I

THE SANCTUARY OF DIANA AT ARICIA TO THE AUGUSTAN AGE

THE APPROACH

Aricia and its sanctuary of Diana are about eleven miles from Rome along the Via Appia. Although there were a few kilometers between the city walls and the sanctuary, the cult belonged to the city. Taking the Via Appia south from Rome, one approaches Aricia up a long incline to the point where the sanctuary road turns off (map 1). In Martial's day (2.19) the route was almost impassable for the beggars taking advantage of the long slope that slowed down vehicles. Aricia itself had a fine, fortified position, originally near the ridge of the crater of an extinct volcano looking west across the Latian plain all the way to Antium, later slightly further down the slope on the Via Appia (Strabo 5.3.12).[1] Today the view is just as commanding, although modern Anzio can sometimes be obscured by smog. The road to the right will take one to Lanuvium; that to the left still leads to the sanctuary.

Aricia is now a rather elegant Roman suburb. Driving south towards Lanuvium on the Via Appia, one passes through to the far side of Aricia, staying on the road to the left, dodging children and shoppers and other cars at a minor roundabout, then turning off onto a narrower road nearly invisible among apartment buildings. From here the road curves, cresting the crater's ridge, and one finds oneself in a world of incredible remoteness and, indeed, sacredness,[2] even while the noise

[1] See Lilli 2002 for the archaeology of archaic (52–62) and Republican (62–66) Aricia.
[2] For an analysis of the characteristics of sacred space, see Eliade (1959).

of schoolchildren playing has not yet died away.[3] The sanctuary is set in the crater of a small, extinct volcano, above a lake that appears almost perfectly round, although a cartographer would show it as slightly irregular and oblong (map 2).[4] Within the crater the woods are thick and green, birdsong fills the air, and the perfect blue of the lake reflects the sky and the crater's sloping sides. The old Roman road has, it is true, been asphalted, but it still slopes gently down from the crest to skirt the lake, moving away toward the sanctuary at a point where the lake leaves a blunt triangle of level land. To pass over the ridge into the crater is a very real experience of crossing a boundary into what is still effectively sacred space (fig. 1).

Neolithic man was here (Lenzi 2000, 157). Human activity in the crater began to increase from the middle Bronze Age, as bronze axe heads attest (Giardino 1985, 9–11; Lenzi 2000, 157–8). From the late Bronze Age through the early Iron Age the hunters and farmers inhabiting the Latin countryside seemed to prefer the more accessible and prosperous settlements along the river and land routes in the plain, and the Alban Hills were comparatively less inhabited (Smith 1996, 52). Yet there is evidence of eighth-century burials in the cemetery of Aricia (Gierow 1964, 354–6), and from then on the town grew in size, along with the other Alban communities. The Alban Hills were thickly wooded, and wild animals flourished there. Animal bones and fragments of an antler have been found just outside Aricia in the context of human habitation rather than burial and are datable to the eighth and seventh centuries (Gierow 1964, 358). The hills would have been a paradise for hunters, whether aristocrats in pursuit of boar or simple men looking to supplement a meager diet. Such hunters, coming over the ridge into the crater, would have had an awe-inspiring scene before them.[5]

[3] "The threshold is the limit, the boundary, the frontier that distinguishes and opposes two worlds – and at the same time the paradoxical place where those worlds communicate, where passage from the profane to the sacred world becomes possible" (Eliade 1959, 25).

[4] Cf. the detailed isometric "pianta generale del territorio nemorense" (fig. 44) in Lenzi. Lenzi is now the indispensable source for the topography of the sanctuary. There were actually two craters collapsed into one that the lake has filled (Lenzi, 155).

[5] Cf. Edlund 1987, 35–8 on the origin of sacred places, 42–93 on extra-urban and rural sanctuaries in Etruria and Magna Graecia, and especially 87 on the Lucus Feroniae.

