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Elites, kinship, and community in archaic central Italy

Christopher Smith*

Abstract
This paper reconsiders the notion of "società gentilizia", brilliantly studied by Bartoloni, and offers some considerations on the role of the elite in urbanization, with special reference to Lazio. We shall argue that the more nuanced versions of aristocratic structures which have been developed recently offer opportunities for sophisticated models of the emergence of urban forms and within that the development of cultic and sacrificial behaviour. This is most evident at large sites like Rome or *Veii*, but we will consider how we can best develop this model for smaller sites, and integrate it within Ampolo's notion of the open society operating in the seventh and sixth centuries BCE.

Keywords: Aristocracy, Kinship, Community, Feudalism, Clans.

1. Introduction

Gilda Bartoloni's brilliant career as an archaeologist has been complemented by substantial and important works of synthesis, notably in her two volumes *La cultura villanoviana: All'inizio della storia etrusca* (2002) and *Le società dell'Italia primitiva: Lo studio delle necropoli e la nascita delle aristocrazie* (2003). Inevitably, she touches on the emergence of groups larger than the family, often associated with the phenomenon of *gentes*, attested in Rome. This paper, offered in the spirit of profound admiration and gratitude to a scholar who has always enhanced the community of research, seeks to carry this discussion a little further.

The interplay between elites and family groups in the construction of archaic society is crucial in many reconstructions of archaic Italian society, and has been for decades. Yet there is much still to do to understand about how stable these social and political phenomena were, and to identify accurately how they functioned and when. Recent accounts such as Nicola Terrenato's magisterial *The Early Roman Expansion into Italy* (2019) have insisted on the deep roots of the aristocracy. That the phenomenon of social differentiation can be traced back to the Late Bronze Age is hard to doubt, and we should probably see it as going back much further[1]. The extent to which family groups remained stable from that period into archaic times and beyond is something which perhaps only new techniques of scientific analysis can prove or disprove. However, since we are now much more aware of our interrelatedness through DNA studies, and since we remain relatively resistant to models of social change based on mass movements of people, it is inevitable that we will find the long winding lines of connection.

Nevertheless, at least some models of elite behaviour are more focused on the transience and fragility of the elite. Aristocracies can be unstable; the sheer statistical challenge of reproducibility in a world of high infant mortality is well known[2]. We need to focus more sharply on what we mean by aristocracy or elite. First, I would like to make some methodological points about terminology, and secondly I would like to trace a slightly different story of the shifting perception of kinship.

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[1] In addition to Bartoloni 2002 and Bartoloni 2003, see Fulminante 2014 for a summary of the transformative work of Renato Peroni; cf. Bietti Sestieri 2010; Cardarelli 2015.

[2] For the ancient world, see Hopkins 1983; Sallares 1991; Bintliff, Sbonias 1999; Scheidel 1999.

2. On describing aristocracies

In studies of early Italian social differentiation, terminology has often sacrificed precision for flexibility. Terrenato often uses lineages; Stoddart prefers descent groups, and both neatly avoid the problem inherent in the much-used Italian term *società gentilizia*[3]. Another favoured word is 'elite' which in modern parlance has largely shed its original connotation of election or choice[4]. For the orientalising period, the notion of *principes* is imported into terminology such as *tombe principesche*[5]. This generalized terminology reflects an understandable view that the existence of social differentiation and hierarchy is perhaps more important than the fine details of individual differences. So Terrenato quite reasonably states that «elite and aristocracy are used here as interchangeable terms and … without claims to a clear-cut social differentiation»[6].

However, there are consequences arising from loose terminology. The definitional problem is flagged in Fisher and van Wees' important edited volume *'Aristocracy' in Antiquity: Redefining Greek and Roman Elites*. The inverted commas, and the turn to the concept of the elite, show the increasingly profound concern with the notion of inherited title, or of any consistent ideology. In their introduction they argue that there was no resemblance between ancient rulers and European monarchs and that the hereditary principle was weak[7]. The evidence for hereditary elites in antiquity is indeed scarce; they regard the Roman patriciate during the Struggle of the Orders in the fifth and fourth centuries as a rare example, and even that was short-lived and unsuccessful. The social structures of antiquity likewise were constructions, constantly being updated and refined, rather than enshrining long duration privilege. Greek shows few signs of elite value being placed on birth (the Latin, *patres*, is perhaps different)[8]. Lastly, the structures for inherited wealth were weak; apart from general instability, lack of significant evidence for capital accumulation and partible inheritance all militate against closed elites.

