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Matthew B. Roller: Dining Posture in Ancient Rome

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Introduction

THE READER WHO TAKES this volume into her or his hands may marvel to behold a book-length study of posture in the Roman convivium—a topic that may appear, even to students of Roman social and cultural history, overly abstruse and specialized. Can the results of such an investigation really fill so many pages productively? Some preliminary justification seems worthwhile, lest anyone decide out of hand that the answer is no and abandon the book on principle.

I therefore open with three brief examples, two literary and one visual. The first, a passage from Suetonius's fragmentary *De Poetis*, relates an anecdote about the comic playwright Terence. As a young poet on the verge of producing his first play (the *Andria*, staged in 166 B.C.), Terence was instructed by the aediles to submit the work to the venerable playwright Caecilius Statius for approval. He duly called upon the great poet, by chance arriving at his house while he was dining. Terence was admitted but was made to sit on a bench "because he was poorly clothed," while Caecilius himself reclined on a couch. But upon reading the opening verses, Terence so impressed his host that he was invited to recline on a couch and share the meal, after which he read off the remainder of the play to Caecilius's great admiration.¹

For current purposes, this anecdote makes two important points. First, it indicates that, among the parties who were present at this meal, at least two different postures could be assumed simultaneously: reclining and sitting. Second, it suggests that these postures were differently marked for status. Terence's "poor clothing"—"poor," one assumes, in the eyes of his host Caecilius, and in relation to the clothing that Caecilius himself (and his other guests, if any) wore—is given as the reason that he was initially required to sit on a bench, near but apart from the host's couch. And since it was only after making a good impression with his verses that Terence was invited to recline on a couch like his host and share the meal, it seems clear that the reclining posture is correlated with higher status and privilege, and the seated posture with lower. Thus, Terence's two postures objectify and make visible the social status(es) ascribed to him by his host: first, he sits apart from the other diners as a social inferior; then he reclines among them as a social equal. The transition from the one posture to the other, and from the margin to the center of the convivium, marks a social promotion that he earns by the quality of his poetry. Yet even

¹ Suet. *Poet.* fr. 11, pp. 28–29 Reifferscheid: *scripsit comoedias sex. ex quibus primam Andriam cum aedilibus daret, iussus ante Caecilio recitare ad cenantem cum venisset, dicitur initium quidem fabulae, quod erat contemptiore vestitu, in subsellio iuxta lectulum residens legisse, post paucos vero versus invitatus ut accumberet cenasse una, dein cetera percucurrisse non sine magna Caecilii admiratione.*

when he sat, Terence was probably not at the bottom of the social hierarchy, even in this dining room. For any Roman reader of this anecdote would assume that household slaves were also present, attending to the needs of the host (their master) and his guests. As we shall see, such slaves would normally have been on their feet, either discharging their various tasks—pouring wine, clearing the tables, bringing food, and the like—or awaiting orders from the diners. To stand at dinner, then, and to be in motion, constitutes a third convivial posture marking a condition inferior even to that of a seated diner, let alone a reclining one.

The second example is a passage from Isidore's *Etymologiae*, written in the seventh century A.D., which cites M. Terentius Varro, the polymath of the first century B.C., as an authority on archaic Roman dining practice. Isidore writes (*Etym.* 20.11.9), "*Sedes* ['seats'—i.e., places on the dining couches] are so called because among the old Romans there was no practice of reclining, for which reason they were also said to 'take a seat.' Afterward, as Varro says in his work *On the Life of the Roman People*, men began to recline and women sat, because the reclining posture was deemed shameful in a woman."² In asserting that men's dining posture changed from sitting to reclining, while women's posture did not, Isidore and Varro suggest that Roman bodily practice in convivial settings had both a diachronic dimension (change occurred over time) and a gendered dimension (men's practice diverged from women's). This latter dimension, moreover, is implicated with social hierarchies and moral values in an ideologically potent way. For we may suspect, given the hierarchy of postures observed in Suetonius, that women who dined seated were thereby marked as socially subordinate to men who reclined. And Varro's remark that the reclining posture was "shameful" for women, but not for men, indicates that a given posture had a different moral valence depending on the sex of the person who assumed it.

