

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality
Katherine M. D. Dunbabin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

The Roman Banquet

Images of Conviviality

Dining was an important social occasion in the classical world. Scenes of drinking and dining decorate the wall paintings and mosaic pavements of many Roman houses. They are also painted in tombs and carved in relief on sarcophagi and on innumerable smaller grave monuments. Drawing frequently upon ancient literature and inscriptions as well as archaeological evidence, this book examines the visual and material evidence for dining throughout Roman antiquity. Topics covered include the relationship between Greek and Roman dining habits, the social significance of reclining when dining in public, the associations between dining scenes and death, the changing fashions of dining at the end of antiquity, and the use of banquet scenes in the art of early Christianity. Richly illustrated, *The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality* offers a full and varied picture of the role of the banquet in Roman life.



Katherine M. D. Dunbabin is professor Emerita of Classics at McMaster University in Hamilton, Ontario. A scholar of the British School at Rome, a Humboldt Fellow, a Visiting Fellow at All Souls College, Oxford, and a Jackson Lecturer at Harvard University, she is also the author of *Mosaics of the Greek and Roman World*.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The Roman Banquet

Images of Conviviality



Katherine M. D. Dunbabin

McMaster University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality
Katherine M. D. Dunbabin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

PUBLISHED BY THE PRESS SYNDICATE OF THE UNIVERSITY OF CAMBRIDGE
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge, United Kingdom

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
Ruiz de Alarcón 13, 28014 Madrid, Spain
Dock House, The Waterfront, Cape Town 8001, South Africa
<http://www.cambridge.org>

© Katherine M. D. Dunbabin 2003

This book is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2003

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

Typefaces Bembo 11/14 pt. and Cochin *System* L^AT_EX 2_ε [TB]

A catalog record for this book is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging in Publication Data

Dunbabin, Katherine M. D.
The Roman banquet: images of conviviality / Katherine M. D. Dunbabin
p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-82252-1

1. Gastronomy – Rome – History. 2. Dinners and dining – Rome – History.
I. Title.

TX641 .D85 2003
641'.01'30937 – dc21 2003043509

ISBN 0 521 82252 1 hardback

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality
Katherine M. D. Dunbabin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

For
William

Contents

List of Illustrations.....ix

Preface xv

Introduction I

CHAPTER 1. Romans, Greeks, and Others
on the Banqueting Couch..... II

CHAPTER 2. Place Settings.....36

CHAPTER 3. Public Dining..... 72

CHAPTER 4. Drinking in the Tomb..... 103

CHAPTER 5. Banqueting in Late Antiquity 141

CHAPTER 6. The Last Banqueters 175

Conclusion..... 203

Notes.....209

Glossary..... 251

Abbreviations 259

Bibliography 261

Index of Ancient Sources 281

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality
Katherine M. D. Dunbabin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

Index of Sites and Monuments.....285

General Index.....289

Colour plates follow page 60.

List of Illustrations

COLOUR PLATES

- I Pompeii, House of the Chaste Lovers (IX 12.6), triclinium, west wall, indoor banqueting scene.
- II Pompeii, outdoor banqueting scene (Naples MN 9015).
- III Herculaneum, banquet of young man and *hetaera*.
- IV Pompeii, House of M. Lucretius (IX 3.5), banquet of Erotes and Psyches.
- V Herculaneum, painted panel with still life.
- VI Boscoreale Treasure, selected silverware.
- VII Lilybaeum, Hypogaeum of Crispia Salvia, painting of banquet scene.
- VIII Sevso Treasure, Hunting Plate, central medallion.
- IX Rome, building on Caelian Hill, painting of wine server.
- X Rome, building on Caelian Hill, painting of servant with plate of vegetables.
- XI Thysdrus, mosaic panels with *xenia*.
- XII Sepphoris, House of Orpheus, mosaic of banquet.
- XIII Constanza, Tomb of Banquet, painting of banquet on *stibadium*.
- XIV Antioch, Tomb of Mnemosyne, mosaic of banqueting women.
- XV Rome, Hypogaeum of Vibia, *arcosolium*, induction of Vibia and banquet of Vibia among the Blessed.
- XVI Vergilius Romanus, Cod. Vat. Lat. 3867, fol. 100v, Dido's Feast.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