Van Wees and Fisher's next step is to distinguish ancient, specifically Greek, aristocracies from models they believe derive from medieval aristocracy and serfdom. I am sure this is right, but it leaves open two questions. First, is the Roman situation sufficiently different to the Greek to permit us to differentiate, and second is the medieval model which van Wees and Fisher are referring to actually real? What we are really referring to is feudalism, as is evident from a couple of references in Terrenato and perhaps most specifically around the notion of the clan-based army, and the centrality of patron-client relations[9].

It bears repeating that we have practically no contemporary written evidence for archaic Rome, with the important but fragmentary exception of the Twelve Tables and whatever confidence we feel we may have in the lists of magistrates, the Fasti[10]. As a consequence, the way we choose to portray early Rome is a reconstruction based on a reconstruction. It is important to bear in mind what alternative models are available, and what preconceptions we are bringing to bear.

This is why it is important to be clear that the model of medieval feudalism is now so discredited that it is not fit for purpose as a comparative model. In reflecting on her remarkable book, *Fiefs and Vassals: The Medieval Evidence Reinterpreted* (1994), Susan Reynolds wrote that the standard legal approach to that point, emphasising the relationship between lord and vassal, «has produced a distorted view of the middle ages. Its concentration on the upper classes, largely ignoring at least nine-tenths of the population, distorts even the view of the upper classes themselves by making the line between them and the rest too hard. Its

[3] Terrenato 2019; Stoddart 2019. On gentilicial society, see the interesting recent essay, Carancini 2015, and the essays in Di Fazio, Paltineri 2018.

[4] See for instance Duplouy 2006.

[5] See the overview by Fulminante Rome 2003, and the exhibition catalogue *Bologna* 2000.

[6] Terrenato 2019, p. 45.

[7] van Wees, Fisher 2015.

[8] See Bradley 2015 for an excellent account.

[9] On the army, see especially Armstrong 2016.

[10] The best account, with a balanced view of the sources, is Cornell 1995.

concentration on dyadic, interpersonal relations, and especially on vertical relations between lords and their noble followers, has distracted attention from the strong collectivist ideas that informed medieval secular society and politics, the emphasis on government by consultation and consensus, on collective judgements, and the belief in natural, given units of society and politics bound together by descent, law and politics»[11].

Reynolds' critical point is that there was no one medieval period, no one system and that there is no straightforward line from whatever relationship existed between a war leader and his followers in the earlier middle ages and between lord and noble later on. Now this leaves open the possibility of arguing that we need to understand feudalism in another sense, and Reynolds' repeatedly states that her argument is against the non-Marxist account of feudalism. Indeed, in reference back to the defence of terminological imprecision for antiquity, the point has been made against the feudalism critique that hierarchy clearly existed, and Reynolds' criticism is merely about technical terminology.

But that Marxist account is not straightforward either. One issue, classically argued by Perry Anderson[12], is the extent to which feudalism existed as a social totality in the way that capitalism did. The typical feudal relation is «seigneurial jurisdiction over an enserfed rural mass», and this relation dominates, even if others existed. But there is a good case for suggesting that this formulation flattens out distinctions both temporal and regional. Moreover, it is critical that the emergence of any discourse dependent on vertical ties of fealty required an enormous scaffolding of discourse and was both long in the making and subject to regular critique in its own time. It is quite difficult to see how any helpful parallels can be drawn with feudalism, in the strong Marxist sense, as a single social totality. So when Terrenato argues that «reconstructions of the nature of the Roman army in the time of the early conquest should have as their background the military organizations bearing the deep mark of the quasi-feudal societies that produced them»[13] he both reveals a critical element of his underpinning thinking and a major problem. Which feudalism? And which Italic society was supposedly quasi-feudal? Terrenato is discussing the Roman conquest in the fourth century, so the implication must be that archaic society bore the marks of this personalised loyalty (if not the mode of economic production). Reading an entire system of production into the scanty evidence, such as historiographical references to clan action, such as the *Fabii* at Cremera, the *Satricum* inscription referring to the *suodales*, or the reference to the patron-client relationship in the Twelve Tables (VII.10) is illegitimate. The evidence also exists for non-clan based action, and the most interesting feature of the Twelve Tables is precisely its defence of the client through a community based sanction[14].

