tried to keep pace with the developments that were taking place there. What, one wonders, could have been the reaction of our muleteer from Aesernia coming to Venafrum to see a spectacle in the amphitheatre and standing in front of the marble replica of the Venus Landolina?

J-P. Descoeurdes


Among the monuments that may strike the visitor to the National Museum in the Baths of Diocletian at Rome more by their number than by their artistic quality are the funeral altars and cippi, most of them lined up along the walls of the four aisles in the magnificent ‘Chiostro di Michelangelo’. A number of them had been included in W. Altmann’s Die römischen Grabaltäre der Kaiserzeit (Berlin 1905), some have been illustrated in M. Honroth, Stadtrömische Girlanden. Ein Versuch zur Entwicklungs geschichte römischer Ornamentik (Wien 1971), but most have remained unpublished—apart from short descriptions in the main guides to the collection (R. Paribeni, Le Terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano, 2nd ed. 1932; S. Aurigemma, Le Terme di Diocleziano e il Museo Nazionale Romano, 6th ed. 1970; W. Helbig, Führer durch die öffentlichen Sammlungen klassischer Altertümer in Rom, III, 4th ed. 1969) and the inclusion of their inscriptions in the Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum. Yet, these unassuming monuments could provide valuable information about the religious attitudes of the Romans. Their full, adequately illustrated publication would be of unquestionable benefit.

Obviously, it was not C.’s intention to take such a complete inventory. But although she is content with selecting a number of pieces (on grounds of what criteria she does not reveal) her book is a most welcome step in the right direction. A brief introduction on the methods used by the sculptores producing such altars and gravestones (pp. 1-3) is followed by an equally brief and no less cursory attempt to define the terms ‘altare’, ‘ara’ and ‘cip­pus’ (pp. 4-6). What precisely distinguishes an ‘altare ossuario’ from an ‘ara ossuario’ remains, however, unclear (and not only to the reader: see e.g. p. 68 where the two terms are used synonymously); and what is the difference between cinerary urns and nos. 24, 31 and 32 for which the term ‘cippo ossuario’ is used?

By far the largest part of C.’s book is taken up by the catalogue raisonné which comprises 59 pieces (pp. 7-133). The first 38 are grouped on the basis
of typological features (e.g. altars with bucrania, altars with the representation of an aedicula etc.) while the others are classified by their cult function (e.g. ‘Altari dei Lari’—where one is somewhat surprised to see no mention of A. Alföldi, *Die zwei Lorbeerbäume des Augustus*, Bonn 1973 or of P. Zanker’s paper in the *Bullettino della Commissione Archeologica di Roma* 82, 1970/1971: Über die Werkstätten augusteischer Larenaltäre). Each entry starts with the measurements, a brief note on the marble used and some comments on the state of preservation, then the provenience as well as the present location in the National Museum are mentioned. The bibliography which completes this first section is not always exhaustive (in particular, C. gives the impression of having some trouble with studies written in German). It is followed by a detailed description, complemented by a profile drawing (by L. Crescenzi) and at least one photograph (for most pieces there are three of them) of good quality. The ensuing discussion touches upon various questions related to the inscription and to the decoration (for the significance of the various motifs C. refers mainly to V. Macchioro, *Il simbolismo nelle figurazioni sepolcrali romane*, Naples 1909 and F. Cumont, *Recherches sur le symbolisme funéraire des Romains*, Paris 1942), but is above all concerned with problems of dating. Only a few of these grave monuments can be dated on external evidence—such as the funerary altar for Minicia Marcella (no. 22): she died in 105/6 A.D. as we know from the letter of condolence Pliny wrote to her father, C. Minicius Fundanus (*Ep. V*, 16). For the vast majority the dating has to rely upon a stylistic analysis of the relief decoration and/or the engraved inscription. On the whole, C. discharges this task convincingly, even though she sometimes displays surprisingly great confidence in—notoriously aleatory—epigraphical criteria. So for instance when she dates the cippus of Pompeia Fortunata (no. 20) to the Claudio—Neronian period because of the ‘buona fattura delle lettere’ after having noted herself that the portrait head was ‘di tipo flavio’. The earliest pieces belong to the middle of the first century B.C., the latest to the end of the third or the beginning of the fourth century A.D., with the bulk being late Julio-Claudian and Flavian. And while most of them are of rather modest if not mediocre quality, a few reach a fairly high artistic level (see especially no. 46 for an Augustan, no. 6 for a Claudian and no. 37 for a Flavian example); but to what extent this is a reflection of the dedicator’s social position does not number among C.’s preoccupations. One piece, however, stands out, towering over all the others; it is the well known ‘altar of the white poplars’ (no. 1), found on the Tiber bank opposite the Castle of S. Angelo. At its top a rectangular depression is carved out (ca. 46 x 67 cms large, 3.6 cms deep) which clearly served to receive not a balustrade to hold the sacrifices as C. suggests (p. 12), but the plinth of a statue. The correct interpretation of this most delicately
decorated monument of early Augustan date has long been put forward by Erika Simon: it is the base of a statue of Hercules standing under a canopy that was supported by four columns, their capitals decorated with the hero's lion-skin (Helbig III 113 no. 2190; 213 no. 2297).

The two very short chapters which follow the catalogue add little to our knowledge. The first (pp. 137-140) includes a few summary—and one is tempted to say simplistic—remarks on the symbolic significance of the decoration; birds, for instance, represent the soul of the dead (p. 139), the griffin alludes to his or her apotheosis (p. 138). In the second (pp. 141-142) C. gives a list of 15 workshops ('officine lapidarie') to which she attributes a number of altars and cippi. Suffice to remark that most of her so-called workshops consist of no more than two pieces.

Finally, the indices where one finds the same combination of usefulness and lost opportunities so characteristic of the whole book. The first, of persons (pp. 143-145), is chaotic (see on this P. Herz, Gymnasium 87, 1980, 463). On the other hand, those of proveniences (pp. 147-148) and of the decorative motifs (pp. 149-157) are most helpful. But in a work that deals mainly with inscribed monuments, one might also have expected an index of inscriptions.

J-P. Descoeudres


Well produced as regards both text and illustrations this first ΣΙΚΕΛΙΚΑ volume augurs well for the series which is published by the Centro siciliano di studi storico-archeologici 'Biagio Pace' under the direction of Nicola Bonacasa. It is the long-awaited publication of one of Sicily's main prehistoric sites, the famous 'Cave of the Old Man', situated near Petralia Sottana in the province of Palermo (ca. 30 km south of Cefalu), overlooking the valley of the Imera meridionale.

The archaeological exploration of the fabled grotto started in 1936, and in 1937 the first excavation campaign took place under P. Mingazzini, the then director of the museum at Palermo. In the following year a