

Readers who want an exciting textbook to use in an introductory course on Roman history should consider this book as a valuable tool. Its strengths are obvious, and its success as a textbook almost assured amongst young academics. The book will certainly help students to think outside the conventional narrative box (i.e. the chronologically arranged political history of the Roman State) by addressing issues on many aspects of ancient Roman society and culture.

*Brasilia*

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## ROMAN WOMEN

MACLACHLAN (B.) *Women in Ancient Rome. A Sourcebook*. Pp. x + 222. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. Paper, £22.99 (Cased, £70). ISBN: 978-1-4411-6421-6 (978-1-4411-7749-0 hbk).

CHRYSAL (P.) *Women in Ancient Rome*. Pp. 224, b/w & colour pls. Stroud: Amberley, 2013. Cased, £20. ISBN: 978-1-4456-0870-9.  
 doi:10.1017/S0009840X14001966

Scholarship on women in past societies has, in the last decades, worked to consolidate the subject, establishing its boundaries. Nevertheless, this field of research is far from being exhausted and its limits are still blurred. Therefore, the two books under review are welcome additions to the study of women in Rome, especially because both are intended for a lay or undergraduate reader. This is probably the mark that distinguishes these books from other volumes on the same topic. They are a good basis from which to start studying women in ancient Roman society and culture. Due to the lack of solid evidence concerning the multiple aspects of women's life in Rome, what we do know is just a part of the whole picture. The historical record deals especially with the elites and with the abnormalities or eccentricities. Both MacL. and C. acknowledge this difficulty and strive to produce consistent and coherent perspectives on the subject. Both are admirable efforts aimed at introducing the appeal and the complexity inherent to the study of women's lives in Rome to non-classicists.

MacL., who published in 2012 a sourcebook on *Women in Ancient Greece*, here edits a comprehensive selection of texts in translation – historical, legendary, philosophical and inscriptional texts – arranged in five chronological parts: 'Rome's Beginnings'; 'The Early and Middle Republic'; 'The Late Republic'; 'The Julio-Claudian Period'; and 'The Later Empire'. Each of these sections is subdivided and each subdivision is organised according to specific topics (30 in all), some of them current issues of debate: women and the legendary past, Etruscan women, gender tensions, women in the inscriptional record, the female body, etc. An editor's selection of texts is always debatable, but MacL.'s is consistent, covering the most important moments and characters in Roman history and including the core texts for the study of women in Rome. The materials are primarily literary and, due to the importance conceded to the great figures in legend and politics, mostly drawn from authors like Livy, Appian and Pliny. It is mostly complemented with inscriptions. This remark notwithstanding, MacL.'s volume offers a representative sample of passages that will be very useful in assessing both legendary and historical women and is a good teaching resource. This makes the book especially useful as a textbook for undergraduates, but it should be complemented by an instructor's guidance. In fact, MacL.'s

contextualisation of the texts is valuable, but frequently reduced to the essentials. The ideological patterns and the broader context that frame the texts are scarcely explored, which works well when further students' research is required and encouraged, but may lead to an oversimplification of a subject that is multilayered. Each section finishes with a list of suggestions for further reading and at the end there is a brief general bibliography. The references included are up to date and relevant, allowing a more curious reader to pursue deeper research. MacL.'s book is a good starting point and is a good pedagogical resource for the study of Roman women through well translated and accessible primary texts.

