

2011

## Review of Nancy T. de Grummond and Ingrid Edlund-Berry (eds.), *The Archaeology of Sanctuaries and Ritual in Etruria*

Gretchen Meyers

*Franklin and Marshall College*, [gretchen.meyers@fandm.edu](mailto:gretchen.meyers@fandm.edu)

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/rasenna>

---

### Recommended Citation

Meyers, Gretchen (2012) "Review of Nancy T. de Grummond and Ingrid Edlund-Berry (eds.), *The Archaeology of Sanctuaries and Ritual in Etruria*," *Rasenna: Journal of the Center for Etruscan Studies*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 4.  
Available at: <http://scholarworks.umass.edu/rasenna/vol3/iss1/4>

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the CES Electronic Resources at ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. It has been accepted for inclusion in *Rasenna: Journal of the Center for Etruscan Studies* by an authorized editor of ScholarWorks@UMass Amherst. For more information, please contact [scholarworks@library.umass.edu](mailto:scholarworks@library.umass.edu).

**The Archaeology of Sanctuaries and Ritual in Etruria.** Edited by NANCY T. DE GRUMMOND and INGRID EDLUND-BERRY. (Journal of Roman Archaeology Supplementary Series Number 81.) Portsmouth, RI: Journal of Roman Archeology, 2011. Pp. 167. ISBN: 978-1-8878289-81-6.

Reviewed by GRETCHEN MEYERS, *Franklin & Marshall College*

This book is a welcome addition to the ample scholarship on Etruscan religion.<sup>1</sup> Its particular contribution is its focus on the spaces in which both communal and individual religious actions took place. The interpretation of Etruscan ritual in its spatial environment has often been taken to refer to architectural elements such as temples and altars. The editors of this volume make clear, however, that their concern is the sanctuary writ large and all objects and activities within its boundaries. Such a comprehensive view, which reanimates sanctuary life in terms of structure and participation, is relatively rare in current Etruscan scholarship.

The book is also noteworthy as a compilation of recent archaeological discoveries at important sanctuary sites, some in English for the first time. As such the volume is a valuable comparative tool highlighting parallels in ritual practice that may not be immediately obvious when published in disparate venues. For example, read together the first four essays in the volume — dealing with Campo della Fiera, Tarquinia, Poggio Colla and Cetamura — provide interesting insights into the life of a sanctuary, particularly in terms of the practice of reuse, burial and memorializing sacred objects and places from earlier rituals. At the same time, as pointed out by de Grummond in the volume's conclusion, obvious variation abounds in Etruscan religious experience, in social and economic dimensions, as well as regional differences.

The genesis of the book was a colloquium on Etruscan sanctuaries and ritual at the AIA in Chicago in 2008. Given that such colloquia can sometimes lack breadth or cohesiveness due to the challenges of organizing a limited number of papers into the allotted time, this collection is remarkable in its broad overview of the topic. The volume is divided between essays dealing with new archaeological evidence from excavations in progress (Stopponi, Bagnasco Gianni, Warden, and de Grummond) and essays focused more broadly on different aspects of ritual practice within Etruscan sanctuaries (Rask, Nagy and Pierracini). A bibliography on Etruscan sanctuaries, organized by site, at the end of the volume, provides much for further investigation of the sites not included here. The JRA Supplement series is an appropriate venue for a collection of this size. It is heartening to see an exclusively Etruscan-oriented volume in the JRA supplement series for the first time.

Edlund-Berry's introduction lays out the volume's dual focus of sanctuary spaces and the activities within them. Her essay is a useful summary of scholarship on Etruscan sanctuaries and the problems of definition that often accompany the study

---

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, de Grummond and Simon 2006, and van der Meer 2010.

of the physical space of religion. Long dominated by the funerary realm, the field of Etruscan archaeology did not direct specific focus to sanctuaries, as differentiated from other types of non-funerary sites, until G. Colonna's important catalog, *Santuari d'Etruria*, in 1985 — a work to which this book owes a huge debt. Like the 1985 catalog Edlund-Berry begins with terminology and the various components necessary in delineating a "sanctuary." She advances the earlier discussion by arguing that the problems in defining Etruscan sanctuaries and sanctuary spaces go hand in hand with problems in defining the 'sacred' in the context of Etruscan culture (9). She points out that when we ignore the inherent ambiguities arising from the Etruscan intersection of public and religious life, we overlook instances of Etruscan ritual that may not be immediately obvious in the archaeological record or may have been practiced in alternative spaces (10). This broad view opens the door for the comprehensive presentation of Etruscan ritual behaviors that follows in the subsequent essays.