Indeed Terrenato's brief account of the sixth century sets up a sort of pivotal tension between the lineages, with their real or fictive deep roots, and the state. He characterises the elite as «absolute rulers at home and constrained citizens in council», and suggests that «the boundaries between the power domain pertaining to the elite lineages, and what had been transferred to the broader community were open to different interpretations»[15]. But he sustains the traditional elite interpretation of Rome, arguing that the changes involved in moving towards cities did not amount to de-feudalization, and that what Rome and other central Italic states succeeded in doing was simply widening the elite a little[16].

Van Wees and Fisher focus less on the intricate web of personal relationships represented by feudalism, and instead on a specific intersection between status and class: «those who owned enough property to be able to live off the labour of oth-

[11] Reynolds 2012, p. xiv, reflecting on Reynolds 1994.
[12] Anderson 2013.
[13] Terrenato 2019, p. 162.
[14] *Satricum*: De Simone *et alii* 1980. Cremera: Smith 2006, pp. 290-295.
[15] Terrenato 2019, p. 63.
[16] Terrenato 2019, p. 60.

ers were not just an objective economic class but also a self-conscious status group insofar as they adopted a shared leisured lifestyle»[17]. This makes the accumulation of property a critical step in the development of social hierarchy. Yet even here, we may want to introduce glosses. It is not clear that we have either a 'class' or a singular 'status group'; the something-in-between allows for a more fluidity. And although agricultural production seems to offer the key to eventual status groupings, such as censorial wealth-classes, this does not exclude other methods of wealth creation through services, for instance, or the visible performance of duties. So our challenge again is to locate chronologically the accumulation specifically of landed property, and to be precise about the relationship between leisure and ostentation and landed wealth. The focus on food consumption and preparation and textile production would seem to indicate an ethos of industriousness which we see later in the Roman sources, and there are legitimate questions around the notion of what work really is. But there is little evidence at all for large scale farming; even the *Auditorium* villa near Rome has a tiny late sixth century core[18].

Survey work has shown the infilling of the landscape in the later Iron Age, and since we cannot imagine an agriculture of *latifundia* at this stage, we are surely looking at the development of individual farms which contributed somehow to sustained social inequalities. Again, the evidence is not strong for the kinds of industrial levels of surplus which we may see later, so we are driven to models of obligation which slowly redistribute small surpluses towards an elite. In some areas this may be sharper and more directed; the extraction of iron at Populonia, for instance, may have demanded a totally different social organization[19].

Understanding the network of settlements and interaction between them remains a significant challenge. We need to understand better the relationship between factors such as demography and climate too. It would appear that population is rising through the first half of the first millennium BCE, which would have created some pressure towards intensification, alongside any additional extraction of surplus by an elite[20]. Yet the coercive powers of that elite were at least to a degree limited, and whether the other pressures were determining factors remains to be seen. A hypothetical model would be incremental redistribution to the elite in return for community-defined duties, which then recursively reinforced status, and sustained the cycle of upward redistribution.

There is legitimate evidence to connect elite groups with land, at least at Rome, and this relates to the fact that many of the rural tribes had the names of elite families[21]. This is an absolutely critical piece of evidence and cannot be stressed too much. The rural tribes were in place by the beginning of the fifth century BCE according to Livy, and unless we suppose that this is mistaken, or that the names are all later, neither of which is a plausible position, then Roman society at any rate emerges from the sixth century with a profound affinity between *gentes* and land ownership[22].

However, we need to be attentive to the sorts of conclusions we may draw. First, the rural tribes co-existed with the urban tribes; second, there are patrician *gentes* not represented among the tribes; third, the tribes are used as divisions of the earliest plebeian assembly. Michael Rieger, argued that the tribes reflected the development of the Roman army, in other words, whatever realities it reflected from the archaic period, it was an organization which was put to the service of the community. That is controversial, but it reminds us of the extremely difficult question of what the tribes were for, and when they were created[23]. Finally, given what we know about property regimes, however

[17] van Wees, Fisher 2015, p. 38.

