

Unwritten Rome. By T.P. WISEMAN. Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008. Pp. x + 366. Paper, \$37.95. ISBN 978-0-85989-823-2.

In his prolific career, T.P. Wiseman (W.) has produced erudite and original studies on an impressive variety of topics literary, historical and archaeological. Now comes this work, composed in the belief that with enough ingenuity, the right argumentation and a creative combination of all relevant evidence, one can recover reliable information about unwritten Rome. The title admits of two interpretations. It may refer either to the Rome that existed before written records (particularly a written history, ca. 200 BCE at Rome) or to those events and beliefs of Roman society for which we simply lack contemporaneous written accounts. W. claims (p. 23) to deal with the former, but in fact gives the latter abundant attention. The book thus shares much ideologically with his recent investigations into the less well-evidenced beliefs (*The Myths of Rome* (Exeter, 2004)) and culture (*Remembering the Roman People* (Oxford, 2009)) of the Roman people.

Of the volume's eighteen papers, four and part of a fifth are new; the rest have appeared (mostly) in edited volumes since 2002 and are given only a very few *addenda*. Why these articles? The principle of selection is not stated, and one wonders why some relevant works have been omitted (e.g., the review of T. Cornell's *The Beginnings of Rome* (Routledge, 1995) in *JRA* 9 (1996) 310-15). Moreover, the advantage of having these works inside one cover is, given the inadequate *index locorum*, only partially realized. None of the coins and only three of the numerous inscriptions discussed are recorded in the index (*ILLRP* 309 and 310, and the *Fasti Praenestini*, under the unusual entries "the epitaphs of the Scipios" and "Verrius Flaccus," respectively), and many important and oft-cited passages go unlisted. This is unfortunate, for a proper and complete index would have greatly facilitated scholarly use of the volume.

The first essay (pp. 1-23, a new work) establishes the book's methodology and sounds several discouraging notes: the Romans themselves knew little about early Rome; no oral tradition transmitted reliable information about that world; and because rituals change over time, the belief that archaic ones preserve evidence about earliest Rome is mistaken. How to recover unwritten Rome then? Not through comparative anthropology (which receives a strong rebuke), but by traditional "close reading of the sources" and "careful consideration of what they may or may not presuppose" (p. 22). The remaining seventeen chapters employ this approach, ambitiously and often adventurously, to Roman cult, *ludi*, theater, historiography and regal Rome. If the topics of the contributions vary, so do their aims,

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with several attempting to solve clearly defined problems and correct recently advanced misconceptions, while others provide somewhat impressionistic accounts of their subject. But all are worth reading and pondering. Considerations of space preclude discussion of every paper; what follows are selective comments.

W. treats *cultus* and *religio* with a keen eye on their change and development. [[1]] On the *Lupercalia* (pp. 52–83) and its deity (or deities) he is fundamental; yet one must still consult the original article (*JRS* 85 (1995) 1–22), since its appendix of *testimonia* for the festival is omitted here. [[2]] The attempt (pp. 140–54) to connect sacred prostitution (instituted in the 7th or 6th century) with the cults of *Venus Verticordia* and *Fortuna Virilis* will strike some as far-fetched. [[3]] The inspiring reconstruction of the worship of Liber (pp. 84–139) during the Republic charts the god’s role in the struggle between plebeians and Senate and in the civil wars, and demonstrates the presence in 4th-century Rome of a world of theater in which Liber presided over performances of mythological burlesque that appealed to the people, but which Varro and others suppressed in their accounts of Roman drama. W. detects (pp. 155–66, a new contribution) a similar suppression in the seemingly discordant reports about Numa and the cult of Jupiter Elicius. Valerius Antias (at Arnob. *Adv. Nat.* 5.1) and Ovid (*Fast.* 3.320–8) have Numa summon (*elicere*) Jupiter from heaven. Yet in the early 2nd century this action already carried negative connotations of magic, hence the story’s absence or modification in Livy (1.20.7; cf. 1.31.8), Varro (at Aug. *CD* 3.9; 7.34–5) and Plutarch (*Numa* 4.3). How, then, to explain the account in Ovid and Antias? “It is inconceivable that this story is a late invention” (p. 165); it dates to the archaic age. But how did it survive the centuries and the change in religious sensibilities? “Certainly the story as we have it is a comedy, perhaps first created for the stage” (p. 165), which then became “so firmly fixed in the popular mind” that “it survived to be preserved in literature” (p. 166). This is an imaginative reconstruction, and though I remain unconvinced, I found many of W.’s remarks on magic, religion and Numa useful and illuminating.

The papers on *ludi publici* are some of the book’s best. W. (pp. 167–74) rightly disputes the recent attempt [[4]] to date the institution of the *ludi Plebei* and *ludi Ceriales* to the late 3rd century, forcefully restating Lily Ross Taylor’s brilliant demonstration that the *ludi Plebei* were originally called *ludi Romani* and hence established much earlier than the traditional date of 220 BCE. [[5]] In another, he investigates the 1st-century vicissitudes of *ludi* for Hercules (pp. 187–93), attested on two fragmentary inscriptions, and connects these games

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with the fortunes of Sulla and his followers. The famous *denarius* of M. Volteius thus refers, in W.'s view, to these *ludi* and not, as traditionally believed, to the *ludi Plebei*. [[6]]