The first four essays offer new discoveries and interpretation from four important Etruscan sanctuaries: Stopponi on Campo della Fiera at Orvieto, Bagnasco Gianni on the Ara della Regina at Tarquinia, Warden on Poggio Colla, and de Grummond on Cetamura del Chianti. Stopponi on Campo della Fiera is an extremely useful update on excavations at the site identified as a possible location of the federal sanctuary of the Etruscans, the *Fanum Voltumnae*. The essay, largely an English translation of material previously published in Italian,<sup>2</sup> covers several areas of the complex site, which has produced material culture ranging from the Villanovan through the Medieval periods. Most attention is directed toward a central zone, with a sacred precinct containing a small temple erected between the 4<sup>th</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> centuries B.C.E. The precinct provides vital evidence of ritual activity into the Imperial period, including well-presented examples of a *donarium*, a thesaurus and altars. Particularly noteworthy is a quadrangular structure in which sanctuary material, including ceramics, molded blocks and bases, was deposited at various points, attesting to the longevity and diversity of ritual action in the sanctuary. An appendix provides an intriguing, if speculative, reconstruction of an inscribed base with a votive dedication from an Archaic freedwoman. The value of this essay is lessened slightly through difficulty in deciphering the few plans provided. Given the complexity of the site and its stratigraphy greater clarity and magnification in the illustrations would have been welcome.

Bagnasco Gianni on the Ara della Regina also offers new insights about an Etruscan sanctuary of great renown. Long recognized for its imposing temple with marvelous 4<sup>th</sup> century BCE sculptural decoration of winged horses, the Ara della Regina was likely one of the most sacred locations in ancient Tarquinia—associated with the legendary revelation of the *etrusca disciplina* to the city's founder Tarchon. Primarily through masonry analysis and stratigraphic review, Bagnasco Gianni articulates the chronology of building at the site: two phases of an Archaic temple adjoining a sacred area marked by a stone chest and a polychrome precinct wall, and the more familiar late Classical/Hellenistic third phase, when the temple was

---

<sup>2</sup> Stopponi 2009: 37-53.

enlarged with a massive terrace, prompting the construction of an altar memorializing the earlier sacred monument. Her essay is clear, concise and convincing, complementing other contributions in the volume by elucidating the relationship between sanctuary space and the ritual significance in architectural innovation and renovation.

The essays by Warden and de Grummond similarly present new archaeological findings, although from less familiar sanctuaries. Both Poggio Colla and Cetamura, excavated since 1995 and 1978 respectively, have added considerably to our knowledge of Etruscan sanctuaries and ritual behavior and are well deserving of inclusion in a volume that highlights novel information on the topic.<sup>3</sup> Warden's contribution considers several intriguing votive contexts at the northern Etruscan sanctuary of Poggio Colla containing broken or overturned objects as examples of ritual fragmentation, a process where such deliberate actions altering the original state of a votive object connect the terrain of the sanctuary to the divine through the agency of the officiating priest or priestess. Warden's infusion of theoretical perspective, strengthened through his offering of comparanda from other sites such as the altar from the Melone del Sodo II tumulus at Cortona or the site of Montacchia near Pisa, vividly brings the rituals of the Poggio Colla sanctuary to life.

De Grummond too enlivens the archaeological remains from Cetamura, through a careful retelling of the votive activity in the sanctuary, mostly during the Hellenistic period. Her essay relies on the influential categorization of Etruscan rituals by M. Bonghi Jovino and votive 'containers' by G. Bagnasco Gianni.<sup>4</sup> De Grummond's systematic presentation of votives from the site, which include propitiatory offerings at a brick, tile and loom weight kiln to miniature bricks or iron nails offered in pits within the primary sanctuary structure, establishes a link between ritual and craft production that is an area of Etruscan ritual behavior worthy of greater attention. Together the evidence from Poggio Colla and Cetamura (particularly side by side) entreats archaeologists to look closely for variation in traditional votive contexts and consider the ritual implications of broken, misshapen or up-ended objects in sanctuary contexts.