The third example is a funerary urn from the city of Rome, now in New York, dating to the Flavian period (A.D. 69–96; fig. 1). The relief that decorates the front of this urn shows a woman reclining on a couch. A small dining table sits before her, holding drinking vessels and items of food. Sitting in the middle of the couch is a smaller male figure wearing a toga (probably), his feet resting on a small podium; he and the woman are turned toward one another and extend their arms in reciprocal gestures. As I will argue in chapter 3.2, the inscription accompanying this scene, together with the overall form of the monument, gives us good grounds for supposing that the woman shown here is a freedwoman. The intimacy suggested by these figures' gestures and proximity might further lead us to suppose they are a mother and son, the latter probably freeborn. At the head and foot of the couch stand figures bringing food and wine for the table—certainly slaves, seemingly represented as small children. This scene calls to

² Isid. *Etym.* 20.11.9: *sedes dictae quoniam apud veteres Romanos non erat usus adcumbendi, unde et considerare dicebantur. postea, ut ait Varro de Vita populi Romani, viri discumbere coeperunt, mulieres sedere, quia turpis visus est in muliere adcubitus* (Var. fr. 30a Riposati).



1. Urn dedicated by Domitius Primigenius (S458), first century A.D. New York, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, Fletcher Fund, 1927 (27.122.2 ab). All rights reserved, the Metropolitan Museum of Art.

mind the hierarchy of postures observed in the passages of Suetonius and Isidore. Here, however, the hierarchy of free persons is apparently based on age, not gender or status at birth: a freedwoman reclines, presumably because she is an adult, while a freeborn male sits, presumably because he is a child. Moreover, the fact that a woman is shown reclining suggests that the norm described by Varro—that women in the good old days “properly” sat to dine—is not observed here. But why not? Should we infer that women’s dining posture had changed over time? If so, would the associated norms also have changed so that reclining was no longer deemed “shameful” in a woman? Alternatively, might the practices and values of different social strata be different? For Varro probably refers to elite practices, while the people commemorated in this monument are not elites.

These three examples adumbrate some of the interrelationships between status, values, and social practice that this book will examine; they also point toward some broader scholarly debates—in Roman studies proper, and among other humanists and social scientists—that this book engages. Let us take these in turn.

Most obviously, this book participates in the upsurge of scholarly interest, over the past fifteen years, in Roman dining practices and foodways. The concerted attention of historians, archaeologists, and literary critics—most notably in the collections edited by Oswyn Murray (1990, 1995) and William Slater (1991), and in the work of particular scholars such as John D’Arms and Katherine Dunbabin—has greatly enhanced our understanding of the physical environments, social dynamics, and symbolic operations of the Roman convivium. One significant strand of this scholarship has examined how power relations among the diners are asserted, displayed, and contested. The positions assigned to the guests, the kinds of food and entertainment on offer, and even the give-and-take of convivial conversation all participate in the construction and maintenance of social hierarchies.³ Being concerned with how bodily bearing relates to social hierarchy, this book pursues this sociocultural approach. Yet we must characterize more precisely its contribution to this discussion, for scholars have long recognized that dining posture and social position are connected. Since the foundational work of Joachim Marquardt and August Mau in the 1870s and 1880s, culminating in the still-indispensable second edition of *Das Privatleben der Römer* (1886), a broad scholarly *communis opinio* has held that dining posture is correlated with gradations in age, sex, and social status, and that this correlation is as follows: free adult males—the most empowered and privileged social group—reclined on couches to dine; free adult women—“respectable” ones, at any rate—sat during the Republic but reclined

³ John D’Arms has been a major exponent of this approach: see D’Arms 1999, 1991, 1990; also Booth 1991; Bradley 1998; Roller 2001: 129–73.

during the Empire; free children, if present at all, sat; and slaves, at the bottom of the social scale, stood in service and at attention. This account of how posture, privilege, and participation are interrelated can be found, with small variations, in most handbook-style overviews of “everyday life” to which one might turn for basic information on Roman dining, and is repeated in many other studies by historians, literary critics, and archaeologists who rely upon these “handbook” discussions.⁴

There are at least three reasons, however, to be discontent with this schematization, reasons that are interrelated but distinguishable. First, it is based upon a very limited body of literary texts: the same dozen or so citations recur in the footnotes of every “handbook” discussion. In fact there are hundreds of texts providing representations of Roman convivial posture, and collectively they enormously complicate this simple view. The first passage cited here, for instance—in which Terence first sits separately to dine, then reclines along with his host—shows immediately that not all free adult males ipso facto dined reclining; under some circumstances, it appears that different postures, and different spatial relationships among bodies, articulated social hierarchies *within* the class of free adult males. I will adduce many texts that represent free adult males sitting or standing in the convivium, as well as reclining; also texts that represent slaves reclining or sitting, as well as standing; free children reclining as well as sitting; and free adult women reclining during the Republican period, when the handbooks say they sat. The complexity of this evidence taken as a whole will require us to seek explanations other, or further, than those that simply correlate posture with sex, gender, and age.

