaccio. Less attention is given to the manufacturers' stamps, which he will treat in detail in a forthcoming volume. The stamps have, in any case, been much more thoroughly studied, since Dressel's time, than the other epigraphical evidence. The Baetican stamps, much less perishable than painted inscriptions, are found throughout the Roman world, whereas it is Testaccio that is our chief source of knowledge about the other inscriptions. Stamps found at the dozens of amphora manufacturing sites along the Guadalquivir River are, in the hands of such scholars

as Michel Ponsich and Jose Remesal Rodriguez, helping to identify these sites and to document at its source the tremendous development of the Baetican olive oil industry, just as Testaccio documents it at one of its destinations. In Spain, too, as at Testaccio, much work remains to be done, since the Spanish kilns will have to be excavated before their histories are fully known. In his discussion of the stamps here, the author confines himself to general remarks about the shapes, contents, and positions of the Spanish stamps. A useful list of African stamps from Testaccio is appended.

In concluding remarks, Rodriguez Almeida looks forward to the formation of an archaeological park in the Emporium and to an eventual international effort to excavate the rich history that lies buried in Testaccio. The present book, gracefully written and handsomely illustrated, is a worthy reflection of his own extraordinary efforts toward reaching that goal. It foreshadows, one hopes, their eventual success. Monte Testaccio is the great ledger of Rome's Emporium. Closer study of the hill will help us determine primary facts about the city's economic life and will thereby put into clearer perspective the political and social conditions with which business and trade are so closely intertwined.

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*This is a book review published in the American Journal of Archaeology in Volume 90, full citation below. It is made available on the E.L. Will memorial website with the permission of the American Journal of Archaeology.

Will, E.L. 1986. Review of *Il Monte Testaccio: Ambiente, Storia, Materiali*, by Emilio Rodríguez Almeida. *American Journal of Archaeology* 90:128-129.