[18] On food consumption, the critical evidence is the number of food and drink related vessels in burials; for banqueting generally see Kistler 2017 and Colivicchi 2017, both with helpful bibliographies. On textiles, see Gleba 2008. On the Auditorio villa, see Carandini 2006.

[19] On metalworking see Zifferero 2017; see also Pagliantini 2019. On artisanal activity generally, see Biella *et alii* 2018.

[20] See for instance Fulminante 2014; Di Giuseppe 2018.

[21] Taylor 2013.

[22] See for example, Capogrossi Colognesi 1980.

[23] Rieger 2007.

limited that is, there is no easy way to envisage the tribe as reflecting land ownership, as opposed to a general family influence. The evidence of the tribal names cannot independently demonstrate the long-standing presence of *gentes* in those areas, and may reflect a relatively late consolidation or indeed internal conquest, which is the model for the tribe of the *Claudii*.

So the erosion of a single model of feudalism removes the option to base our understanding of archaic central Italy on that as a parallel socio-economic situation. Caution over the conclusions we can draw from the names of rural tribes leaves us with the question of whether, or at what point in the first half of the first millennium BCE, central Italy might have had a concept of a stable aristocracy with consolidated systems of dependence. Systems of land ownership and use altered profoundly across the period, and late Bronze Age economics and the economics of the 6th century BCE were incomparable. Moreover, although central Italy did not suffer the interruption of social structures which we see with the collapse of Mycenaean civilization, whatever local perturbations may have occurred[24], there are in fact no efforts in our surviving literature to trace back lineages into the distant past that are not the demonstrable product of Greek influence. The Aeneas story, which critically links central Italy with the Homeric epic, was known from perhaps the fifth century BCE onwards, but the full construction of the lineage from Alba Longa to Rome cannot be established before the third century BCE, and the attempts to link individual families back to the kings or to Aeneas and his companions appears to be an invention of the late Republic. In short, there is very little evidence for a tradition of claiming deep historical roots for individual families[25].

On the other hand, and most remarkably, some symbols of power are remarkably long lasting. The discovery of miniature bilobate shields in late Bronze Age burials at Quadrato di Torre Spaccata and Santa Palomba, their presence in T 1036 from Casal del Fosso, *Veii*, and their presence in the Regia at Rome may well indicate a very deep rooted notion of the accoutrements of power and authority[26]. This disjunction between individuals and structures is striking.

Drawing this discussion together, one might wonder if the material expression of elite behaviour in the archaeological record should be understood at least as much as a trace of communal obligation and expectation as of elite leisure. In other words, successful performance of community roles was a critical factor in ensuring the upward flow of resource and of honour. An increasingly well-defined set of religious rules and obligations may be key[27]. However, we are still a very long way from the rigidity of the alleged medieval world-view, and we have seen reason to question whether that is a valid picture. Our model (rather like the more fluid actual situation in medieval times) allows for the acquisition of status by merit, and loss through failure.

In this section we have argued that it is no more legitimate to use the discredited medieval models to explain ancient elite structures than the C13. In Greece, a hereditary aristocracy is very difficult to identify, and so Fisher and van Wees tend to use the word elite. Rome may have countenanced a claim for status based on heredity, and perhaps the same was true elsewhere in central Italy, but it is far from clear that it was overwhelmingly successful. In other words, even if there are some successful lineages, and acknowledging that there are evident attempts at managing inheritance (which we shall discuss more below), Fisher and van Wees' critique of the notion of a strictly defined hereditary aristocracy and associated feudal structures in the context of archaic Greece is likely to be applicable also to central Italy in the first half of the first millennium BCE. We have suggested fragile models of reciprocal ob-

[24] See Bettelli 2002; Bettelli 2015; Blake 2008, pp. 1-34. The problems of Terramare culture and the position of Frattesina perhaps offer the most direct evidence for knock-on effects; see Bietti Sestieri *et alii* 2019.

[25] See the exhibition catalogue *Roma* 1981; Grandazzi 2008; Wiseman 1974.

[26] De Santis 2011; Colonna 1991.

[27] See Smith C.J. 2019.

ligation in place of rigid structures of entitlement; and the whole story of the Struggle of the Orders is based on the inadequacy of patrician arguments for exclusivity. Plebeians had families too; they imitated patrician behaviour, but there were also opportunities for the irruption of new families and individuals, and criticism of the notion of entitlement through birth.

