Mignone, L. M. 2016. *The Republican Aventine and Rome's Social Order.* Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press. Pp. xv + 243 ISBN 9780472119882. US$70.

The Aventine hill has long been associated with the Roman plebs in the popular imagination. As an abstract idea, it has been used by various political movements in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, and Merlin's seminal monograph, *L'Aventin dans l'antiquité* (Paris 1906), presented the Aventine as 'la montagne plébienne' and 'la colline populaire' (p. 3). Mignone's erudite and detailed study of the Republican Aventine provides a thorough debunking of this long-held tradition. Through a painstaking evaluation of the literary and archaeological source material (such as it is), she systematically dismantles the notion that there was anything particularly 'plebeian' about the Aventine, demonstrating that the development of the hill mirrored the overall development of the city of Rome, with the region showing a high degree of socio-economic integration. The plebeian symbolism of the Aventine is revealed to be a largely modern construct, and a thought-provoking epilogue shows how this has been reinforced over the last two centuries by its use as a symbolic rallying cry in Paris, Italy, and even Latin America.

The identification of the Aventine as plebeian is primarily linked to the secessions of the fifth and third centuries BC and the flight of Gaius Gracchus to the hill in the second century BC. Mignone thus begins with a close reading of the ancient literary evidence relating to these events. The historicity of the first two secessions, in 494 and 449 BC respectively, is questionable, but the literary tradition typically (although not exclusively) places the first secession on Mons Sacer, a location some way out of Rome, and the second secession on both the Aventine and Mons Sacer. The brief surviving references to the third secession in 287 (the one most likely to be a historical event) place this on the Janiculum. The Aventine therefore features prominently in accounts of the second secession, but is by no means presented in the literary tradition as the canonical location for secession. It is the process of withdrawal itself that appears to be important, rather than the specific location. Consequently, Gaius Gracchus' flight to the Aventine in 121 BC was unlikely to be down to the hill's reputation as the location par excellence for secession and revolt. In fact, Mignone suggests that the presence of the Aventine in literary accounts of the second secession may well be a retrojection inspired by Gracchus' actions, leading us into an interpretative circle.

In any case, Gracchus did not retreat to the Aventine per se, but specifically to the Temple of Diana, perhaps because this temple was said to have housed a bronze *cippus* engraved with the so-called *Lex Icilia de Aventino publicando*, a law that Gracchus may have intended to use as a rallying point for his supporters. This law was apparently passed by a tribune named L. Icilius in 456 BC in order to reclaim land on the Aventine for distribution and development by the Roman plebs, strengthening the association between the Aventine and the plebeians. Chapter 2 of Mignone's monograph, 'Land confiscation on the Aventine: *Ager Publicus* and the *Lex Icilia de Aventino Publicando*' (pp.48-76), however, questions the authenticity of this law. She argues that while a land law was probably passed in 456, it was unlikely to be linked to Icilius, whose name was probably inserted into the narrative at a later date, and the details of the law set out by Dionysius of Halicarnassus, which he claims are taken from the bronze cippus in the Temple of Diana, are anachronistic, reflecting the concerns of the second century rather than the fifth. She questions whether there really was a bronze cippus engraved with this law in this period, and Appendix 2, pp. 212-213, provides a survey of previous scholarship on this cippus and its authenticity (or otherwise). Mignone does an excellent job here of problematising this law and reinterpreting it within the wider context of the development of *ager publicus* and agrarian reform in the Republic, although the details remain somewhat obscure.