A second reason for dissatisfaction with the *communis opinio* is that it ignores visual material. Images, like literary texts, provide crucial evidence for posture as a social practice, and for the values and ideologies associated with that practice. Their scope is also much broader than that of literary texts, which were mostly produced by, and primarily intended for the consumption of, a highly literate, predominantly male elite that was located in, well connected to, or socially and intellectually oriented toward the city of Rome. The visual material, in contrast, was mostly produced by, and intended primarily for the consumption of, subelites; its geographic provenance is also much broader.⁵ This material tells a quite different story from the mostly elite literary material, and it significantly alters

⁴ For this *communis opinio* in handbook-style formats or general overviews, see Marquardt and Mau 1886: 300–301 (the earliest articulation of this view I know); Ihm, “cena,” *RE* 3 (1899) 1895.63–67; Balsdon 1962: 272; Carcopino 1964: 265; Dentzer 1982: 432–47 (with further bibliography); Weeber 1995: 125 (s.v. “Gastmahl”; likewise *id.*, “Freizeitgestaltung,” *DNP* 4 (1998) 659); and Bradley 1998: 46–48. Binder, “Gastmahl,” *DNP* 4 (1998) 804 is more cautious.

⁵ By “elite” I mean any member of the senatorial-equestrian aristocracy of the city of Rome, along with municipal aristocrats of other towns—those who had the wealth, birth, and acculturation to compete for magistracies and participate in government, whether they actually did so or not. With Hopkins 1983: 44–45, 110–11, I take this group as a single social entity, one largely unified (from

our overall view of the practice and ideology of dining posture at Rome. Thus the funerary monument offered as the third opening example (fig. 1) raises a host of questions about Roman dining posture that could never emerge from literary representations. For example, even if this scene in certain respects “looks like” situations described in texts, is it valid to project the meanings and values associated with literary representations of elite dining onto the subelite diners commemorated in this monument? Does it matter that the people who commissioned this monument probably did not, in reality, have the economic resources to dine in the leisured, luxurious, elite style that this image portrays? And why put such a scene on a funerary monument in the first place? That is, why would an image of dining, with participants reclining, sitting, or standing, be used as a vehicle for commemorating a deceased freedperson? Because it brings subelites onto the agenda, the visual material raises many questions, and offers answers as well, about the practices and values associated with dining posture that literary texts do not on their own raise or answer.

The third and perhaps most important reason to be discontent with the *communis opinio* will already be clear from the foregoing discussion. This is its failure to notice how dining posture is linked with social values and to consider what these linkages mean. The second example discussed here—the passage of Varro, asserting that early Roman women normatively dined seated, because reclining was deemed shameful—well illustrates the problem. This is one text that handbooks regularly cite, and on the basis of which they assert that Roman women in general dined seated during the Republic. But Varro is not simply describing social practice; he is also, or rather, linking dining posture with sexual mores. The suggestion that this antique social practice is an outward sign of antique moral virtue—which, by implication, is absent in the morally fallen present—is part of a “good old days” discourse, which should make us chary of accepting as historically true the practice so characterized. Indeed, as we shall see in chapter 2, many texts contradict this one (at least as it is usually interpreted) by representing Republican-era women reclining to dine just as men do, and indeed reclining right alongside the men. Conversely, early Imperial funerary monuments often show women dining seated, at a time when the handbooks say they reclined. It will become clear that women’s dining posture is used in all periods, in both visual and literary media, as an index of moral status. What underlies many specific representations of women reclining (typically alongside men) or seated (at a distance from the reclining men) is not ac-

the first century B.C. if not earlier, at least in Italy) by economic interests, acculturation, and socialization, whatever its internal rifts. By “subelite” I mean anyone else. A clear line is all but impossible to draw, for modern scholars as also for the Romans themselves. In this book, however, the individuals to whom I apply the term “subelite” are in most cases far removed from elites on all three standards of birth, wealth, and acculturation (on which see Weaver 1967: 4–5).

tual practice but profound anxieties about women's capacity for, and inclination toward, transgressive sex, which is inferred from their juxtaposition with male bodies and their proximity to wine. The broader point, moreover, holds true for men and children as well as for women. Dining posture in general—for diners of every status, age, and sex—is profoundly intertwined with key social values. Thus, upon assuming a particular posture and a particular relationship to other bodies, a diner associates certain values with herself or himself; conversely, a person to whom certain values are ascribed is thereby authorized to assume a particular dining posture.