In terms of terminology, we may be better to use terms such as elite, rather than aristocracy and lose the automatic assumptions of inherited title. At the same time, we should not exclude the possibility that descent claims were part of the performance of an elite, and always contested. In the next section, I want to look a little harder at the notion of kinship and its contribution to our understanding of social structures in archaic central Italy.

3. On Kinship

The questions we are posing relate to chronological development and of focalization. How did central Italian elite behaviour change over time? And is our evidence stronger for persisting lineages or for evolving communities?

We will break this down into three transitional moments: the move towards larger settlements; the orientalising period, as illustrated by the recent publication of children's burials at *Gabii*; and the archaic period, as illustrated by the substantial new publication of burials from around *Veii*. We shall take as our guiding hypothesis a recent formulation by John Ma for the Greek world, that «the polis was not constituted by elites, or in reaction to elites, but that elites were constituted by and within the polis»[28].

3.1 *From Late Bronze Age to Early Iron Age: New Communities*

In his conclusion to the recent volume on *Gabii*, Terrenato draws attention to the importance of Marco Pacciarelli's presentation of the abandonment of long-settled small Bronze Age sites and the shift to larger settlements around the beginning of the Iron Age in the 10th to 9th centuries BCE. This is where central Italy diverges most substantially from Greece. There, we can see little that matches this rapid shift in settlement pattern, which takes place over a few generations. Late Bronze Age sites are between 5 and 15 ha. in size, but Early Iron Age sites can be as large as 100 ha. These sites appear to be discontinuous in settlement, with distinct nuclei of settlement[29].

This phenomenon is well known, and for the most part tends to be understood as a process of partial synoecism, driven by maximum accessibility to resources[30]. The importance of some nuclear families in the individual parts of these settlements is indicated in burial evidence, some of which features military equipment in male burials[31]. There is little evidence for centralization in this early phase and Terrenato characterises this as a profound multi-focality. This resists notions of the city as a strong, centralized monolithic entity, and privileges peer competition[32].

The resulting picture would seem to indicate that the process of coming together was led by groups with a strong warrior ethos and commitment to lineage groups, as well as an interest in resource exploitation. Some more village-like formations continued in the countryside, but the overall pattern is towards the larger discontinuous settlements. These formations are therefore tentative and segmented, and to some extent they might seem rather irrational. Terrenato suggests that this was a «counterproductive move that would automatically reduce considerably per capita access to agricultural resources' and that mutual protection was a factor, so that the sites are the product of 'networks of friendly lineage groups»[33]. This picture of a tentative coalescence is largely convincing, and fits with broader accounts of aggregative and

[28] Ma 2016. It should be said that this ought not to exclude the same argument being made for *ethne*, on which see Morgan 2003.

[29] Pacciarelli 2001. See also Alessandri 2013.

[30] Riva 2010, p. 19.

[31] For a number of helpful essays with bibliography see now Negroni Catacchio 2018. See also Iaia 1999.

[32] Terrenato 2020.

[33] Terrenato 2019, p. 57.

semi-urban settlements. Specifically, this approach dissociates 'urbanism' from centralized state formation and from legends of founder figures such as Romulus[34].

In other contexts, key concepts which have been used to explain the advantages of aggregated settlement include eusociality (Bintliff) and energized crowding (Smith)[35]. These comparative approaches, which tend to avoid the central Italian example, nevertheless show similar progressions from smaller villages to large agglomerations without necessarily deploying state formation as a model[36]. The possibility, which is sadly difficult to illustrate for our sites owing to the limited excavation, is that they had served a central place function previously, and it would not be entirely surprising if such evidence were to be found in our context. This raises what I suggest is an underrated feature of our models, which is the role of seasonality[37]. The incremental development of markers of permanence, for instance through commemorative burial, then becomes critical. Three of the best examples of this are the clustering of burials around early cremations at the necropolis of Osteria dell'Osa, near *Gabii*; the evidence of ritual activity at Tarquinia; and the apparent commemoration of an early burial over more than a century at Piazza d'Armi at *Veii*[38].

