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From Huts to Houses. Transformations of Ancient Societies.

J. Rasmus Brandt and Lars Karlsson (eds.)

*Proceedings of an International Seminar
organized by the Norwegian and Swedish institutes
in Rome, 21-24 September 1997. Stockholm, 2001. 461pp.*

by Michael L. Thomas

The recent emphasis on settlement archaeology in the Mediterranean has led to a growing body of evidence associated with the ancient house. This volume, the publication of a conference on this subject, engages numerous issues associated with ancient domestic space as well as the role of the house in early settlements. The conference, also entitled “From Huts to Houses,” consisted of forty-three announced papers and eleven posters. Although the forty four articles in this publication address topics from as early as the Mesolithic period to as late as the twentieth century, in locations ranging from the Near East to Scandinavia, the majority of articles (thirty-nine) focus on (or are tangentially related to) Bronze and Iron Age Italy, including Etruria and Rome. According to the editors’ statement in the introduction, the aim of the conference was “to examine the causes and effects of the architectural transformation process in general.” However, this description falls short of accurately defining many of the papers in this volume. Although much of this book is indeed about the technology and evolution of architecture in ancient western societies, several contributions address the context and meaning of the ancient house and its role in settlements.

The layout of the publication follows the organization of the conference; articles are divided into four categories: “building typology and development,” “building function,” “building technology,” and “organization and economy.” The first section of the book, “building typology and development,” is the largest in terms of number of articles (fourteen) and also the most varied chronologically and geographically. The papers in this section concern the evolution and organization of the ancient house. They include Erhan Acar’s “From hut to citadel: the evolution of housing and settlement in prehistoric Anatolia as changing patterns of space and time,” Eva Rystedt’s “Huts vis-à-vis houses: a note on Acquarossa,” Alessandro Naso’s, “Dalla capanna alla casa: riflessi nell’architettura funeraria etrusca,” Vedia Izzet’s, “Putting the house in order: the development of Etruscan domestic architecture,” Lars Karlsson’s “From huts to houses: problems of restoring House I on the Acropolis of San Giovenale,” Gabriele Cifani’s “Le origini dell’architettura in pietra a Roma,” Karl Reber’s “Entwicklungsstufen in der Grundrissorganisation griechischer Wohnhäuser,” Jörgen Streiffert’s “Prehistoric houses on the Swedish west coast,” Per Ole

Rindel's "Building typology as a means of describing the development of early village communities in the 5th-3rd centuries B.C. at Grøntoft, Western Jutland, Denmark," Wenche Helliksen's "Farms in transition: a study of settlement patterns in eastern Norway, 300 B.C. to A.D. 1200," Eva-Maria Viitanen's "Longhouses and log cabins: changing building traditions in Late Iron Age and Early Medieval period (A.D. 800-1300) in Fennoscandia," Axel Christophersen's "The shaping of urban landscapes in medieval Norway: concepts and considerations," Reidar Bertelsen's "Medieval civilization in Arctic earthen huts," and Barbro Santillo Frizell's "The dynamics of development house-building: ethnohistory and dry-masonry domes."

The second section, "building function," contains the fewest articles (six) of any section. The term "function" here is loosely applied, as the articles deal with issues of iconography, material culture, and ritual. These are Alexander Mazarakis Ainian's "From huts to houses in early Iron Age Greece," Pontus Hellström's "Reflections on the function of the monumental building at Luni sul Mignone," Laura Flusche's, "Aristocratic architectural iconography at Poggio Civitate," Demetrius J. Waarsenburg's "Living like a prince: the habitation counterpart of tombe principesche, as represented at Satricum," Eero Jarva's "The Functions of huts and settlements with reference to the Latin settlement at Ficana," and Lil Gustafson's "The longhouse at Veien: a 'central place' in eastern Norway dating from the Roman Iron Age."

The third section includes construction techniques and roofing systems within the category of "building technology." The eleven articles comprise Jochen Komber's "New aspects of the development of houses from Mesolithic to the Viking period in northern Europe," Ann Maria Bietti Sestieri and Ann De Santis's "L'edificio della I età del ferro di Fidene (Roma): posizione nell'abitato, tecnica costruttiva, funzionalità in base alla distribuzione spaziale dei materiali e degli arredi," Olivier Büchschütz's "De la hutte à la maison, de Vitruve aux trois petits cochons," Börje Blomé and Carl Nylander's "On Etruscan earthquakes and architecture," Börje Blomé's "A tentative reconstruction of House B on the Borgo of San Giovenale," Helle Damgaard Andersen's "Thatched or tiled roofs from the Early Iron Age to the Archaic period in central Italy," Helle Damgaard Andersen and Judith Toms's "The earliest tiles in Italy?," Charlotte Wikander's "From huts to houses: the problem of architectural decoration," Ola Storsletten's "From purlins to roof-trusses: transformations in ancient building technology," Paolo Brocato and Francesco Gallucio's "Capanne moderne, tradizioni antiche," and Ebrico Genovesi's "Laboratorio di architettura etrusco presso il Museo civico di Allumiere."

