

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Republican Aventine and Rome's Social Order*. By LISA MARIE MIGNONE. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. Pp. xi + 243. Hardcover, \$70.00. ISBN 978-0-472-11988-2.

Mignone's book is admirable from start to finish; it is in many ways a model academic publication. To start, it clearly and succinctly states—in fact, from the first page—its major themes and arguments, which are worth quoting. “First, this book destabilizes the long-standing scholarly tradition that the Aventine was the citadel and headquarters for Rome's politically vibrant plebs. Second, it demonstrates that the development of the Aventine as a region mirrors the overall evolution of the *urbs*.” Mignone then offers her major conclusion, “The *caput mundi* was characterized by a significant degree of socioeconomic integration, and the book concludes by proposing that this transurban heterogeneity may have contributed to the city's relative tranquility up until the final decades of the republic.” The seven chapters, epilogue, and two appendixes develop the arguments and evidence to support this conclusion.

Mignone sets up the volume in the Introduction with an extended discussion of the *communis opinio* on the Aventine and its basis in Merlin's 1906 work, *L'Aventin dans l'antiquité*, which established the currently held notion of the Aventine as a plebeian stronghold of largely commercial character. Chapter 1 (17–47) examines the literary sources of the three plebeian secessions and concludes that the accounts in the ancient authors do not support the modern conclusion that the Aventine was the definitive site for plebeian secessions.

Chapters 2–5 explore the residential diversity of the Aventine in the Republic and conclude that residents were drawn from all of Rome's social and economic classes. Chapter 2 (48–76) focuses on the *lex Icilia de Aventino* of 456 BC and examines the problems of historical revisionism in ancient sources for studying Rome while Chapter 3 (77–116) uses literary references to reconstruct residential patterns on the Aventine concluding that the hill saw a very heterogeneous set of residences.

Chapter 4 (117–137) bolsters these arguments with evidence from archaeology on domestic architecture while Chapter 5 (138–179) takes a comparative

approach and draws on modern studies of urbanism, work on Pompeii and Herculaneum, and additional evidence from Rome such as the regionary catalogues to further argue against a plebeian segregation on the Aventine. Following a brief concluding chapter Mignone turns her attention in an epilogue (184–202) to the reception of the notion of a plebeian Aventine and how that idea has informed political movements in the post-Classical world. Two short appendices conclude the text with brief considerations of the placement of the Temple of Ceres, which Mignone argues, persuasively, was not on the Aventine itself, and of the authenticity of Dionysius' archaic bronze stele and its inscription, on whose survival she surveys the positions of the major scholars without clearly stating her own independent conclusion, rather implying that the law could not have survived on bronze.

Here perhaps I should confess that I first approached this book as other reviewers obviously have (notably G. Forsythe, *CW* 2017, 110.2: 287–288) skeptically if not with active hostility, viewing the set up as a straw man argument and not expecting anything that would change my thinking on the Aventine as a plebeian quarter. After reading the book I was completely persuaded in Mignone's major arguments and enthusiastically conclude that she is correct in her sweeping reassessment of the residential character of the Aventine and in what that means for the urban character of Rome and other premodern urban centers as well. She is also correct about the location of the Temple of Ceres at the Circus Maximus.

Having praised the book in such glowing terms, it seems only fair to point out some minor weaknesses. I wish Mignone had engaged Alex Scobie's conclusions in "Slums, Sanitation, and Mortality in the Roman World" (*Klio* 68.2: 399–433 [1986]) in which he places the residential centers of the poor in the valleys of Rome and includes the Aventine with the other hills as bastions of the wealthy, arguments that pre-date similar ones by Aldrete that I note she does cite. I also still cannot accept Mignone's conclusion (90) that the structure long known as the "Porticus Aemilia" is the Navalia or shipsheds of Rome. Topography and architecture make this identification impossible, as many recent studies of Roman shipsheds by Rankov and others make certain. Finally, figures could have been improved by illustrations of the archaeological material, especially mosaics, from the residential complexes on the Aventine and the use of greyscale to more graphically indicate population density by region in Figure 12 (162).

These are minor points, as I noted above. In its major themes and conclusions, Mignone's work is persuasive and well written. It should be read by anyone studying the city of Rome, of course, but it is also an excellent case study for any scholar or student of ancient cities or urban planning in the premodern world.

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