The crater is steep and the lake 30 meters deep (Guldager Bilde 1997a, 166), with only a narrow shoreline. On the northeast side is the one bit of level land beside the lake, roughly triangular in shape. Here the sanctuary was eventually located, beside the lake, itself a kind of *templum*, a sacred space marked out by nature.[6] Just to the east, beneath the sheerest rise of stone, a great spring poured from the crater wall and into the lake (Rosa 1856, 7; Frazer 1.17, n. 4). Its stream was substantial enough to turn mill wheels in the Middle Ages, from which the place Le Mole ("the millstones") took its name. The crater is large enough to define a world of its own but not so large that it invites fragmentation of its interior space; and in this very contained space, the triangular flatland forms a single orienting point (figure 2). Behind this orienting point, the peak of the Alban Mount, the focus of Latin communal worship at the shrine of Jupiter Latiaris, rises above the crater walls.

"Man becomes aware of the sacred because it manifests itself, shows itself, as something wholly different from the profane" (Eliade 1959, 11). This crater is the natural place for a hunting cult. It is the universe writ small, uniting the three cosmic levels – the earth, the canopy of the heavens,[7] and, through depths of the lake and the caves at its shore, the underworld.[8] It was then, as now, a place of stunning beauty and peace, sacred and remote. In the twenty-first century, the sacredness of the place is marked by the contrast between the turbulent urban landscape outside the crater and the serene nature within. That same contrast would surely have been evident, although not so intensely, two millennia before, when one moved away from the rumbling, noisy

[6] G. Colonna, "La Dea Etrusca CEL e i santuari del Trasimeno." *Rivista Storica dell'Antichità* 6–7 (1976–1977), 45–62; see also Holland 1961, 6 n. 10 and 19 n. 42, on the religious importance of "living water."

[7] Cf. Varro, *LL* 5.17: sic caelum et pars eius, summum ubi stellae, et id quod Pacuvius cum demonstrat dicit – "hoc vide circum supraque quod complexu continet terram." (Thus *caelum*, "sky" is both a part of itself, the top where the stars are, and that which is meant by Pacuvius, when he indicates it thus – "See you that /Which round and over holds earth in its embrace"). Text and translation are those of Warmington (1979), who assigns it to Pacuvius' *Chryses* (fr. 107–8), the story of Orestes pursued by Thoas, whom he will eventually kill. See also fr. 115, a direct translation of Euripides' *Chrysippus* fr. 836 N, on Earth the mother who gives birth to the body and aer/aether as the entity that gives breath.

[8] Following Eliade (1959) 36–42.

traffic of a commercial city and principal staging post on the heavily traveled Via Appia. But the Bronze Age hunter no doubt saw it in its truest form, not needing the contrast with hectic urbanism to recognize "the sanctity of a lake and the setting in nature" (Edlund, 56).[9]

It is a small lake, spring fed, no more than 1.8 kilometers at its widest and 34.5 meters deep once the *emissarium* was built to maintain its level.[10] As there was no natural above-ground outlet, the lake level would have changed according to seasonal rain or drought although over time such changes would be moderated by the underground outflows (Lenzi 2000, 155). The summer's lush lakeside meadows would have been turned to marsh during the rainiest winter months, and in years of high rainfall the triangular piece of lowland would have been flooded. This triangle, broad across the curve of the lake and narrowing into the crater walls, is where the terrace for the lower sanctuary was eventually built. It resembled the stubby handle embracing the bottom of an Etruscan bronze mirror. On a calm day the lake reflects the sky and the shoreline with shimmering perfection. The Romans, much more attuned to the visual impact of the setting than we can be, called the lake the *speculum Dianae*, the "mirror of Diana."[11]

The crater has its own microclimate. Violent thunderstorms, earthquakes, and thick fogs are all more frequent there than they are in the plains of Latium beyond (Guldager Bilde 1997, 166). Trees – today chestnuts but in antiquity also beech and oak – as well as scrub and the larger woody bushes grew thick on the crater slopes: the area was densely populated with wildlife. Trees and bushes would have found the level ground inhospitable, however, intermittently sodden as it would have been before the *emissarium* was built. Meadow grass, on the other hand, would have grown well there. So the lake and the springs provided water for wild animals, the meadow offered grass for

[9] Cf. Edlund's discussion of the sacred nature of lakes in Italy (1987, 55) and on Monte Falterona and Lago degli Idoi in particular (56–8): "The site in all of Etruria which provides the most profound sense of the link between the sanctity of a lake and the setting in nature" (56).