Consequently, the basic historical question of who assumed what posture when, cannot be answered by simply accepting at face value what the texts say or the images show. This is because most representations of dining posture in every medium are ideologically fraught: the postures that people are represented as assuming while dining have more to do with the values they seek to claim for themselves than with giving an authentic “snapshot” of actual social practice. To lack awareness of this ideological dimension, or to ignore its intricacies, vitiates any attempt to recover actual social practice. Yet at the same time, these ideological effects themselves presuppose that certain social practices do exist, or can plausibly be imagined to have existed at some time and place; thus ideological analysis requires a parallel analysis of practice, just as no analysis of practice can proceed in ignorance of ideology. The two dimensions refer to, presuppose, and symbiotically require one another. In this book, I develop an ideological analysis of representations of convivial posture at the same time as I develop an account of actual social practice—but the latter, being constructed in light of the former, will turn out quite differently from the account offered by the handbooks.

A word on the specifically *convivial* form of dining, which is my focus here. The term *convivium* labels a late afternoon or evening meal taking place in a domestic dining room or garden, hosted by the proprietor of the residence, involving some combination of family members and guests numbering anywhere from a very few up to perhaps a dozen (nine is an ideal but not necessarily standard number), and ordinarily employing a single *triclinium*, the three-sided arrangement of couches commonly used for dining during the period of this study. I do not systematically investigate “civic” dining, which occurred on special occasions such as festivals, was publicly sponsored or paid for by a single donor, and might involve large numbers of people spread over many *triclinia* in the public spaces of cities and towns; or, alternatively, involved a college of priests or magistrates whose meals might be paid for publicly or by an endowment, and might occur in specially designated spaces. The evidence for civic dining is partly literary but primarily epigraphic. Certain social dynamics associated with the different postures are shared by civic and convivial dining. However, many of the dynamics I investigate here arise out of the relationship

between invited guests and host, the intimacy of the gathering, its domestic setting, and the mixing of the sexes. These elements are usually absent from civic dining, where there is no host, participation depends upon group membership, the numbers may be large, the setting is usually not domestic, and women (apparently) were normally excluded or segregated.⁶ I do, however, survey *popina* dining (i.e., purchasing and eating food in taverns) in chapter 1.6, which shares with convivial dining a relatively small scale, high frequency, and mixing of classes and sexes, but differs in lacking a host and the associated social dynamics.

Besides participating in the recent discussion of Roman conviviality, this book seeks to contribute to a second area of burgeoning scholarly interest: the history of the body, and specifically of the ways in which a Roman's social position and subjectivity were expressed in and constructed through bodily dispositions and movements. Recent monographs by Gunderson and Gleason, for example, have demonstrated that Roman rhetorical theory and practice were profoundly concerned with the "manhood" of elite males who spoke in public. How orators modulated their voices, and positioned and moved their bodies, determined whether they succeeded or failed to insert themselves into the valorized category of "men" (*viri*). Rhetorical treatises therefore attempted to inculcate students with techniques by which they could vindicate and perform their elite status and manhood while speaking in public.⁷ Through their dining practices as well, I will argue, and especially through the associated bodily attitudes, Romans in general claimed for themselves (and ascribed to others) particular locations within the hierarchies of gender and status. To be sure, dining—unlike rhetoric—was not formally theorized: at any rate, no treatises survive, nor are any attested, that offer a systematic theory (*ars convivialis*) of convivial behavior and bearing. Even general treatises on manners are unknown until the high Empire.⁸ Likewise, dining practices were subject to less scrupulous surveillance and regulation regarding proper bearing, clothing, ges-

⁶ Our understanding of Roman civic dining has been transformed by two recent, complementary studies: Donahue 2004, emphasizing the epigraphic evidence; and Dunbabin 2003a: 72–102, emphasizing the (limited) archaeological and visual evidence.

⁷ See Gunderson 2000: 59–86 (esp. 73–80 on Quintilian's anatomization of the orator's body in the quest to secure his masculinity, and 81–82 on his voice); Gleason 1995: 55–81, 103–30.