Mignone then goes on to explore literary reports of known historical figures who apparently lived on the Aventine in the period from the third century BC to the foundation of the Principate. These include the poet Ennius, members of the patrician gens of the Sulpicii Galbae, and L. Faberius, a wealthy and influential man with political connections to Julius Caesar, who, Vitruvius reports (7.9.2), had a luxurious residence on the Aventine. Livy (39.9-11) also locates various protagonists in the Bacchanalian affair of 186 BC here, including P. Aebutius, his aunt Aebutia, a well-connected woman known to elite matrons in the city, his mother Duronia and stepfather T. Sempronius Rutilus, and his lover, Hispala, an independent freedwoman. Cicero also had rental property on the Aventine and the Argiletum, two *insulae* that he had acquired as part of Terentia's dowry (Cic. *Att.* 12.32.2). Many of the workers in the Emporium district, which began to be developed from the early second century BC, also likely lived in

the area. This miscellaneous and anecdotal evidence suggests that the population of the Aventine was socially and economically mixed, at least from the third century BC onwards.

The archaeological evidence for domestic architecture on the Aventine is scant and fragmentary, but Mignone's presentation of the available evidence indicates that by the second century BC at least, there were luxurious houses on the hill. The Largo Arrigo VII (also known as the Domus Picta and the Casa Bellezza), originally excavated in 1958, in particular is one of Rome's finest specimens of Republican housing. At least some of the residents in the late Republic, therefore, were wealthy, but as Mignone emphasises, we cannot identify the social status of residents by means of their décor or architecture; the inhabitants of these houses could be patrician or plebeian, freeborn or freed, despite previous attempts to identify the occupant of the Largo Arrigo VII as an eques or merchant rather than a senator simply by virtue of the residence's location on the Aventine. This highlights one of the fundamental problems with identifying the Aventine as a peculiarly plebeian space. How exactly would we distinguish a region as 'plebeian'? After all, as Mignone notes early on in her study and again in the conclusion (pp.11-13; 181), nearly every Roman citizen living in Republican Rome was a plebeian. Nor is plebeian synonymous with poverty or the poor, as Mignone is clearly aware, although occasionally she comes close to conflating the two, when, for example, she emphasises that Gracchus' resistance on the Aventine was 'no guerrilla scuffle in narrow alleyways cutting through overcrowded tenements' (p. 47); it is not clear why we might expect this particular form of architecture in a 'plebeian' district.

The final chapter, 'Zoning Rome's Residents' (pp. 138-179), explores the issue of residential zoning in Republican Rome. Mignone rightly emphasises that walkability was key, meaning that most residents lived and worked in their neighbourhoods, remaining in close proximity to their primary social and economic locations. Through a consideration of the (primarily imperial) ancient evidence such as the fourth-century AD Regionary Catalogues, the third-century AD Severan Marble Plan, the first-century AD townscape of Pompeii, and the nature and organisation of *vici* in Rome, she highlights the lack of evidence for social and economic zoning. Rather there was social and economic integration throughout the city, a residential patterning encouraged in part by the presence of the elite *domus*, with its diversity of residents, and by the system of patronage. There is nothing to indicate that the Aventine was any different in this sense from the other hills of the city. Mignone suggests that this social diffusion may have encouraged urban cohesion and reduced the potential for violence in Rome. It would be interesting to develop this argument further, and in particular, to consider what exactly changed in the final decades of the Republic, when Rome was characterised by exactly the sort of urban violence that this social diffusion should have prevented. Furthermore, as Mignone suggests in her concluding pages, it would be a useful exercise to compare the Aventine to other hills in the city, such as the Quirinal or the Caelian, to see if there was anything particularly distinctive about these different neighbourhoods.

In this scholarly and stimulating book, Mignone has successfully deconstructed the notion of the Aventine as a 'plebeian hill', in terms of both its residents and its political symbolism. She shows an excellent knowledge of the relevant literary and archaeological material, and draws well on comparative models of urban spatial organisation. While the text can be somewhat dense in parts, discussions are consistently thorough and detailed. The book is well presented, although the printing quality of some of the maps and images could be improved. It should serve as a welcome corrective to the practice of what Mignone describes as 'filtering the history of the Aventine through plebeian associations' (p. 182), enabling new assessments of the literary and archaeological material relating to the hill and its residents.

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