However, this also raises a question about the nature of this permanence. Comparative studies have stressed that many features of villages are replicated in larger aggregated settlements; we see scalar advantage and stress rather than completely different behavioural patterns. Proto-Villanovan and Villanovan huts are less different from each other than Villanovan huts are from the regular rectilinear houses of subsequent monumentalized settlements, and even perhaps from earlier irregular rectilinear houses[39]. It is the shift to monumentalized, regular architecture which is the more obvious sign that lifestyle, display and political form have radically changed.

So we still have some challenges over what proportion of proto-Villanovan village dwellers chose, or were driven, to move. Was each node in the larger agglomeration a village, or a lineage? When permanence came to be critical, did the clustering of tombs around individuals represent lineages or replications of villages? Did these agglomerations grow individually or were there new clusters? Finally, what variation is masked by our general typology? Riva for instance distinguishes processes of agglomeration at Tarquinia, *Veii*, and *Caere*[40]; Rome is distinctive; and *Gabii* is different again. The tension between seeking a general typology of elite-driven agglomeration and worrying about distinctive choices and outcomes might be resolved by a focus on techniques of leadership and display. The limited numbers of ways in which status could be won and displayed, and the absence of functionally distinct sites (e.g. industrial complexes or solely religious sites) suggests a broadly similar spectrum of behaviour[41].

Having rightly rejected an exogenous immigration model to explain the shift to large settlements, we have left the shift to largescale settlements relatively undertheorized. The possibilities for resource accumulation, both from the local region and wider trade networks, were clearly key. The defence of that resource, both across short and medium term, may also have been an issue. This implies both the defence of the community (and indeed intra-communal defence), but also the protection of the acquisition of status over time. Yet above all, the fairly rapid shift to these very large settlements, however discontinuous they were, implies a different and distinctive stage for the display of status.

[34] Terrenato 2020.
[35] Bintliff 2010; Smith M.E. 2019.
[36] See Wengrow 2015.
[37] Seasonality and transhumance have been a long-standing topic, but the role of seasonality in early moves to settlement is less studied.
[38] See Bietti Sestieri 1992; Bonghi Jovino 2017; Bartoloni, Sarracino 2017. On *Veii* more generally, see Pacciarelli 2010.
[39] See Stoddart 2010.
[40] Riva 2010, pp. 25-27.
[41] On the integration of artisanal activity in cities see Biella *et alii* 2018.

Even if we allow for continuity of family lineages across this change, the critical issue is that the notion of relationship is itself transformed by the radical shifts involved in scaling up and energized crowding. Kinship, that is the claim that being related has significance, becomes a resource in different ways; the break with the past requires a new history to be created. One of the fascinating features of the Osteria dell'Osa lineages, or the revered burials at Piazza d'Armi at *Veii*, may have been the conscious invention of radically new expressions of interdependence across time.

3.2 *Infant burials and elite reproduction in the Orientalising period*

This combination of the cultural aspect of kinship and the political notion of relationship is, I think, critical to understanding how radical the elite display of the eighth and seventh centuries was. The orientalising period and the phenomenal wealth of the princely tombs which we find can be interpreted in terms of resource availability and capture, but they also offer real challenges in terms of understanding how family relations worked and how reproduction was valued.

The massive conspicuous consumption associated with funerals and with the construction in some instances of substantial tumuli, which are nevertheless relatively rarely of more than three generations in duration, reflect a valorisation of the family and its interaction with others, especially if we believe that some of the extraordinary treasures were moving as dowry[42].

Yet as Riva stressed, the transformation of funerary ideology and political authority worked both to exalt elite status and to place this in the context of the wider communities, by civilizing the warrior, or institutionalizing socio-political integration[43]. Riva's stress on the socio-political strategies of the elite is not at odds with Terrenato's model, but it raises some interesting questions about our understanding of what kinship means in such a context, and how to understand the newly published elite sub-adult burials at *Gabii*.

On the one hand, the development of the patronymic *nomen* as part of a binominal naming system has often been thought to reflect an increased interest in the maintenance of property within families[44]. New inheritance regimes are a natural concomitant to the increased capacity to accumulate wealth. However, the elaborate ideology of the funeral places greater emphasis on the social persona of the deceased individual. This double acceleration of meaning, both familial and individual, is a radical political problem, even contextualized within a community setting, as Riva demonstrates[45]. There is again significant variation between sites, and within sites. What does kinship do in this context? Clearly there is a valorisation of the fact of reproduction, the continuity from generation to generation, but there is also a focus on the family unit which can be disruptive and which can fail. If Colonna is right, the purportedly disruptive figure of Thefarie Velianas had a family history in Cerveteri, but one that might have ended with him, just as the Tarquins were expelled from Rome[46]. The orientalising period is an experiment in the re-evaluation of power and its transmission, but for all the glory of some of the more extravagant displays, it may not have been entirely successful.