⁸ Plutarch's *Quaestiones Convivales* (*Mor.* 612C–748D) discusses the origins and meanings of particular dining practices but does not systematically organize, prescribe, or regulate convivial behavior in the manner of a rhetorical treatise. Other works are attested as discussing aspects of conviviality (see Plin. *Nat.* 28.26; Mart. *Epig.* 9.77; Gell. 13.11 [= Var. *Men. fr.* 333–41 Astbury]; also D'Arms 1990: 317), but these attestations leave unclear whether the works in question are systematic treatises.

Regarding "manners," various texts of the late Republic and early Empire comment on proper bodily deportment. Cicero's *De Officiis*, for instance, contains some general injunctions (e.g., 1.126–31), but none referring to dining in particular; likewise in certain Senecan treatises. But no surviving text prior to Clement of Alexandria's *Paedagogus* (ca. A.D. 190) makes what we would call "manners" its main focus; on Clement see ch. 3 n. 16.

ture, movement, speech, and so on. Such matters were indeed of concern in the dining room, as we shall see, but not to the extent observed in rhetorical treatises. That rhetorical performances were scripted more minutely than convivial ones may reflect not only the stricter formal constraints governing oratory but also its higher social stakes, since it occurred in the most important civic venues, and before audiences both larger and more socially distinguished than would ordinarily be found even in an elite dinner gathering. The dining performance, however, compensated by its greater frequency and flexibility, and especially by its broader social purchase. Romans of every age, sex, and status must have participated regularly in convivial dining as defined above, whether as host, guest, or servant, in groups of varying size that were also variously constituted by sex, status, and degree of social intimacy. Every participant, moreover, was simultaneously a performer and a spectator for every other. Thus, even elite males no doubt spent much more time performing their gender, status, and overall subjectivity in the convivium than before the courts, senate, or people. And for Romans who did not engage in public oratory—subelite males, along with women and children of every status—the convivium must ordinarily have been the premier venue for such performance. We have come to understand, then, how Roman bodies in their oratorical deportments were repositories of social information and sites of social contestation. I suggest here that Roman bodies in their convivial deportments function similarly, since the triclinium too was an arena of social representation and performance. The differences between these two arenas, however, mean that dining bodies will entail their own distinctive social meanings and contestations.

From another perspective, this book is concerned with the body as an instrument of nonverbal communication. The study of nonverbal communication in the past fifty years has been dominated by psychologists and anthropologists, who have established and defined it as a subfield of social psychology. Historically, however, certain kinds of nonverbal communication have been of great interest to classicists. Gesture in particular has long engaged historians of ancient art, who have sought to understand what the bodily movements depicted in ancient images signify. Gesture has also attracted scholars of ancient rhetoric, since Roman rhetorical treatises discuss in detail the movements of limbs and appendages that are appropriate in different rhetorical situations.⁹ Very recently, Roman cultural historians have begun to examine the social means and ends of gesture, and of other bodily techniques, in contexts ranging far beyond oratory; some of this work is inspired, at least in part, by Pierre Bourdieu's (and ultimately Marcel Mauss's) comparative studies of

⁹ Andrea de Jorio arguably pioneered the field in his famous 1832 study of Neapolitan gestures, which he thought would help him to understand gestures depicted in ancient art. The modern landmark study of gesture in ancient art is Brilliant 1963, which remains foundational for the broader study of Roman bodily techniques as signifiers of status. For oratorical gesture see n. 7 above; also Aldrete 1999; Graf 1991.

bodily techniques.¹⁰ Posture, on the other hand, has been almost entirely neglected by classicists. Yet the study of posture cannot simply be subsumed into that of gesture. For while posture and gesture are clearly akin as nonverbal communicative techniques, they are in fact different techniques and tend to have different social effects. Gesture can be defined as a continuous and temporally restricted movement of a bodily appendage, while posture involves maintaining the body as a whole in a relatively motionless, stable state for an indefinite period. And while gestures are significant in an enormous variety of social situations, posture tends to matter especially in situations where social hierarchies are being constructed and displayed. Indeed, anthropological and psychological studies have found that posture, along with how bodies are positioned in relation to one another and to other significant objects (“proxemics”), are the principal nonverbal signifiers of social dominance in a number of different cultures.¹¹ In this book, then, I mobilize certain insights and categories derived from the field of nonverbal communication as I investigate what dining postures signify, how bodies in convivial contexts relate to one another and to other significant objects, and how these bodily techniques construct and display relations of social dominance and subordination.¹²

