

some conflicting interests between the Athenians without having to call Athens a "feuding society". H also seems to be too uncritical, over-confident and defensive of his results, appearing to defend the Athenians of the 5th and 4th century BC from the attacks of "pessimistic" historians of the 21st century AD. However, H has worked on his subject thoroughly and, in my opinion, it is a good thing for a historian to question generally accepted truths. This book will not leave its readers cold and is sure to provoke discussion.

Suvi Kuokkanen

KAREN K. HERSCH: *The Roman Wedding. Ritual and Meaning in Antiquity*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2010. ISBN 978-0-521-19610-9 (hb), 978-0-521-12427-0 (pb). XII, 341 pp., 9 figs. GBP 55, USD 90 (hb), GBP 17.99, USD 27.99 (pb).

In the past thirty years, the study of women's life in ancient society has produced a number of publications to which we can now add a new interesting and challenging book by Karen Hersch. Among the numerous aspects related to ancient women's life, the author has chosen to focus on the role that the bride played in the Roman wedding. It is certainly a major task, since any discussion on Roman women as brides must be necessarily based on the written sources which are, however, the product of the elite male. For her study the author has chosen a number of literary and antiquarian texts from the end of the Republic through the early Empire along with some iconographic examples of marriage scenes. The analysis of such evidence is carried out with the help of methodologies drawn from modern social studies, an approach that has been widely adopted in recent scholarship on the social dynamics in the ancient world.

The book includes five chapters, which are preceded by an introduction and followed by bibliography and illustrations. In Chapter 1, "The Laws of Humans and Gods", Hersch analyses the legal aspects of the Roman wedding, but she also considers the religious injunctions, as legal acts and religious rites were both necessary requirements for a legitimate marriage. In Chapters 2 and 3, the author discusses the stages of the wedding ceremony, which starts with the preparation of the bride and the activities that may have taken place in her house (Chapter 2: "At the House of the Bride"). It continues with the procession that accompanies the bride to her new house and the rituals performed there by the groom and the bride (Chapter 3: "To the Groom's House"). In Chapter 4, "Gods of the Roman Wedding", Hersch discusses which gods and goddesses were usually associated with the rituals of the Roman wedding. As Hersch correctly points out, the Roman wedding ceremony has been traditionally described in modern scholarship as an orderly arranged ritual. On the contrary, as the author emphasises, every ceremony was different, depending on the couple's social status, tastes, and religious devotion to specific gods. Hersch's thorough analysis of these different aspects along with the bibliographic references make her work very valuable and leaves room for others to explore further particulars of the Roman wedding ceremony.

The work ends with the conclusions in Chapter 5, where Hersch interestingly explains the apparent oddities of the Roman wedding ceremony as aspects shared by other Roman rites and celebrations, such as the assumption of the *toga virilis*, the funeral, and the triumph. Like these rites, the wedding ritual was a form of *rite de passage* for the bride, who had to experience separation, transition, and incorporation, on public display.

The ultimate goal of Hersch's work is a better understanding of women's role in Roman society. Hersch undoubtedly accomplishes her goal through a detailed analysis, which shows the importance and the significance of the Roman wedding ritual for a woman. However, as the author is well aware, research based on male texts does not allow us to explore better the thoughts and the feelings that accompanied the Roman bride during her wedding ceremony.

Margherita Carucci

GREG WOOLF: *Tales of the Barbarians: Ethnography and Empire in the Roman West*. Wiley-Blackwell, Chichester – Malden 2011. ISBN 978-1-4051-6073-5. VIII, 167 pp. GBP 50, USD 89.95, EUR 60.

The year 2011 apparently witnessed something of a rediscovery of Arnaldo Momigliano's *Alien Wisdom* (1975). Recently, the insightful little book has not only inspired Erich S. Gruen to a study published earlier in the year by Princeton University Press (cf. above p. 235), but it moreover seems to have stimulated Greg Woolf as well – a scholar known for his studies regarding the Roman West. Another formative predecessor recognised by Woolf is the 1992 monograph *Edges of the Earth in Ancient Thought* by James Romm, a very remarkable study that is rightly considered essential in its field. Considering this and Woolf's own earlier contributions from the oft-quoted *Becoming Roman* (1998) onwards, a rough outline of this new book could perhaps have been predicted. Even the concept of an ethnographical "middle ground" – a model developed in the field of North American colonial studies and applied in this book to Roman studies – featured prominently in Woolf's 2009 article "Cruptorix and his kind" (in *Ethnic Constructs in Antiquity*, edited by T. Derks and N. Roymans, Amsterdam University Press).

The "middle ground", however, is no mere fad. Woolf's main point is that a creative process of "barbarian tales" grew in the recently subjugated provinces of the Roman West. Envisioned by Woolf as "exercises in cultural conservation", these tales mostly constitute a form of barbarian *interpretatio* based on the classical information and myth now available to them. What earlier has been seen as a largely one-sided process of Greeks and Romans imposing their own traditions and their constructed linkages upon their recent neighbours/allies/subjects, is cast in Woolf's approach as a more nuanced and bilateral exchange of interpretations (cf. Gruen 2011). After a short introduction situating the study within the wider field of research inspired by postcolonialist discourse, Chapter One ("Telling Tales on the Middle Ground") takes a look at the varieties and registers of information regarding the western barbarians during the Roman Republic and early Empire. Some terminological definitions are provided and several worthwhile remarks made on their use before the "middle ground" is brought along – to a large extent the most refreshing heuristic device in use throughout the book. The interpretation of the sources is done convincingly; for instance, Woolf provides a quite plausible explanation for the notably static nature of much of ancient ethnography in remarking that Pliny appears to derive ethnography from the geographic reality of the world itself. Combined with climatic explanation models this comes a long way in accounting for the curious "ethnographic stasis" and the "impossibility of new barbarians" remarked upon by, among others, Herwig Wolfram (1997, *The Roman Empire and its Germanic Peoples*, 37). The