The recent publication of child burials at *Gabii* encourages us to look hard at the notion of kinship commemoration. Child burials are relatively uncommon in the archaeological record for cemeteries in this time and period; they are notably underrepresented at the nearby and contemporary necropolis of Osteria dell'Osa. They are however more common in domestic contexts. In just two relatively small contexts, ten child burials have been found. They span a period of roughly a century. Seven were accompanied by significant quantities of pottery and other goods[47].

[42] For the role of women in central Italy, see for example Pitzalis 2011.
[43] Riva 2010, esp. pp. 72-107.
[44] Colonna 1977a.
[45] Riva 2010, pp. 108-140.
[46] Colonna 2007, pp. 419-468.
[47] Killgrove 2020; Cohen 2020.

This is a really important publication and discovery. It offers us a remarkable opportunity to reassess this important subcategory of burials, and the exemplary publication will become an immediate benchmark. The evidence is contextualized, it seems to me, in two distinct ways. Terrenato focuses on elite multifocal settlements dating back to the Villanovan period, but the analysis of D'Acri and Moggetta offers a very sharp illustration of the concentration of this specific phenomenon to the transition between Latial IIIB and Latial IV, that is in the later part of the 8th century BCE and into the 7th century[48].

The suggestion that burials besides or beneath houses rather than in formal necropoleis betokens an attempt to delineate boundaries and make long term claims on property is consonant with a shift in attitudes towards accumulated property. It is speculative but not unreasonable to associate the honouring of neonates and young children as a recognition of reproductive failure, of the potential dead end of transmission. The argument is made by D'Acri and Moggetta that the possibility of a visible burial inside the town, permissible for the very young, added to the range of elite display activities[49].

That may be true, but it rests on significant assumptions. In a different context, we are told that exposure of infants who were deformed required that the child be shown to five neighbours[50]. Now there is no evidence of deformity in the admittedly fragmentary bone evidence, and that is not my argument. However, that there is a community aspect to and interest in infant mortality is very striking. It is at least plausible that alongside elements of display and mobilization of the young dead in property claims we see a communal awareness of reproductive failure. At exactly the time when communities are building cohesion, the loss of future members, and of the possibility of continuity, was of general interest.

Any such interpretation would be interesting because it may reveal that this very important set of data around 700 BCE reflects the complex interplay of family concerns and communal solidarity. At precisely the same time we begin to see elements of the expression of political authority. So extravagant burials also tend to highlight aspects of broader military or domestic ideologies. Chariot burials, or the throne at Verrucchio, or unusual knives, perhaps related to sacrifice, feasting and banqueting equipment betokening commensality all seem to be part of the exaltation of the elite to a hitherto unprecedented degree[51]. We have tended to imagine an increased elite mobilization of resource in order to participate in luxury good exchanges, and this is also a period of increasing urbanistic development, but this elite performance, which continues visibly through the seventh century, is concomitant with growing signs of urban development, and diversifying communities[52]. So the interest in the children of the elite may have been part of a wider concern with community building, even in the orientalising period.

3.3 *Ostentation, Austerity and Elite Solidarity in the* Ager Veientanus

The well-known shift from burial expenditure towards more community-oriented expenditure in the sixth century BCE in the *Ager Veientanus* and Latium reflects yet another shift in the relationship between status, kinship and display[53]. We now possess a remarkable catalogue of the *Ager Veientanus* by Marco Arizza, which demonstrates this extremely well for the period from the mid-sixth century to the fourth century[54]. We see a more or less universal shift from cremation to inhumation, until the return to inhumation in the fourth century, relative uniformity of simple grave types, absence of accompanying funerary objects initially, and fairly poor and standardised burials thereafter,

[48] D'Acri, Mogetta 2020.
[49] D'Acri, Mogetta 2020, p. 140.
[50] D.H. 2. 15. 2. On exposure of children, see Moreau 2018.
[51] Riva 2010, pp. 95-106 for chariot burials, pp. 91-93 for knives. On Verrucchio, see von Eles 2015.
[52] Cifani 2008; Potts 2015.
[53] Colonna 1977b, pp. 131-165 was the foundational statement. The phenomenon has been much discussed and analysed since.
[54] Arizza 2020.

and remarkably little in the way of armour. Vestibules at the entrance of tombs seem to allow the possibility for some sort of display; but numbers of burials in each tomb are limited.