Dining posture, then—abstruse as the topic may seem—is situated at the junction of several questions and methodologies that engage contemporary scholars. And the remarkable richness with which dining practices are documented and illustrated in both textual and visual media makes possible a

¹⁰ Bourdieu’s work on bodily *hexis* and *habitus* (e.g., 1990 [1980]: 66–79) is well known to classicists, many of whom have productively adapted and applied these frameworks to Greek and Roman society, or critiqued such applications. Roman cultural historians who study bodily techniques and who engage Bourdieu include Gleason 1995: xii, xx–xxvi; Gunderson 2000: 9–12, 67–73 (etc.); Corbeill 2004: 1, 70–71, 109–10, 135 (and *passim* for gestures generally in Roman society). Mauss 1979 [1950]: 97–123 is the seminal work on “body techniques.”

¹¹ Schwartz, Tesser, and Powell (1982) offer historical and anthropological perspective on nonverbal signifiers of social dominance, along with an experimental study. Apart from posture, the main signifiers they identify are lateral opposition, precedence, and elevation (pp. 115–17). All these are matters of proxemics, and all figure in my later discussion. Firth 1978 [1970] is the classic anthropological study of posture and proxemics in relation to dominance and submission. Also helpful are the overview of the field by Harper 1985; a droll analysis of gendered ways of sitting in postwar Germany by Woesler de Panafieu 1982; and a survey of ancient Greek posture by Bremmer 1991.

¹² I know only a few discussions of posture and/or proxemics in a Roman context. Bartman 2002 discusses the gender implications of the sinuous, hip-shot posture assumed by youthful male figures in a class of ideal sculpture she terms the “sexy boy” type; Newbold 2000 shows how Imperial historians articulate social hierarchies through descriptions of posture and interpersonal proximity; Dickmann 1999: 281–87 discusses bodily bearing and social status in the Roman aristocrat’s morning *salutatio*; Hall 1998 surveys a variety of social transactions that he calls “deference-greetings”; and Barghop 1994: 80–87, 91–95 considers how the toga, by its weight and drapery, constrains its wearer to assume a socially appropriate bearing.

correspondingly nuanced, textured analysis of these issues. Let me now describe how the material for analysis has been selected, and how the book itself is organized.

Earlier, I listed three reasons to be dissatisfied with the accepted account of how dining posture relates to social hierarchy. Two of these reasons involve the omission of evidence: errors arise from surveying only a small number of pertinent literary texts, and from neglecting visual material altogether. To correct these errors I have sought to collect and examine as much evidence as possible, both literary and visual. The value of a large body of evidence, of course, is that it provides a degree of control over the interpretation of any given passage or image. When working with only a few representations, one can offer little more than description. But in the context of a fuller collection of evidence, one can determine whether a particular representation is frequently or rarely paralleled, routine or surprising, normal or deviant. One can then begin to consider what values are associated with any given representation, and what relation that representation may have to actual social practice. At the same time, however, the enormous volume of pertinent material in many different media, covering much of the geographic and chronological span of the Roman world, makes a truly comprehensive collection of evidence impossible, and would render this study unreadable even if it could be achieved. Limits on the collection of evidence, therefore, are just as necessary to the success of this project as is the full and systematic collection of evidence within those limits.

The limits I have chosen are as follows. I have gathered as many literary texts as I could identify that cast light on dining posture, from the beginnings of Roman literature proper (Plautus, ca. 200 B.C.) to approximately A.D. 200. Relatively few texts illuminate the first 130 years of this period aside from Plautus himself, and some observations in later historical or antiquarian writers.¹³ This meager material warrants considerable attention, however, because later Roman writers (along with modern scholars) make claims about ancestral Roman dining postures that are not supported by—indeed, are contradicted by—such evidence as there is, and the resultant misunderstandings have colored scholarly interpretation of practices and values in later, better-attested periods. Literary representations become more numerous and rich in the age of Cicero, and remain so through the late second century A.D. Most of these texts, though not all, were written by and for elites who resided in, or at least had a strong social and cultural orientation toward, the metropolis of Rome itself. The year A.D. 200 provides a reasonable end point, since a rich vein of antiquarian and imaginative texts that illuminate contemporary (or earlier) dining practices

¹³ The two texts with which I opened are antiquarian in this way: Suetonius describes events that supposedly took place in the 160s B.C., and Varro purports to describe the dining practices of the remote past.