BLACK-AND-WHITE FIGURES

- 1 Funerary relief of C. Rubrius Urbanus, drawing from collection of Cassiano dal Pozzo.
- 2 Nineveh, relief, Garden Feast of Assurbanipal.
- 3 Corinthian column krater with frieze of reclining banqueters.
- 4,5 Attic red-figure kylix attributed to the Foundry Painter, with symposiasts and flute girl.
- 6 Paestum, Tomb of the Diver, north wall, showing *kottabos* players and male lovers.
- 7 Paestum, Tomb of the Diver, east wall with *krater*.
- 8 Murlo, terracotta revetment plaque with banquet.
- 9 Tarquinia, Tomb of Hunting and Fishing, rear wall of second chamber.
- 10 Tarquinia, Tomb of the Leopards, rear wall, banquet scene.
- 11 Tarquinia, Tomb of the Ship, rear wall, detail of banquet scene.
- 12 Tarquinia, Tomb of the Shields, main chamber, rear wall, banquet of Larth Velcha and his wife Velia Seitithi.
- 13 Velletri, terracotta revetment plaque with banquet.
- 14 Alt-Kalkar, grave stele of C. Iulius Primus.
- 15 Olynthos, plan of houses A VI 2, A VI 4, A VI 6.
- 16 Athens, Agora, room in South Stoa I, reconstruction drawing.
- 17 Eretria, House of the Mosaics, plan.
- 18 Pompeii, House of the Moralists (III 4.2–3), summer triclinium, with masonry couches and table.
- 19 Pompeii, House of the Moralists (III 4.2–3), plan.
- 20 Reconstruction of couch with *fulcrum* from Pompeii.
- 21 Layout of typical Roman triclinium in the late Republic and early Empire.
- 22 Thysdrus, Sollertiana Domus, plan.
- 23 Conimbriga, House of the Fountains, triclinium.
- 24 Delos, House of the Trident, plan.
- 25 Jericho, first Winter Palace of Herod the Great, reconstructed plan.
- 26 Pompeii, House of the Chaste Lovers (IX 12.6), triclinium, north wall, outdoor banqueting scene.
- 27 Pompeii, House of Obellius Firmus (IX 14.2/4), *lararium* painting.
- 28 Pompeii, House of Triclinium (V 2.4), indoor banquet.
- 29 Pompeii, House of Triclinium (V 2.4), banquet under portico.
- 30 Pompeii, House VIII 5.24, outdoor banquet of pygmies.
- 31 Capua, banquet mosaic.
- 32 Pompeii, still life with plate of fish.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

- 33 Rome, mosaic of *asarotos oikos*, detail showing debris of food.
- 34 Boscoreale, silver cup decorated with plane branches.
- 35 Antioch, House of the Boat of Psyche, mosaic of banquet of Agros and Opora.
- 36 Rome, fragmentary relief from state monument showing banquet of Vestals.
- 37 Altar with banqueting scene, Este.
- 38 Side of Este altar, smith's tools.
- 39 Sentinum, relief of banquet.
- 40 Amiternum, relief with reclining and seated banqueters.
- 41 Pompeii VI 10.1, *caupona*, scene of seated drinkers in inn.
- 42 Isola Sacra, sarcophagus, detail, seated drinkers in tavern.
- 43 Pompeii, Tomb of Vestorius Priscus, banquet scene.
- 44 Pompeii, Tomb of Vestorius Priscus, display of silverware.
- 45 Rome, sarcophagus lid with seated and reclining banquet.
- 46 Carthage, mosaic of seated banquet.
- 47 Carthage, mosaic of seated banquet, detail.
- 48 Pompeii III 7, masonry triclinium in vineyard.
- 49 Pompeii, Agro Murecine, building with multiple triclinia, plan.
- 50 Ostia, Building of the Triclinia (I 12.1), plan.
- 51 Ostia, Building of the Triclinia (I 12.1), masonry couches in one triclinium.
- 52 Rome, House of the Herald (Schola Praeconum), wall painting with waiting servants.
- 53 Rome, House of the Herald, wall painting of three servants.
- 54 Rome, Vatican Necropolis, *kline* monument of Flavius Agricola.
- 55 Peiraeus, grave stele of Pyrrhias and his wife Thettale.
- 56 Samos, Hellenistic Totenmahl relief.
- 57 Totenmahl relief, apparently from Hierapolis.
- 58 Rome, tomb near columbarium of Statilii, painting of banqueting couple.
- 59 Rome, *kline* monument of C. Iulius Bathyllus.
- 60 Rome, Via Laurentina, *kline* monument of boy.
- 61 Rome, *kline* monument of woman.
- 62 Amiternum, funerary relief.
- 63 Puteoli, urn of L. Roscius Prepon.
- 64 Rome, funerary altar of Q. Socconius Felix.
- 65 Rome, funerary urn of Loriania Cypare.
- 66 Funerary urn of M. Domitius Primigenius.
- 67 Isola Sacra, Tomb II, *loculus* slab.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

