ROMA

A. ZACCARIA RUGGIU, *MORE REGIO VIVERE. IL BANCHETTO ARISTOCRATICO E LA CASA ROMANA DI ETÀ ARCAICA* (Quaderni di Eutopia 4). Rome: Edizioni Quasar, 2003. Pp. 533, 121 pls. ISBN 88–7140–207–3. €65.00.

A book that strings together all the various strands of evidence on the aristocratic banquet in Archaic Italy is a welcome piece of scholarship. Although the title of the book suggests Archaic Rome as the centre of the author's enquiry, glancing at the table of contents in fact highlights Etruria, as a wider and fundamental context of comparison with Rome. The introduction and ch. 1 introduce, respectively, the main questions of the book and an analysis of the ancient sources on the banquet. Whilst the primary concern of the book seems here to be the origins of the space devoted to the banquet in the Roman house of the second century B.C., the issue that pervades the remainder of the book is the following: how to explain the caesura, in the history of the Roman banquet, that occurs between the end of the monarchy when the Archaic banquet 'disappears' and the second century B.C. when the banquet 'reappears' following Rome's conquest of Greece and Asia Minor? The institutional nature of the banquet and its dependency upon the ideology of aristocratic groups in Rome as in Etruria are deemed as the reasons behind the visibility and occultation of this ritual of conviviality at different times during the Archaic period when the oscillation of the pendulum of political rule and growing socio-political tensions eventually led to the fall of the monarchy and the establishment of *isonomia* as the ideological stance of the new oligarchy of the Republic.

Ch. 2 treats the origins of the banquet as institution from Homer to the Orientalizing period in Tyrrhenian Italy and, at the same time, gives a full account of the various interpretations that have been offered on the banquet both in Greece and in Tyrrhenian Italy to date. Particular attention is devoted to explaining the shift that occurred between the seated and the recumbent banquet and its social implications, and the differences between the Greek and Italic cultural context including the participation and visibility of women at the banquet — all themes that have already been tackled rather exhaustively by scholars of Greece and Italy alike from the 1970s onwards.

Chs 3 and 4 are devoted, respectively, to the banquet in Etruria and the banquet in Rome and Latium: both examine closely the archaeological evidence for the banquet from key sites, including some recently published sites such as Casale Marittimo near Volterra, and the Archaic houses on the northern slopes of the Palatine excavated by A. Carandini and P. Carafa. In these chapters, beside the sites, the Archaic architectural terracottas from both Etruria and Rome take the lion's share of the author's attention since, as the two following chapters, 5 and 6, show, the

use and the context and modes of display of these terracottas are crucial for understanding the politico-ideological shifts amongst the ruling Roman élites that ultimately led to the fall of the monarchy. Thus, ch. 5 illustrates how the policies of Servius Tullius' reign, such as the military and census reforms and the new organization of the city by tribes, were aimed at curbing gentilicial forms of power within the city, and therefore had a profound effect on aristocratic customs including the banquet: hence, the disappearance of banqueting scenes from the terracottas of this period. The following phase of rule of the Tarquins when the gentilicial ideology and the aristocratic values of *sodalitas* were revived under the reign of L. Tarquinius Superbus is examined in ch. 6: here, the author examines the latest finds from Carandini's excavation of the Palatine houses and the uncertainties surrounding the excavators' interpretations particularly in regard to the origins of the *atrium* house.

The following chapter contains further observations on the reinstatement of banqueting scenes on the architectural terracottas of this period, as well as an analysis of the opposed ideologies of political rule — tyranny as exemplified by L. Tarquinius' reign and oligarchic rule — that developed in this phase of political conflict ending with the fall of the monarchy, as reflected in the two opposed myths of Mezentius and Aeneas. That the conflict was also one of civilizations — Etruscan versus Roman/Latin — is crucial for the history of the banquet, since by the early Republic the 'ideology of the banquet' becomes an Etruscan one. More on the difference in the treatment of women in Etruria and Rome ends ch. 7. The final chapter appraises all these changes in relation to the transformation of domestic spaces, and this involves a discussion on the origins of the *atrium* house, and the 'disappearance' of a designated banqueting space in the Roman house at the end of the sixth century B.C. as a result of the establishment of *isonomia* and the rejection of the gentilicial ideology and its institutions. Although the author's conclusions rest on her main arguments that she intimates at the beginning — the obliteration of the banquet linked to the end of the monarchy and its restoration with the advent of Asiatic *luxuria* in the second century B.C. — the author offers no real concluding section to the book. This is a pity, given the enormous amount of material and the variety of interpretations that she aims to gather. Some proper concluding remarks would have helped bind together the material discussed, since the greatest quality of the book lies exactly in compiling the entirety of previous and most recent studies on the Archaic banquet in Greece and in Italy. At first glance this might seem an unnecessary exercise given the enormous quantities of publications on the subject, yet precisely because of these large quantities the book is a useful tool for study. This is enhanced by a comprehensive collection of illustrations with detailed drawings and maps.

Yet, the book is not without problems. At first sight, the reader feels that the material is examined in a very unstructured way with the result that several pages are filled with many and frankly frustrating repetitions. This, however, may have to do with poor editing work. Another poor feature of the book that strikes the reader at times is a crude, seemingly undigested mode of presenting other scholars' views, almost as a list of viewpoints with little criticism in the exposition of such views.

Perhaps the most serious criticism that may be made concerns a matter of overall interpretation of the central problem — the disappearance of the aristocratic banquet and the curb on aristocratic consumption as a politico-ideological shift in Rome — in the ancient sources. The author finds a correspondence between the ancient sources and the archaeological evidence on this problem that cannot be fully corroborated. The archaeological desert in fifth-century Rome and the Italic peninsula as a whole hinders a clear-cut visibility of transition from the sixth century that the author too readily accepts in her reliance upon written sources. Isolated pieces of evidence dated to the fifth century B.C., *in primis* the Auditorium villa which is surprisingly not even mentioned in the book, are a stark reminder of realities far more complex than ancient authors reveal. It is therefore rather surprising not to find anywhere in the book, not even in the chapters that analyse the ancient sources and the events surrounding the reign of Servius Tullius and L. Tarquinius, even the slightest intimation that certain events influencing the visibility/invisibility of the aristocratic banquet, such as the Servian reforms or even the expulsion of the kings from Rome, may be purely a product of the ways in which the ancient authors represented and imagined the political events of this time.

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