disappears at about this time.¹⁴ I have collected texts within this range principally by searching the Packard Humanities Institute and Thesaurus Linguae Graecae databases for the core vocabulary of reclining.¹⁵

Regarding visual material, since I seek here to integrate literary with visual evidence and to exploit their potential for cross-illumination, I focus on images that coincide with the texts as much as possible. A significant corpus of funerary monuments showing images of diners in various postures (like the object in fig. 1) survives from the city of Rome and its immediate environs, including Ostia, and dating from the early first century A.D. onward. This material coincides geographically with the literary representations, and overlaps chronologically for almost two centuries; it diverges in being produced by and for subelites. The monumental forms bearing this imagery in our period are principally grave stelae, *loculus* covers, ash urns, funerary altars, and *kline* monuments. Modern and systematic catalogues exist for the latter three types; I have attempted to collect and survey all dining images that appear among these better-documented monumental forms.¹⁶ Mural decoration is another visual medium in which representations of diners in various postures appear—specifically, paintings from sites in Campania, especially Pompeii, that were buried and preserved by the eruption of Vesuvius in A.D. 79. These paintings, executed mostly in the Pompeian third and fourth styles, date from approximately 10 B.C. to A.D. 79. They are found principally in the dwellings of local elites and prosperous subelites. Thus they overlap chronologically with both the literary texts and the funerary monuments discussed previously, while socially the occupants of these dwellings, and also the likely viewers of these paintings, ranged from persons like those represented on the Roman urban funerary monuments to persons who probably had more in common with the highly literate and literary urban elites. The divergence in this case is geographic, yet it may be relatively unim-

¹⁴ The latest authors I have examined thoroughly are Gellius, Athenaeus, Apuleius, and Lucian. Occasionally I draw upon still later authors and texts, such as Cassius Dio, the Historia Augusta, Servius, and Macrobius, that depict dining practices of the period before ca. A.D. 200.

¹⁵ Latin texts were collected primarily by searching the full Packard Humanities Institute database for *cubo*, **cumbo*, and their compounds in *ad-*, *de-*, *dis-*, and *re-*; also forms of *reclino*. This is the core Latin vocabulary for the reclining dining posture. *Iaceo*, *sto*, and *sedeo* are also regularly used for convivial posture, but all have semantic ranges extending widely beyond conviviality, and it was not worthwhile to look through every occurrence of these verbs in search of convivial contexts. Likewise, I did not survey the full vocabulary of dining (*cena*, *convivium*, *triclinium*, *lectus*, etc.) because only a minority of passages in which dining, its spaces, and its furniture are mentioned say anything about posture. In Greek, the vocabulary for reclining to dine is generally limited to the verbs κατακλίνω, κατάκειμαι, and ἀνάκειμαι. I employed the Thesaurus Linguae Graecae database to search for these verbs in authors who write at length on Roman or Graeco-Roman cultural practices in our period: Polybius, Dionysius of Halicarnassus, Diodorus Siculus, Strabo, Philo, Josephus, Appian, Plutarch, Lucian, Athenaeus, Herodian, and Cassius Dio. In all, through these and other means, I collected several hundred passages in which dining posture is specified, problematized, or discussed. In this book I discuss many but not all of these passages.

¹⁶ See Catalogue I.1–4 (including some *loculus*-covers at I.3); also chs. 1.3 and 2.3 for further discussion.

portant: for it is likely that Campanian mural decoration in this period was similar to contemporary Roman mural decoration both stylistically and thematically. For these reasons, I have sought also to be comprehensive in collecting images of dining in Campanian mural decoration.¹⁷

While these are the limits—chronological, geographic, and formal—within which I have collected material systematically, I remain aware that a great many representations of dining (hence of the associated postures) exist from times, places, and media outside these limits. Within our period, for example, funerary monuments with scenes of dining are known from other areas of Italy and the provinces; also, images survive in media other than funerary sculpture and wall paintings. Beyond the end of our period, numerous images of dining are found on sarcophagi and in mosaics from Rome and elsewhere. And while few if any visual representations of dining that can reasonably be called “Roman” survive from Rome itself or anywhere else prior to the Augustan age, a large number of Hellenistic Greek and Etruscan images of dining do survive from Italy and elsewhere in the Mediterranean, from funerary and sympotic contexts, that predate most of the Roman representations studied here. While I do not collect and analyze this material systematically, I occasionally use such objects as comparanda—when, for instance, they show an illuminating contrast or continuity with the Roman texts and images being discussed more comprehensively; or when they show a different way of solving a representational problem.