[10] Zahle 1997, 169; the depth was measured in 1928 when the lake was drained to raise the great imperial ships. Since then the water level has dropped as a result of the dense population outside the crater, which uses the water that previously would have flowed into the lake.

[11] Servius *ad Aen.* 7.515; *CIL* XIV 2772.

grazing, and the woodlands refuge for animals and a source of forage year-round for animals and for man himself. Today the town of Nemi, a medieval foundation on the highest and steepest point of the crater rim right above the ancient meadow and sanctuary, is famous for the tiny wild strawberries that are celebrated with a festival at the end of May, and the old meadow, now rich agricultural land, is ribbed with lines of greenhouses protecting flowers grown for the Roman market. It is a haven for wildlife.[12] In that, it has not changed so very much from the time when the first Bronze Age hunter arrived. He saw the crater, its distinctive and separate nature, and its abundant wildlife as an inevitable focus for his religious experience of the hunting goddess.

THE SITE

What we know about the sanctuary as an expression of religious ideas, as a place shaped by human design for religious (and other) purposes, must come first from archaeological investigation. Until the excavations undertaken by Professor Giuseppina Ghini in the 1990s inaugurated a new era, the site of Aricia's sanctuary had been beset by misfortune – centuries of scavenging, followed by another century of poorly documented or unfinished excavations. It is not certain how much of the original sanctuary survived once it was closed. About the end of the second or the beginning of the third century C.E., a landslide destroyed part of the structure (Guldager Bilde 1997, 167). The sanctuary may have been closed down after this misfortune, or its closing may have been a response to increasing opposition on the part of Christian authorities. No coins after the reign of Antoninus Pius have been discovered (Guldager Bilde 1997, 167), and the fourth-century grammarian, Servius, indicates that Diana's priest, the *rex nemorensis*, had been transferred to Sparta (*ad Aen.* 2.116), although he does not say when this happened. By late antiquity, the sanctuary was certainly deserted and in ruins. Through the Middle Ages and the Renaissance nothing specific is known. No doubt the structures were used as a quarry for building materials. In the seventeenth century two Marchesi

[12] See figure 2. It was still maintained as a hunting preserve by the Chigi family in the eighteenth century, as attested by Lucidi (1791, 71) in his history of Aricia.

Frangipani explored the sanctuary and found various votive statuettes. In the eighteenth century digging was done for the Spanish Cardinal Despuig, whose collection from the sanctuary and surrounding areas ended up in Majorca a century later (Hübner 1862, 292–311). Cardinal Despuig's collection is distinguished by the fact that the provenience of the artifacts was preserved, but otherwise the finds uncovered by these treasure-hunting expeditions all went unnoted into private collections.

Then, in 1885, a serious, scientific (for the time) excavation was undertaken by Lord Savile (*Not. Scav.* 1895, 424–31) under license from Count Orsini, who had bought the castle at Nemi in 1870. When Savile wanted to resume excavations in the following year, Orsini imposed intolerable conditions on him and forced him to fill in the previous year's work. Savile had divided the "finds" of the previous year with Orsini. By the standards of the time, which valued imperial over Republican artifacts and objets d'art over archaeologically and historically significant material, Orsini acquired the lion's share of the finds. The bright side is that, as a result, the Republican artifacts were preserved in a single collection by Lord Savile. He turned it over to the Nottingham Castle Museum, and it is now kept in Nottingham at the Brewhouse Yard Museum.[13]

After the break with Savile, Orsini commissioned Roman art dealers to "excavate." They did so in 1886–8 and 1895 (*Not. Scav.* 1887, 1888, and 1895; cf. Rossbach 1885 and 1890; Helbig 1885; Rohden 1886), and the finds were sold. Although unknowable numbers of artifacts disappeared into private collections, some beautiful pieces were acquired by museums. The most significant collections are at the Ny Carlsberg Glyptotek in Copenhagen and the University Museum in Philadelphia.[14]

At the beginning of the twentieth century the castle of Nemi became the property of the Ruspoli family. A new excavation was undertaken, published by L. Morpurgo (*Not. Scav.* 1903), who did not know where the pieces from the excavations of 1886 or after had gone

[13] Blagg (1983, 19–24) surveys the history of excavations for the Nottingham Museum, Crescenzi (1977) the history of the identification and excavation of the site.