C.'s volume is intended, as stated in the preface, for the growing lay market, providing an audience of non-specialist readers with an exciting, yet accurate, account of women in Rome. In a brief introduction, C. deals with the problems presented by the meagre and biased evidence on women's lives, warning against the dangers of taking the sources about Roman women at face value. The book is arranged in eight chapters, organised thematically. Chapter 1, 'Women in the *Familia*', explores the domestic setting of the Roman *matrona*, her role as wife and mother and especially the much publicised and idealised behaviour that was expected from her. In Chapter 2, 'Betrothal, Marriage, the Wedding', C. puts emphasis on the status of married women, especially concerning the legal background and the procedures of marriage and divorce. Chapter 3, 'Women in the Public Eye', shows the patterns of public intervention available to women, pointing at the ways they could step into the male sphere. Chapter 4, 'Educated Women, the *puella docta*, and the *fine arts*', focuses on women's education and on the activities some of them might have learned, from the elementary and home-based education that was provided to most women, to more advanced stages of instruction aspired to and obtained by some exceptional women. Chapter 5, 'Sibyls and the Dark Arts', provides a vivid account of magic and superstitious practices. It comes as a surprise that C. begins this section with references to Homer, Hesiod, Sophocles, Antiphon and other Greek authors. The relevance of their contribution to a volume about Roman women is not clear, and as a result this chapter departs slightly from the main theme. The following chapter, 'Women and Religion', develops around the thesis that women had important and active roles in Roman religion. It deals mainly with festivals and rites that were important for every stage in the female life cycle, but also with the role Vestal Virgins were expected to play. Chapter 7, 'Women's Medicine and Women's Health', provides an interesting and contextualised account of Graeco-Roman medicine, especially but not exclusively as concerned with women's diseases and treatments as well as with women as health professionals. Chapter 8, 'Sex and Sexuality', explores some aspects of female sexuality and men's attitudes to it, covering the ubiquity of erotic symbols in Rome, female homosexuality, prostitution and other activities regarded as infamous or shameful. Endnotes are usually kept to a minimum, being concise and mostly restricted to references to the sources cited in the text. In addition, the book is enriched by a chronology of key dates, a list of ancient sources and a glossary of Greek and Latin terms, very useful for the intended reader. A number of illustrations, ranging from some well known to a few that are not commonly seen, complements the volume, allowing the reader to visualise some features concerning the representation of women not only in the Roman past, but also – and this is an additional attractive feature – in more recent images. The bibliography is sound and wide-ranging, listing the more recent and most important studies together with a few less up-to-date items, some dating back to the early 1900s. C.'s style is simple and straightforward, but enticing and sometimes witty, often resorting to links with present situations. The book constitutes an extensive and pleasantly readable commentary made out of patchy evidence. C.'s main achievement lies precisely in his effort to connect the dots between the

evidence and the texts available, building up a picture of women's lives. He shows a thorough acquaintance with the history of women in Rome, and this allows him to move to and fro in Roman history and culture, establishing connections between particular cases and episodes. For a less attentive reader, however, this may be risky. In fact, the audience may be led to think that there is nothing in between. The stated biased nature of the sources causes him to highlight the salacious, the curious and the abnormal. This limitation is caused by the nature of the evidence we have for reconstructing women's lives, but, in spite of the warnings occasionally issued, a less attentive or prepared reader – the expected reader for C.'s book – may be led to the very same conclusions that C. is trying to avoid: that there were no women in Rome besides the virtuous Lucretias and Virginias and the lubricious and murderesses Agrippinas or Messalinas. As stated, the evidence has its shortcomings, but this fact should have been more clearly and more frequently stressed. Despite these minor remarks, the volume is enthralling and very worth reading.

These volumes will be of most interest to those beginning the study of women in ancient Rome as they offer reliable and satisfying points of access to an increasingly appealing field of study. When taken together, they can attract the audience's attention to an alluring subject and lead the way to further research.

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## WESTERN ROMAN WOMEN

HEMELRIJK (E.), WOLF (G.) (edd.) *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*. (Mnemosyne Supplements 360.) Pp. xxii + 408, figs, ills, map. Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2013. Cased, €139, US\$180. ISBN: 978-90-04-25594-4.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X14003023

This volume presents nineteen articles which are revised versions of papers and posters presented at the conference 'Gender and the Roman City: Women and Civic Life in Italy and the Western Provinces' held at the University of Amsterdam in 2011. The Editors' specific goal is 'to investigate one dimension of the civic societies of late Republican Italy and the early imperial provinces: the roles played in them by women' (p. 1). More broadly they hope 'to contribute to an integrated approach of the study of Roman urban society and that of Roman women, by both looking at the local Roman cities from the perspective of women and gender, and studying women within their social and civic context' (pp. 4–5). The Editors selected the west as their focus believing that the cities of this region shared common legal and political institutions modelled on those of Rome. They make clear, however, that the volume is not arguing for a 'uniquely western Roman style of womanhood' rather they chose the civic environment and the west merely as convenient, interesting, foci. This acknowledgment, however, while clearly correct, betrays the weakness of the collection. Since there are no grounds for stating that something was clearly different for women in the Roman city in the Latin West, there then

\*The original version of this article was published with the incorrect author name. A notice detailing this has been published and the error rectified in the online PDF and HTML copies.