In Terrenato's account this trend is somewhat glossed over, with the sixth century being one of the least fully treated periods. It falls into the periods of readjustment, where the number of lineage groups is perhaps expanded a little, but the essence of elite power remains. Again, it would be perverse to deny some continuity of families, but my emphasis would be more strongly related to how we understand the cultural evolution of kinship in a period of restricted display.

This is usually regarded as a period in which the older clan-like grouping starts to give way to smaller families. I would suggest that the opposite might be true. If we are right that the disappearance of funerary expenditure reflects some level of social control on the elite from a broader community, and the redirection of resource, as well as the emergence of stronger central figures who were later characterised as tyrants, a phenomenon we see most clearly at Rome but which is hinted at elsewhere, the need for defensive actions to protect elite positions may actually have been greater[55]. The *gens* at Rome was pre-eminently good at retaining property and customs because it came to be drawn relatively widely (agnatic inheritance to the seventh degree in cases of intestacy)[56]. Whether or not this was something inherited from the very distant past, it was, I suggest, especially helpful in dealing with what may have been a testing time for the elites. Deprived of some of the traditional methods of display and faced with political challenges, the solidity of the *gens* was an interesting response. If the *gens* was in fact much more the product of internal revolution, it might explain the continuing trajectory towards exclusivity that we see at Rome, and which was ultimately unsuccessful[57]. In other words, elite groups became larger by processes of absorption, but tried to limit their number. The artificiality of the *gens* is in some ways demonstrated by its relatively slight impact on political history, certainly after the fifth century BCE.

4. Conclusion: Performing Kinship

Rather than focusing on the continuity of elite behaviour via the persistence of lineages, and the relative fragility of the state, this account emphasises the radical transformations of the notion of kinship occasioned by the tense dialogue between elites and communities. Alain Duplouy has emphasised the performative nature of the ancient elite, and following this, John Ma has argued that we should be looking for «the formation of public goods and the ideology which was at stake in processes of capture or claim, and indeed generated them»[58].

In conclusion, I want to suggest that a focus on the cultural construction of kinship would lead us to emphasise that it was deeply performative and profoundly contextual; as Johnson and Paul put it, we should be looking for "relatedness as a multiscalar form of social identity"[59]. The re-elaboration of history in the new Villanovan sites; the public nature of commemorations of family, individual and reproductive success or failure in the 8th to 7th centuries; and the strategic alliances that may have countered challenges to inherited status are signs of the repurposing of kinship. Similarly, contests over the validity and relevance of ancestry would be one of the rhetorically contested areas of Roman politics. At Rome, and no doubt elsewhere, the mythicisation of ancestry worked to sustain elite privilege, but also to set a bar for contemporary performance. Exemplarity works both to establish a claim for one's status, and to force the question of whether one has earnt it. Kinship was defined, constrained and re-evaluated in a political context.

[55] See for instance Lulof, Smith 2017.

[56] This is demonstrated by provisions in the Twelve Tables V. 4-5, on which see Crawford 1996, pp. 640-642; Humbert 2018, pp. 195-204.

[57] On the *gens* generally, see Smith 2006.

[58] Ma 2016.

[59] On kinship, see Sahlins 2013, with the book symposium in HAU: *Journal of Ethnographic Theory* 3. 2, 2013; for a survey of the integration of kinship and bioarchaeology see Johnson, Paul 2016.

One consequence however is that kinship is not just a private matter. To an extent, the very notion of kinship was one of the public goods which Ma mentions. Elite kinship, and its relative weight or significance in contrast to community values, is potentially both a resource and a threat. That is why it was not a static given, but a shifting ground of contention, and I would suggest that this is something we see in changing funerary behaviour. The new evidence from *Gabii*, and the ongoing work at *Veii*, which Gilda Bartoloni has led and inspired, help us to rethink the interplay between individual and family, lineage and community, and kinship and the state.

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