[14] Surveys covering the history of excavations and collections are Guldager Bilde 1997a, 171–2 (Glyptotek), and Guldager Bilde and Moltesen 2000, 7–18 (Philadelphia).

(316, n. 2) with the exception of some items acquired by the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston. Orsini apparently had not sold everything he claimed for himself from Savile's excavation. These remaining pieces eventually made their way to the Museo Nazionale and are now in the Terme Museum, together with the finds from all of the twentieth-century excavations.

From 1924 to 1928 excavations were undertaken under the auspices of the state by Edoardo Gatti. Gatti was unable to finish uncovering the buildings (particularly the theater) and died before he could write up the report. L. Morpurgo (*Not. Scav.* 1931) nobly tackled the difficult task of publishing a dig she had not supervised (and that had been covered up when the work was completed), so that many questions raised by the partial excavation inevitably remained unanswered. Furthermore, Gatti's excavations in the sanctuary were overshadowed by the discoveries of the imperial ships at the bottom of the lake. These magnificent "floating palaces" were raised (1927–32) and housed in a museum built for them beside the lake. The ships were destroyed in a fire on May 31, 1944 (Ghini 1992, 3–7), possibly the result of arson by retreating German troops. New excavations, admirably conducted and swiftly published, were begun in 1989 by Ghini (Ghini 1997, 2000).

This complex and unfortunate history has always complicated the study of Diana. The treasure hunts were for artifacts that were separated from the site without any record, either of where they were found or of where they went. Savile cared about the site itself, as did Gatti, but neither had the opportunity to complete his excavation. Their sketches and maps (such as they were) lacked precise measurements. Thus we have no reliable record of the size of the buildings nor any precise indication of where the reburied remains were situated in relationship to each other or to the structures that are now visible. Ghini's current excavations are focused on the colonnade and niches at the back of the sanctuary.

Allowing for these considerable uncertainties, what have been discovered are the remains of a late-Republican sanctuary, rebuilt in stages during the first two centuries of the imperial period. The broad outlines of this sanctuary, as Gatti and Savile found it, are as follows (map 2): There was a well-paved Roman road leading over the rim of the crater on its southwest side, and proceeding down the slope

to the sanctuary on the northeast quarter of the lake. This part of the sanctuary was defined by a large rectangular terrace of the late Republican period, set beside the lake and bordered on two sides by a colonnade. Behind the colonnade there were high arched niches set into the slope. These niches were constructed in the early imperial period, and some held statues of the emperors. A small rectangular building once identified as the Republican temple stood on the terrace, underneath a medieval farmhouse. There was a small theater and an attached building complex with a bath. The ships found sunk in the lake and raised during the excavations of the late 1920s may or may not be directly relevant to the sanctuary.

The lakeside face of the terrace, the niches, and parts of the colonnade are visible today, and the quondam supposed temple lies under the farmhouse among the greenhouses. The theater and the other buildings have been covered over. The separate parts of the sanctuary and the artifacts found there are discussed in detail later. Unavoidably, the excavations conducted to date have for the most part raised questions that can only be answered by new and more exhaustive scientific excavations. There is still much to be done, and it is hoped that Professor Ghini's work will be adequately funded in the next decade, so that she may reestablish the evidence already brought to light and add to it – especially by revealing whatever may be left of the temple.

FROM THE ARCHAIC AGE TO CA. 300 B.C.E.

Sacred space is defined by use. Buildings represent only one way to define the places where men and women come to worship a god. There were worshippers in the crater meadows long before there were buildings to receive them. This is not only appropriate for a goddess whose domain is the wild; the absence of buildings must also define a certain religious quality of the goddess which had to be preserved when the sanctuary *did* acquire structures.

