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La Necropoli Etrusca di Casale Marittimo.

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La Necropoli Etrusca di Casale Marittimo.

Electa, Milano 1999.

Pp. 103, figs. 99, many in color.

by P. Gregory Warden

The finds from Etruscan necropolis of Casa Nocera at Casale Marittimo are truly extraordinary and are beautifully presented in this catalogue, issued to coincide with an exhibit that took place at the Florence Archaeological Museum from June 21 to September 23, 2001. Casale Marittimo is a site in the Cecina valley, between Volterra and the sea, that flourished in the Orientalizing period. This area is rich in settlements of the eighth and seventh centuries B.C., as evidenced by previous discoveries of a tholos tomb at Casale Marittimo (dismantled, moved, and reconstructed in the garden of the Florence Archaeological Museum in 1901) and by such iconic images of late Villanovan art as the urn from nearby Montescudaio, with its unique sculptural recreation of a Villanovan funerary banquet. The new finds from the site live up to the standards of past discoveries.

The catalogue begins with a brief and very general introduction of the Orientalizing period in the Volterrano and the Cecina valley. More interesting is the next section on the area of Casalvecchio, the settlement connected to the necropolis of Casa Nocera. The summary is brief and tantalizing, and one hopes for a more scholarly publication. Excavations that took place here in the 1960s are still unpublished, but a more modern excavation campaign was undertaken in 1989, with satisfying results: the discovery of an eighth-century hut village, an acropolis with structural remains, and two Orientalizing buildings. In the earlier of these two structures were found incised and inscribed bucchero comparable to vases found in elite tombs at Monteriggioni and Vetulonia; this building has been identified as a Regia. The later structure had fictile decoration in the form of gorgon antefixes and seems to have been abandoned in the early 6th century; it was destroyed and rebuilt, but now without the antefixes. The settlement seems to have continued after the abandonment of this second Orientalizing building. While the discoveries from Casalvecchio are not nearly as spectacular (are they ever?) as the finds from the necropolis of Casa Nocera, this is extremely important new information for early settlement in northern Etruria. Further excavation and timely publication will be eagerly awaited.

Since this book is an exhibition catalogue, it makes sense that most of the attention goes to the funerary remains, for they are the ones that are visually substantive. The necrop-

olis of Casa Nocera rests on a small hill near the settlement and is comprised of ten tombs that are said to have belonged to two generations of a single family. Documented within this discrete group is a fundamental fact of life in the social development of Orientalizing Etruria, the change in funerary ritual from cremation within a stone-lined tomb (Tomb A), to inhumation in fossa tombs, to a full stone-lined chamber tomb. Added to this kind of information is the extraordinary nature of finds that include spectacular bronzes: vases, implements, ornaments, and weapons; in other words, the full paraphernalia of the Orientalizing elites. Most unusual are the bronze adzes, long-handled weapons (or probably at this point more status indicators than actual weapons) revetted with sheet bronze and encrusted with a row of bronze water birds. The list of finds is extensive, and only the most notable ones are documented or illustrated in this publication, but especially impressive is the careful and loving conservation process and the skill of the conservators of the Gabinetto del Restauro of the Florence Archaeological Museum. Many of these objects simply would not have survived in lesser hands, and it is particularly sad to note that the Gabinetto was closed down shortly after this exhibit. Also impressive in terms of the archaeological process is information on skeletal, faunal, and floral remains, information that all too often has been neglected in Italian funerary archaeology. Noteworthy are the well-preserved fragments of linen (a shroud?) in which was wrapped the funerary urn of Tomb A. Also fascinating is the food that was consigned to the deceased in their journey to the afterlife: hazelnuts, pomegranates, apples, and grapes were all found in Tomb A. Incense was found in two of the tombs, and a honeycomb was included in that fascinating Tomb A.

The Florence exhibit was beautifully presented, with careful attention to archaeological documentation that brought out the important issues of gender, status, and social development in the Orientalizing period, arguably the formative period of Etruscan society, culture, and art. This is why so much of the material in this show is deeply interesting, because it documents the formation of so much that will be taken for granted in later Etruria, not just archaeologically but art historically as well. What is important here is not just the splendor of the remains, but the inexorable need in Orientalizing Etruria (and in other parts of the Mediterranean as well) for greater display and increased monumentality, a need for physical testament to the increasing social and economic power of the Etruscan elites. The singular contribution of the Florence exhibit in this regard was the presentation of two stone standing figures that were unfortunately found in private hands at Casale Marittimo, but are said to come from the Casa Nocera necropolis. Unfortunately the excavations could not confirm the find spot, for no statuary fragments were forthcoming in the systematic excavation of the necropolis. If there is ever a case that attests to the damage perpetrated by illegal excavation, this is it, for the statues are a rare instance of Etruscan monumental figural statuary of Orientalizing date. Examples of this kind of art can be counted on one hand, and the two figures from Casale Marittimo are fascinating because of their style, costume, hair style, gestures, and poses. Only the broader questions are touched on in this book, and unfortunately only one view is presented of each statue. There are no back views that show the particular treatment of the hair braid of each of the figures. Those fortunate enough to have seen the exhibit will be able to make do with the illustrations, but anyone who has not seen the statues and tries to figure out the details from the description will be frustrated.

Thus, while there is a great deal of information in the catalogue, many of the details of the statues, of the settlement, and even of the tomb groups will only be forthcoming in a proper scholarly publication. In fact, even much of the information that was presented in the exhibit labels will not, alas, be found in this book.

Especially useful in the exhibit apparatus were narrative description of some of the tombs and their contents, as well as conclusions about the sex of the individuals, their status, and the family relationships. It should also be noted that a CD-ROM of the same title as this catalogue was issued for the exhibit. It, like the catalogue, is extremely hard to find and many of those of us who signed up to receive it during the exhibit never heard about it again. Such is not an uncommon story for Italian exhibitions, but it is a great shame in this case, for the exhibit was of great importance, and this catalogue deserves to be made available to a wider audience.

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