These Hellenistic Greek and Etruscan objects themselves participate in a longer tradition of representations of reclining and seated dining—some in relief sculpture, some painted—which extends back through the classical and archaic periods, in both Italy and Greece, and into the ancient Near East. Most scholars agree that the practice of dining reclining had broad social purchase among the aristocrats in these various societies, and that all images depicting this activity, across their entire chronological and geographic range, convey a nexus of values: privilege, leisure, autonomy.¹⁸ This is true for Roman examples, too, even though at Rome the practice (and imagery) of reclining was not limited to elites, at least in the period of this study. However, the iconography of dining has local variations—sometimes subtle, sometimes substantial—in every locale where it appears, variations that are created by and in turn reveal the differences in social context.¹⁹ The Roman examples discussed here are built on a framework of inherited iconographic forms that were filtered, selected, and

¹⁷ See Catalogue II; also chs. 1.4 and 2.4 for further discussion.

¹⁸ E.g., Dunbabin 2003a: 11–35 for a survey of pre-Roman dining imagery; in greater detail for particular cultures, Dentzer 1982: 76–126, 431–37; Fehr 1971: 7–61 (both discussing archaic and classical Greek and Near Eastern images); Rathje 1990 (Italic/Etruscan); Bonfante 1996; Small 1994 (both Etruscan); Fabricius 1999 (Hellenistic Greek).

¹⁹ Local differences: Small 1994: 87 on what is distinctive about Etruscan dining scenes (and the associated practices and values); Dentzer 1978: 65–69 on a distinctive Egyptian example; Fabricius 1999: 338–39 on the differences among examples from four Hellenistic cities.

supplemented so as to turn that tradition to distinctively Roman cultural uses, thereby causing Roman dining imagery to appear and function differently from dining imagery found elsewhere.²⁰ In this book I undertake iconological analyses, in something like the Panofskian sense, at a level of iconographic detail where meanings that are distinctively Roman emerge in the context of specifically Roman social structures, values, and practices. At certain points in the chapters that follow, I will argue explicitly that contemporary Roman values and practices, and not the inherited iconographic tradition, provide the most appropriate matrix for interpreting certain motifs or details.

In the organization of the following chapters, categories of gender and age provide the overarching structure: chapters 1 and 2 examine the practices and values associated with various dining postures for free adult males and for free adult females, respectively; chapter 3 discusses freeborn children. The convivial deportment of slaves is considered throughout but receives no separate chapter. This structure seems necessary, since Roman representations of *convivia* normally notice slaves only insofar as they support and facilitate the dining of higher-status persons, and also because the convivial behavior, bearing, and relative privilege of each category of free person (men, women, children) is articulated, at least in part, by contrast with what slaves do in the same setting. I handle slaves, then, as the Romans' own textual and visual representations do: denying them an autonomous convivial existence, yet making them essential for sustaining and indeed defining the conviviality of free persons.

Free adult males were juridically the most empowered and privileged demographic sector in Roman society. While status differences within this sector obviously mattered a great deal, with the result that some such males were clearly superior to others (as Suetonius's anecdote about Terence shows), nevertheless the convivial practices of this group broadly speaking, including the postures they assumed and the values associated with these postures, provided the benchmark of privilege with respect to which the dining postures and practices of others were defined. We turn first, then, to an examination of such males and their dining postures.

²⁰ This description also applies to the Roman appropriation and transformation of Greek poetic traditions (consider, e.g., Horace's remaking of archaic Greek sympotic poetry in a Roman mold, or Vergil's transformation of Greek epic). Wallace-Hadrill 1994: 30 puts the general point succinctly: "[T]o demonstrate an 'origin' for an artistic phenomenon is not adequate to account for its social function. The Romans constantly borrowed new cultural goods from the eastern Mediterranean as new areas opened up to them, but they turned them to their own social ends." Likewise Zanker 1994: 281–84, on the virtues of contextualizing art objects in the "lived life" of any given moment. Beyond ancient literature and art, recent anthropological investigations of how objects move across cultures have shown in general that such objects, always and necessarily, are endowed in the culture of reception with meaning and value different from what they had in the culture of origination: Appadurai 1986: 26–29, 45–46, 51–53 (and *passim*); Spooner 1986: 199–200, 214–18, 220–25 (and *passim*).