The final three essays in the volume turn away from specific sites and consider Etruscan ritual more generally. Rask offers a fresh reassessment of what may be considered an Etruscan "cult image." Her piece is well ordered and logical: first, a systematic treatment of Etruscan archaeological objects often classified as "cult images," second, a survey of "cult images" in Etruscan visual language. Ultimately, Rask concludes that we are no closer to defining the nature of an Etruscan cult image, but her wide array of evidence firmly supports her point that these objects are more productively treated as ritual objects than as just another art historical category of statuary. Her thought-provoking statement that Etruscan-inspired

---

<sup>3</sup> In the spirit of full disclosure, I wish to make clear that I have served as the Director of Materials at Poggio Colla from 2004 to the present.

<sup>4</sup> See Bonghi Jovino 2005 and Bagnasco Gianni 2005.

depictions of cult images operate in terms of the power of touch and transgression is well situated in scholarship on the uniqueness of Etruscan ritual and art, and demands further investigation.

The volume's next essay by Nagy takes on one of the most discussed facets of Etruscan ritual: votive terracottas. The topic is a mainstay in collections on Etruscan religion like this one. Nevertheless, Nagy provides new insights on the familiar votives through her comparative approach. Using published data from four sanctuaries at Veii and Cerveteri she emphasizes the cult practice and the dedicators themselves. For example, her observation of gender distinctions between votive heads from the sanctuaries of Vignaccia and Manganello at Cerveteri resonates as it raises questions about the male and female participants in ritual, rather than the gender of the worshipped divinity. In keeping with the spatial theme of the volume, Nagy emphasizes the liminality of these locations, near city gates, prompting the question of whether not only certain rituals, but also certain ritual spaces were gendered in the ancient landscape.<sup>5</sup>

Pieraccini's essay is the least concerned with the physical archaeological remains of sanctuaries or ritual in Etruria. Rather, she reminds us that our reconstruction of ancient sanctuaries must also include ephemeral aspects such as offerings, i.e., wine. By necessity her overview of this important element in ritual celebrations relies heavily on visual evidence predominantly from the funerary realm, such as tomb paintings, mirrors and vases, but she notes early in the essay that drinking vessels were common dedications in Etruscan sanctuaries. Her essay (as well as several examples of perishable items from votive features at Cetamura in de Grummond's contribution)<sup>6</sup> serves as a useful reminder that food and drink were vital components of sanctuary life and ritual behavior.

I conclude with a brief comment on the length of this publication. It is not uncommon for edited collections to rely on a large table of contents to cover the full range of a topic. While containing only seven essays, together with editors' introduction and conclusion and an extended bibliography, *The Archaeology of Sanctuaries and Rituals in Etruria* offers a succinct snapshot of a vast topic, sharp and clearly focused in the foreground, while simultaneously pointing the way to future research in the distance.

#### REFERENCES

Bagnasco Gianni, Giovanna. 2005. Sui 'contenitori' arcaici di ex-voto nei santuari etruschi. *Depositi votivi e culti dell'Italia antica dall'età arcaica a quella tardo-repubblicana*, ed. by Annamaria Comella and Sebastian Mele, 351-358. Bari: Edipuglia.

---

<sup>5</sup> There is a formatting error in the essay; the captions for Figures 9 and 10 on page 119 are reversed.

<sup>6</sup> For example, apples, sorb apples and grapes in a dolio and barley and emmer wheat in a burnt deposit in Votive Feature 1A (79) and a cooking pot filled with chickpeas in Votive Feature 7 (84).

- Bonghi Jovino, Maria. 2005. *Mini muluvanice-mini turace*. Depositi votivi e sacralità. Dall'analisi del rituale alla lettura interpretative delle forme di religiosità. *Depositi votivi e culti dell'Italia antica dall'età arcaica a quella tardo-repubblicana*, ed. by Annamaria Comella and Sebastian Mele, 31-46. Bari: Edipuglia.
- de Grummond, Nancy T. and Erika Simon (eds.). 2006. *Religion of the Etruscans*. Austin: University of Texas Press.
- Stopponi, Simona. 2009. Campo della Fiera: nuove acquisizioni. *Annali della Fondazione per il Museo 'Claudio Faina' 2*: 37-53.
- van der Meer, L. Bouke (ed.). 2010. *Material Aspects of Etruscan Religion*. Proceedings of the International Colloquium Leiden, May 29 and 30, 2008. (BABesch Annual Papers on Mediterranean Archaeology Supplement 16.) Leuven/Paris/Walpole, MA: Peeters.

Department of Classics  
Franklin & Marshall College  
Goethean Hall 109  
Lancaster, PA 17604  
[gretchen.meyers@fandm.edu]