THE CHRONOLOGY OF EARLY ROME *)

BY

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Some 15 years ago the Swedish Institute at Rome made an important contribution to the study of Roman art and archaeology by initiating a new periodical, the Opuscula Romana, which has since won much appreciation for its excellent contributions in this field; at about the same time Prof. Gjerstad started his imposing series of publications on the archaeological and historical data of 'Early Rome', the fourth volume of which is here under review 1). By his careful study of all the material remains at present available for a reconstruction of the early history of Rome Gjerstad has undoubtedly ranged himself with distinguished Swedish scholars like Montelius, Säflund, Sundwall and Åkerström, who have been constantly trying to piece together the fragmentary evidence from the sundry local cultures into a reasonable picture of Italic prehistory. By keeping up a low chronology Gj. carries on the tradition of his countrymen, but as it is the Holy City to which he applies this principle, his dating of the find-groups and strata has met with fierce opposition from the very moment he propounded his revolutionary views 2). A reliable summary of the arguments of those


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1) Volumes I-III were reviewed in this journal by the late Dr. van Essen; see Mnem. IV 8 (1955), 247/9; 10 (1957), 178/80; 15 (1962), 427/9.

2) BullCom 73 (1949/50), 13/29.
scholars who were not disposed to give up the orthodox Varronian dates without any further resistance has been conveniently given by Pallottino in Arch. Cl. 12 (1960), 1 ff.; Gj. answered his critics in two Discussions Concerning Early Rome in Op. Rom. 3 (1961), 69/102 and 5 (1965), 1/74 1). A very informative exposition of his approach to the problems both archaeological and historical appeared 1962 under the title Legends and Facts of Early Roman History 2); it may be highly recommended as a useful introduction to his opus magnum, which is to comprise six volumes.

The volumes I-III having almost run out of print and a reprint being impossible, the author decided to compose vol. IV in such a way that it can be used independently except for control of the documentary evidence. The subtitle of this volume announces it as a synthesis of the archaeological evidence bearing on Rome’s history until ca. 450 B.C.; accordingly it provides an explanation of the author’s criteria for dividing the pottery and the non-ceramic material into four periods I-IV 3) and dating them resp. ca. 800-750, 750-700, 700-625, 625-575 B.C. Gj. already followed this periodisation when publishing the contents of the different tomb-groups in vol. II, but he did not bring out clearly which criteria were applied in making this classification; several scholars, who were puzzled by this—as it seemed—rather subjective arrangement, severely criticized this presentation of material. The controversy between Gjerstad and his critics can, so far, be ultimately traced back to a quite different method in evaluating the material found for chronological purposes: the German prehistorian Müller-Karpe, who made up a stylistic chronology of the Middle-European ‘Urnenfelderkultur’ and studied its Italian counterpart to arrive at an absolute dating, thinks the typological development of the swords and fibulae an equally valuable starting-point for a relative chrono-

1) These discussions were continued in Historia 16 (1967), 257/78, where Gj. mainly deals with Alföldi’s book Early Rome and the Latins. Equally important as it demonstrates the impossibility of reaching a compromise on methodological questions is the discussion between Gierow (OpRom 3 (1961), 103/22) and Peroni (BullCom 77 (1962) 19/23; cf. also Dial. di Archeol. 1 (1967), 155/8).