- 68 Rome, sarcophagus of Caecilius Vallianus.
- 69 Sarcophagus of Caecilius Vallianus, detail of servants.
- 70 Rome, catacomb of Praetextatus, sarcophagus of Balbinus.
- 71 Etruscan cinerary urn from Perugia with reclining banqueter on lid.
- 72 Pompeii, Tomb of Cn. Vibrius Saturninus, funerary triclinium.
- 73 Isola Sacra, *biclinium* at entrance to tomb.
- 74 Ostia, Via Laurentina, columbarium 31, plan showing triclinium inside tomb.
- 75 Ostia, Via Laurentina, columbarium 31, painting of funerary banquet.
- 76 Rome, sarcophagus lid with outdoor picnic at *sigma*.
- 77 Thrace, green-glazed cup with skeleton and banqueting paraphernalia.
- 78 Pompeii, mosaic with skeleton butler.
- 79 Rome, funerary altar of Antonia Panace with reclining skeleton.
- 80 Herakleion, sarcophagus, front showing skeleton beside table.
- 81 Herakleion, sarcophagus, left end with sundial.
- 82 Antioch, House of Sundial, mosaic with man beside sundial.
- 83 Rhodes, funerary altar with drunken banqueter.
- 84 Sevso Treasure, Hunting Plate.
- 85 Cesena, silver plate, central medallion.
- 86 Piazza Armerina, villa, mosaic of Small Hunt.
- 87 Complutum, House of Bacchus, mosaic showing servants offering drink.
- 88 Thugga, mosaic showing slaves serving wine and other attendants.
- 89 Rome, sarcophagus fragment, slave with corkscrew curls holding basin for handwashing.
- 90 Sidon, tomb painting of servant Kalokeros holding tray.
- 91 Thysdrus, mosaic with *xenia* including scene of dice players.
- 92 Thysdrus, House of the Months, mosaic from triclinium with *xenia* and *asarotos oikos* motif.
- 93 Antioch, House of the Buffet Supper, mosaic with display of food.
- 94 Antioch, House of the Buffet Supper, detail with plate of appetizers.
- 95 Kaiseraugst Treasure, silver plate with scenes of story of Achilles.
- 96 Glass cage cup (*diatreton*) from grave at Köln-Braunsfeld.
- 97 Ephesos, mosaic of banquet at *sigma*.
- 98 Hot-water heater (*authepsa*) from Kaiseraugst.
- 99 El Ruedo (Baetica), villa, plan showing masonry *stibadium* in triclinium.
- 100 Argos, Villa of Falconer, mosaic with area marked out for *stibadium*.
- 101 Desenzano, plan of villa with triconch.
- 102 Rome, catacomb of Callixtus, *cubiculum* A3, banquet scene at *sigma*.

- 103 Rome, catacomb of Priscilla, *cappella greca*, banquet scene at *sigma*.
- 104 Rome, catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, *arcosolium* 75, banquet scene.
- 105 Rome, catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, *cubiculum* 76, *arcosolium* with banquet scene.
- 106 Rome, catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, *cubiculum* 76, panel with hot water heater in vault of *arcosolium*.
- 107 Rome, catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, *cubiculum* 78 ('of the two *agapai*'), end wall with Orants, *arcosolium* with banquet scene.
- 108 Rome, catacomb of Peter and Marcellinus, *cubiculum* 78, *arcosolium* with banquet scene.
- 109 Tipasa, Christian necropolis, funerary enclosure with two *stibadia*.
- 110 Funerary inscription of Ianuaria from catacomb of Callixtus.
- 111 Rome, Hypogaeum of Vibia, *arcosolium*, banquet of Vincentius and Seven Pious Priests.
- 112 Apamea, House of the Triclinos, plan.
- 113 Apamea, House of the Stag, *sigma* table of green marble from main reception room.
- 114 Constantinople, plan of Great Hall (part of Palace of Antiochus?).
- 115 Cuicul, House of Bacchus, plan showing hall with seven apses.
- 116 Ivory pyxis with banquet of gods from Egypt.
- 117 Vienna Genesis, Cod. Vindob. theol. gr. fol. 17, Pharaoh's feast.
- 118 Codex Sinopensis, fol. 10v, Herod's feast.
- 119 Rossano Gospels, Last Supper.
- 120 Ravenna, Sant' Apollinare Nuovo, mosaic of Last Supper.