Similarly informative are the chapters on historiography. A useful overview of the genre's prehistory (pp. 231–42) stakes a prominent place for Naevius' *carmen belli Punici* in the transition from an oral to a literature culture and in the formation of Rome's historical consciousness. Already for Ennius, Naevius' poetry was distinctive, written *vorsibus quos olim Faunei vatesque canebant* (*Ann.* 206–7 Sk). W.'s exploration (pp. 39–51) of the archaic literary tradition hinted at in this quote is engaging, though the argument is sometimes difficult to follow, and most of the conclusion as best I can disengage it—that Naevius' poetry was cast in a meter common to (and perhaps preferred for) oral prophecy, and that such prophecy was current and still given much credence by the Romans of the late Republic and early Empire—is one I think few would argue against. The topic of genre occurs also in the instructive essay (pp. 243–70) on the ways Cicero, Livy, Varro, Dionysius and Plutarch distinguished history from poetry. [[7]]

Two papers tackle Regal Rome. W. treats with verve and insight the fictions and possible facts (pp. 293–305) surrounding Lucius Junius Brutus. But he too quickly dismisses the vultures in Tarquinius' dream (D.H. 4.63.1–2; Zon. 7.11) as “uncomplimentary” symbols, “scavengers and carrion-eaters” (p. 296; cf. p. 304); in nature, yes, but in omen and prophecy the bird could be powerfully positive. Most famous are the vultures that appeared to Romulus and Remus (Liv. 1.7.1); but an epigram of Posidippus discloses the vulture's preeminence as an omen for the birth of a child. [[8]] Those who like polemic will delight in W.'s preemptive strike (pp. 271–92) against Carandini's forthcoming identification of the remains of a 6th-century house in the forum as the house of the Tarquins. After W.'s treatment, less remains standing of Carandini's hypothesis than there does of the actual structure in the forum.

Finally, there are the papers on Roman theater and its place in Roman society, subjects on which W. is an undisputed authority. [[9]] Most enlightening are the chapters arguing that the *Octavia* was written during the reign of Galba and for performance (pp. 200–9), and that the traditional division between *fabulae praetextae* and *togatae* is an overschematization of Varro's that ignores the variety of dramatic forms at Rome, each capable of presenting material humorous, edifying, historical or erotic (pp. 194–9). More daring are claims that cer-

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tain passages in literature originated on or were influenced by the Roman stage. I have already mentioned the “comedy” of Numa and Jupiter Elicius; elsewhere W. asserts (pp. 210–30) that the theater provided Ovid with the source for several tales in the *Metamorphoses* and *Fasti*, and tries to find Roman legends (pp. 175–86) that could have provided plots for the dramas performed by the disrobing *mimae* of the *ludi Florales* (see Val. Max. 2.10.8, *inter alios*). [[10]] In a new contribution (pp. 24–38), W. asks how the pre-3rd-century extemporaneous and unwritten songs that Livy eight times mentions “survived into the much later literary tradition of historiography” (p. 37) and suggests that these *carmina incondita* were known to him and his predecessors from “patriotic performances at the theatre games” (p. 37).

W. admirably notes those of his claims that are hypothetical. But the ideas of hypothesis, proof and disproof are perhaps almost out of place in discussions of pre-literary Rome. The meager and fragmentary evidence can be pieced together in numerous ways, and the various resulting pictures will all carry nearly the same degree of plausibility. W.’s great skill, fully on display here, is his ability to use both literary and material evidence to create, with enviable erudition and imagination, a plausible and engaging portrait. For the journey to unwritten Rome, this book is an inspiring and informative guide.

MICHAEL JOHNSON

Vanderbilt University

[[1]] Inexplicably absent from the book’s bibliography, however, is G. Wissowa’s fundamental *Religion und Kultus der Römer*² (Munich, 1912).

[[2]] The bibliography on the *Lupercalia* is enormous; see the recent articles of J.A. North and N. McLynn, *JRS* 98 (2008) 144–81.

[[3]] For doubt as to the very existence of sacred prostitution, see S. Budin, *The Myth of Sacred Prostitution in Antiquity* (Cambridge, 2008). One might also refer to the discussion of M.A. Pagnotta, “Il culto di Fortuna Virile e Venere Verticordia nei rite delle calende di Aprile a Roma.” *AFLPer* 16–18 no. 1 (1978–80) 144–56.

[[4]] F. Bernstein, *Ludi publici: Untersuchungen zur Entstehung und Entwicklung der öffentlichen Spiele im republikanischen Rom* (Stuttgart, 1998).

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[[5]] L.R. Taylor, "Cicero's Aedileship," *AJP* 60 (1930) 194–202.

[[6]] Crawford no. 385.2. The latest discussion of this coin (H. Cancik in *Festrituale in der römischen Kaiserzeit*, edited by J. Rüpke (Tübingen, 2008) 10–11) follows the traditional interpretation.

[[7]] See now D. Feeney's response to this paper in *Literatur und Religion 2: Wege zu einer mythisch-rituellen Poetik bei den Griechen*, edited by A. Bierl, R. Lämmle and K. Wesselmann, (Berlin and New York, 2007) 173–202.

[[8]] As first pointed out by J. Linderski, *Roman Questions II* (Stuttgart, 2007) 19 n. 56. Epigram 27 in *Posidippi Pellaei quae supersunt omnia*, edited by C. Austin and G. Bastianini (Milan, 2002) 48–9. The fact that eagles also appear in both the epigram and Tarquin's dream suggests that this poem may be even more important for interpreting the dream of Tarquin and the legend of Brutus.

[[9]] See especially his *Roman Drama and Roman History* (Exeter, 1998) and *Historiography and Imagination* (Exeter, 1994).

[[10]] But note that some now date the coin (Crawford no. 423) discussed on pp. 174 and 176 to 54–52 BCE, and that the most recent investigation proposes the expansion FLORAL(IBUS) for the first word of its notorious legend. See F.X. Ryan "Der Denar des C. Servilius C. f. mit Florakopf und Krummstab," *NAC* 37 (2008) 193–9 (n. 1 for the dating).