The sanctuary was functioning as a place of established worship in the archaic period. Miniature pots – unmistakably votive offerings of the archaic period, and characteristic of similar sanctuary offerings elsewhere in Latium – have been found near the terrace (Gierow 1966, 39–40), and a bronze fibula dates from the late eighth or early seventh

century (Blagg 1983, no. 713, p. 56). A remnant from an even earlier period than this, a cultural rather than a physical remnant, was the ritual of the priest-king, the *rex nemorensis*, the king of the wood. This priest is unique to the cult of Arician Diana in the historical period. (Among the Latins there may have been other similar priesthoods that had faded away by the time notice was taken of such figures.) The *rex* was the fugitive slave who, by breaking off a bough of a sacred tree in the sanctuary, earned the right to meet the reigning priest in mortal combat. The victor of the combat became the new priest-king (Servius *ad Aen.* 6.136**)**.[15] It is a truth of the wild that one being must die so that another may live, and the ritual of the man who kills his predecessor and then himself becomes priest-king doubtless had its origins among the hunter ancestors of the Latin communities. Its survival at Aricia may be due in part to the continued excellent hunting in the Alban Hills; but it must also reflect the interpretive adaptability of the priesthood as managed by the Arician elders in control of the sanctuary.

The ritual of the *rex nemorensis* enacts an eternal anxiety of the early hunter-warrior: when does the hunted become the hunter, and what is the meaning of the death of the one hunted? Such anxieties, and the curious authority of the priest who represents them, are well-known to anthropologists who study hunter-gatherer cultures. The *rex* exhibits the characteristics of the central protagonist of hunter-gatherer mythology, who regularly becomes problematical when societies become politically organized and troubled by the ethical and legal implications of his behavior. The actions of such a protagonist, Guenther says (1999, 426–7), "are in line with his own fluid and flawed nature . . . [T]he striking prominence of this quasi-divine figure in its classic 'archaic' form within the mythological world of hunter-gatherers contrasts with the figure's relative insignificance in the myths and beliefs of state-organized societies."[16] As we will see, the

[15] A detailed discussion of the *rex nemorensis* and the numerous references to this figure in Latin and Greek literature can be found in Chapter 7.

[16] Guenther, as an anthropologist, is more comfortable with the terms "trickster" and "shaman" than most classicists will be; however, for a recent and wide-ranging application of the trickster paradigm to Roman culture, see R. Stewart, "Who's Tricked: Models of Slave Behavior in Plautus' *Pseudolus*," in *Role Models: Identity and Assimilation in the Roman World*, ed. S. Bell and I. L. Hansen (Ann Arbor 2006).

rex nemorensis, and similar priesthoods, may indeed have existed at the same time as Latin state-organized societies were coming into being, but it is clear that his "flawed nature" – symbolized by his fugitive status and the necessary murder of his predecessor, matters that have disturbed both the ancients and so many modern scholars as well – made him a figure whose ultimate containment in the sanctuary at Aricia best served everyone's interests. Once confined to that context, the priesthood continued through the age of the Antonines. Problematic though it is, the *rex nemorensis*' perpetually renewed vitality as a religious symbol cannot be doubted.

At the end of the sixth century the sanctuary emerged into the light of political-military history and is revealed as a place of considerable importance to a number of allied Latin cities. A fragment from the elder Cato's *Annales* demonstrates (Cato fr. 58 Peter; see Chapter 5 for the text and translation) that a dedication of the grove in the Arician woods was once made by the Dictator Latinus, a certain Egerius Baebius from Tusculum. The dedication was made communally by Tusculum, Aricia, Lanuvium, Laurentum, Cora, Tibur, Pometia, and Rutulian Ardea.

The date of the events to which this passage refers has been deduced from context, and, it is argued, should be placed within a decade before or after 500 B.C.E.[17] A consecration of this sort would not have necessarily implied a temple, so Cato may have been recording no more than the consecration of a sod altar in the clearing by the named allied Latin cities. It is now generally agreed, however, that this cannot mark the original dedication of the sanctuary itself (Cornell 1989, 273; restated 1995, 297–8). It must therefore represent a special occasion regarding the alliance of the named cities. This fragment holds much of great importance both for the nature of the cult and for Latin history and is discussed at length in the context of Latin history of the sixth

[17] Gordon (1934, 1) dates the events in the passage to around 500 B.C.E. This date is generally accepted and reaffirmed by Cornell. Pairault's argument (1969, 440–1) for the fourth century is not sustainable, based as it is on his view of Diana as fundamentally a Greek goddess, whose Greekness could not have been acquired before that date. I would certainly agree that this passage reflects the historical fact of the importance of the sanctuary to the alliance of Latin cities. I am not so certain it can be taken as testimony to a known historical event. See the discussion in Chapter 5.