The articles in the last section, "organization and economy," address issues of settlement. The articles are Jacopo De Grossi Mazzorin's "Archaeozoology and habitation models: from a subsistence to a productive economy in central Italy," Alberto Cazzella and Maurizio Moscoloni's "Non piu villagi, non ancora città: gli insediamenti dell'eta del Bronzo dell'Italia sud-orientale," Niccia Negroni Cattacchio and Laura Domanico's "L'abitato protourbano di Sorgenti della Nova: dagli spazi dell'abitare all'organizzazione sociale," Gilda Bartoloni's "Evoluzione negli insediamenti campannicoli dell'Italia centrale tirrenica," Valeria Acconcia's "Fosse a discariche come indizi di strutture sociale: alcuni esempi," Anette Rathje and Iefke van Kampen's "The distribution of space and materials in domestic

architecture in Early Rome: a case study of the pre-Republican habitation levels on the Sepolcreto arcaico site at the Roman Forum,” Antonella Magagnini’s “A case study for the evidence for pre-Republican habitation on the Velian hill, Rome,” Barbera Bellelli Marchesini’s “L’abitato costiera di Pyrgi: osservazioni sull’impianto urbanistico e sugli aspetti edilizi,” J. Rasmus Brandt’s “From craftsmen to specialist: the formation of occupation in Late Iron Age Latium,” Marianne Maaskant-Kleibrink and Peter Attem’s, “Pottery technology and the question of pre-urban and early urban transformations in southern Lazio,” Stephan G. Schmid’s “The impact of pottery production on the sedentarization of the Nabataeans,” and Nils-Axel Mörner’s “Dowsing and radiation lines: the state of the art and its application to the San Giovenale site.”

The publication also has a supplemental section at the end with one article by Sigurd Erixon, “The shepherd huts in the Roman campagna and the characteristics of their construction.” This article, originally published in Swedish in 1932, is a valuable account of an author who traveled to the Roman countryside and studied the construction techniques and function of the huts of shepherds and charcoal-burners, huts that are very similar to appearance to those of early Iron Age Italy.

The sheer number of articles within this volume makes it impossible to address each individually. However, for the scholar interested in Iron Age Etruria, Latium, and Rome, there are several noteworthy contributions from both senior and junior scholars, a few of which deserve mention here. In some instances, papers provide a re-evaluation of archaeological evidence. Lars Karlsson, one of the volume’s editors, revisits the archaeological evidence of House I on the acropolis at San Giovenale suggests that there is evidence for a hut underneath the seventh century house. Blomé and Nylander’s article argues for evidence of an Archaic period earthquake at San Giovanale. Several papers address the shift in size, shape, and meaning of houses in seventh century Etruria and Latium. Three studies on roof tiles, those of Helle Damgaard Andersen, Andersen and Judith Toms, and Charlotte Wikander, add to the longstanding discussion of the development of the tile roof in Etruria. Vedia Izzet’s article links the evolution of the Etruscan house’s physical form to the changing role of the house in Etruscan society. Two studies on elites in Etruria and Latium, those of Laura Flusche and Demetrius Waarsenburg, in the “building function” section, touch on the public/political functions of Orientalizing buildings at different sites, Poggio Civitate and Satricum. Waarsenburg argues that Iron Age elites at Satricum, identified through the distribution of early Proto-Corinthian pottery, did not live in structures that parallel their “princely” tomb. Flusche’s article notes the public function of the building at Poggio Civitate—a late Orientalizing structure—and how its architectural decorations utilized imagery to validate elite roles in society. If we consider the conclusions of all these articles together, important issues of elite political strategy, especially with regard to the public display of wealth and power during the Orientalizing period, undeniably seem to be tied to developments in domestic architecture.

For the scholar interested in early Rome and Latium, there are several worthy contributions here, such as Ann Maria Bietti Sestieri and Ann De Santis’ study of the Iron Age house at Fidene. In Rome, Annette Rathje and Iefke Van Kampen give us a glimpse into an ongoing reevaluation of Boni’s excavation in the area of the so-called sepulcretum located

just outside the Roman Forum on the Sacra Via. This forthcoming study, which includes Antonella Magagnini's study of Boni and Colini's salvage excavation of a pre-Republican structure on the Velian Hill in the 1930s (also previewed in *From Huts to Houses*) should add significantly to our perception of the early settlement in Rome.

I hope that the organizers of this conference consider future *From Huts to Houses* conferences and publications, perhaps on the model of the well received *Deliciae Fictiles* theories. If so, then I offer suggestions that could provide a more accessible publication. For both the student and the scholar a comprehensive bibliography, instead of individual bibliographies after each article, would make this a more useful research tool. Also, for ease of use, a standardized citation format would be helpful (as it stands this book contains both classical footnotes as well as anthropological text citations). The last consideration deals with organization, and to some it may seem to contradict the spirit of collaboration that appears to have been a motivating factor behind both "From Huts to Houses" conference and its publication. Nonetheless, this reviewer suggests that the editors of this volume consider reorganizing the text and even categories to better suit the context of the articles. What we do not see in this book is the type of critical responses to each paper typical of conferences. Although in the cases of some conferences discussion comments are published, for a conference of this size it would be all but impossible. Thus, what the reader of this book misses is the very aspect of the conference, the sharing of information by scholars who would not normally interact, that validates the cross-cultural and diachronic nature of the papers presented. If this publication were organized instead by region and/or era, then the publishers could perhaps offer a two volume set. This could make the publication more affordable (instead of a price as high as \$135 U.S.D.) for the reader who would only buy one volume.

These are minor problems when placed against the value of this conference and its publication. This important collection of articles should appeal to both scholars and graduate students, although it is doubtful that many scholars will be interested in every contribution in this volume. Certainly, publications such as *From Huts to Houses* provide no final answer; they are not intended to. What we get here is a glimpse into new trends and ways of rethinking old issues. Many of these articles are works in progress and for the reader they present new and important perspectives from a variety of international scholars. Some seem destined to become significant contributions to the field as more substantial publications in the future.

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