Preface

My involvement with Roman dining customs began when my husband, organizing a conference on symposia, demanded that I contribute a paper on Roman dining rooms. At the time I was beginning a book on mosaics and did not entirely welcome the interruption, being in some doubt as to whether I would have enough to say. The path on which I then embarked led eventually from the layout of mosaics and the function of the rooms they decorated, to the illustrations of dining scenes, and to the relationship, often far from straightforward, between these scenes and the evidence for actual dining practice. In the process, I found myself learning much about the development of Roman iconography and taking a new look at the social role of Roman art. Subsequently, it has become clear how well adapted was the theme of dining to an approach that would bring the visual and artefactual material together with the evidence of other sources, both literary and epigraphic. The study of ancient dining is fashionable today, as classicists have followed anthropologists and sociologists in recognizing the central place of food (and drink) and foodways in the structure and fabric of society. But this recognition is not a discovery of the New Historicism of the late twentieth century, but a revival of a scholarly interest that can be traced back to the Renaissance, and which drew, not only on the extensive literary sources that deal with dining in antiquity, but also on the artefacts and works of art that illustrate its practice. My own aim in this study has been twofold: to explore how art can be used as evidence for social and cultural history, while giving due weight to the conventions and pressures that governed the production of the images themselves.

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality

Katherine M. D. Dunbabin

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

The genesis of this book was an invitation from the Department of the Classics at Harvard to deliver the Carl Newell Jackson Lectures there in 1998. The original four lectures have been expanded into six chapters, but I have maintained the basic format and division of the subject matter, and resisted the temptation to try to include a much wider range of material and to cover topics outside the scope of the lectures. The week that I spent in Harvard in October 1998 was a memorable experience, combining productive academic discussions with frequent practical demonstrations of the importance of convivial commensality. I am grateful to the department, not only for making that week so enjoyable, but also for its subsequent interest in the publication and especially for the contribution of a generous subvention, which has made possible the inclusion of the colour plates. My thanks go especially to the successive Chairs of the Department, Greg Nagy and Richard Thomas, and to Kathleen Coleman, for continued encouragement and assistance.

Much of the writing of the book took place in another distinguished institution of higher learning that appreciates the role of dining in collegial life. From January to June 2001, I was fortunate to hold a Visiting Fellowship at All Souls College, Oxford; it would be difficult to imagine a more congenial atmosphere and surroundings in which to accomplish the task of finishing work on a manuscript. Much help has been provided in Oxford over the years by the staff of the Ashmolean Library, now the Sackler. In Rome, I benefited from the hospitality of the British School and the American Academy, as well as from the facilities of the German Archaeological Institute Library and Fototeca.

The travel essential for a study such as this, and the other expenses of research, have been supported by a grant from the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada; I acknowledge with gratitude the continuing support of the Council. The cost of photographs and publication permission has been assisted by a grant from the Arts Research Board of McMaster University.

In addition to the original lectures at Harvard, parts of this book have been presented in public lectures at the University of Toronto; the German Archaeological Institute and the British School at Rome; the University of Minnesota; the Università di Perugia; Royal Holloway College, London; the University of Nottingham; and the Institute of Archaeology and All Souls College, Oxford; as well as to the Association for the Study and Preservation of Roman Mosaics. On each occasion, and often in very different ways, questions from the audience, and subsequent discussions with friends and colleagues, have challenged my ideas and helped to clarify my thinking.

I am grateful to all the museums, institutions, and individual scholars who have provided photographs, answered my enquiries, or granted me permission to reproduce illustrations. Acknowledgement is made where appropriate, in the captions to the illustrations and/or in the notes, but I want to mention here the assistance of the following: Jessica David (Art Resource, NY); Shari Taylor Kenfield (Princeton); A. Rieche (Bonn); V. Mesquita (Lisbon); P. G. Guzzo (Pompeii); S. De Caro (Naples); W. Jashemski; E. Cicerchia, F. Buranelli (Vatican); J. Packer; H. R. Goette (Athens); M. Maass (Karlsruhe); E. Milleker (New York); Valerie Scott, A. Giovenco (Rome); G. Migatta (Rome); T. Fiedler (Berlin); R. Giglio; H. Hellenkemper (Cologne); F. Bisconti (Rome); and L. Becker (Worcester MA). Special thanks for help in obtaining photographs, for advice and assistance, or for fruitful and enjoyable discussions of Roman dining go to Janine and Jean-Charles Balty, Alix Barbet, Amanda Claridge, Marlia Mundell Mango, Zeev Weiss, and Roger Wilson; also to Janet Huskinson and an anonymous reviewer for helpful suggestions.

At McMaster, I want to acknowledge my debt to the many current and former students who have assisted me in my research, and especially to John Tamm, Anna Bart, Jan-Mathieu Carbon, and Amanda Cooney. Carmen Camilleri has been a constant source of help with the practical details of preparing a manuscript, as with much else.

This book is dedicated to my husband, William Slater, who first impelled me to undertake the study of Roman dining, and has continued to provide support, encouragement, and sometimes stimulating disagreement ever since.

Ancaster, Ontario
September 2002

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-12730-1 - The Roman Banquet: Images of Conviviality
Katherine M. D. Dunbabin
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

The Roman Banquet
Images of Conviviality