# JULIA DOMNA

LANGFORD (J.) *Maternal Megalomania. Julia Domna and the Imperial Politics of Motherhood*. Pp. xiv + 203, ills. Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2013. Cased, £28.50, US$55. ISBN: 978-1-4214-0847-7.

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Some 40 years ago S.B. Pomeroy's *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* (1975) and M.R. Lefkowitz and M.B. Fant's *Women in Greece and Rome* (1977) opened the way for dedicated investigations of the agency, voices, images and realities of women in the ancient world. This interest has proven especially fruitful for Roman studies. Individual articles, monographs and even a Routledge series are now devoted to biographies of Roman women, in part because Livia, Agrippina, Julia Domna and other imperial women appear so commandingly – albeit fleetingly – in Tacitus, Cassius Dio and other authors. As the names of these historians suggest, however, and as the notorious dearth of information for even the best known Roman women advises, a different approach to women in the ancient world has also emerged. This attends not so much to reclaiming the lives of actual persons, but rather to assessing how women figure in the texts and other contexts they enliven, reflect authorial choices and historiographical intertextuality, and add nuance to narrative: J. Ginsburg, *Representing Agrippina: Constructions of Female Power in the Early Roman Empire* (2006) is a recent example. The two approaches have contributed greatly to Rome's history and historiography alike.

L.'s new book on Julia Domna, the wife of Septimius Severus, employs neither general approach. L. disavows writing a biography of Julia Domna, and she does not examine Domna's presentation in Cassius Dio, Herodian or the *Historia Augusta* in such a way as to elucidate these challenging historical sources. Instead, she uses Julia Domna's appearance in historical texts, inscriptions and coins to investigate the 'propaganda and ideology' of her male relatives, particularly Septimius Severus and Caracalla. It may be that the 2007 publication of B. Levick's *Julia Domna, Syrian Empress* deterred L. from writing a biography: Levick meticulously examines the literary, numismatic and epigraphic sources for Domna and those close to her, and provides family trees, a time line, a glossary and 35 illustrations and maps. But L. never directly addresses how her work intersects with that of Levick or others who have explored Domna and the Severan era, such as A. Birley, *Septimius Severus: the African Emperor* (1999$^2$). L. more simply declares a focus on rhetoric rather than 'the real Julia Domna' (p. 3), and claims in her conclusion that, 'My approach of exploring the use of Julia Domna's images in negotiating imperial ideology stands in stark contrast to recent scholarly work on the empress' (p. 122).

L. derives her approach from that of C. Ando in *Imperial Ideology and Provincial Loyalty in the Roman Empire* (2000) as she aims to probe 'sophisticated communications' between the Severan imperial administration and three constituencies: the Roman military, the *populus Romanus* and the Roman Senate. Citing Ando, she defines propaganda as 'one-sided … messages in a variety of media designed by the imperial administration to present itself in the best possible light', distinguishing it from ideology, 'dialogue between the imperial administration and a given population … not only propaganda but also the responses of the intended audience' (p. 8). She assesses Severan propaganda from coins, adduced as evidence in her discrete chapters on the three groups; from monuments, which figure in the chapter on the *populus Romanus*; and from some inscriptions and occasionally from the ancient authors, throughout. When she turns to 'ideology' she has a harder time. To gauge responses from the military she often resorts to arguments *ex silentio*

or conjecture (e.g. pp. 45–7); there is no evidence for responses from the *populus Romanus*, although she turns to scenes from Cassius Dio and other historians and to the few inscriptions erected in Domna's honour by *collegia* in Rome; and for responses from the Senate she primarily falls back on Cassius Dio, buttressed by references to Senatorial 'attitudes' expressed by Pliny the Younger, Tacitus and even Cicero. Inattentive use of terms and buzzwords aggravates such methodological difficulties, as when L. concludes: 'the images of Julia Domna were not descriptions of the historical figure so much as rhetorical tools by which to praise or blame the men in her life. They were the lenses through which her husband and sons promoted themselves and invited their subjects to participate in negotiating ideology' (p. 121).

L. centres on Julia Domna's 'maternal imagery' evinced in the various titles accorded Domna, on coins, and in some of the authors. Julia Domna was titled *Mater Castrorum* from 195, and *Mater Senatus*, *Mater Patriae*, *Mater Augustorum*, *Pia* and *Felix* around Severus' death in 211. She was depicted on some coins together with her sons, on others with personifications of *Pietas Publica*, *Saeculi Felicitas* and *Pudicitia*, and on still others with various goddesses, including the Magna Mater. (Coins form the majority of L.'s 20 illustrations, and the Cybele aureus RIC 4a.562, 168 prompts her to explain her catchy – but confusing – title: 'I call this insistence on the universal mother of Julia Domna "maternal megalomania". Yet it was not Julia Domna who was megalomaniacal; it was her husband in his determination to use his wife's images to help him legitimate himself and his sons', p. 73.) L. also repeats a few historical passages highlighting Domna's maternal body: the bloody assassination of Geta in Domna's arms and 'very womb' (Cass. Dio 78.2.3–6), and Domna checking her sons' antagonism by suggesting they divide her maternal body just as they were Rome's dominions (Hdn. 4.3.8–9). The focus on 'maternal megalomania' results in episodic treatment of the Severan period, and occasionally the effacement of Julia Domna herself (e.g. pp. 65–9).

L. is most substantial when discussing Domna's *Mater Castrorum* title, because she quantifies her argument. Noting that only a small fraction of inscriptions mentioning Domna was raised by soldiers and veterans (pp. 11, 23), she concludes that the title was 'not . . . to build ideology between the army and the emperor, but to convince civilian populations in Rome and throughout the provinces' of the army's support for Severus and his dynasty (p. 47). Her remarks on coins are interesting when she similarly turns to quantification, in this case of Severan hoards (presented in Appendix A, by C. Rowan, and Appendix B). Other conclusions are less convincing. L. holds that Julia was relatively absent from propaganda and 'ideology' early in Severus' reign because he 'hid his dynastic pretensions' due to widespread Senatorial preference for adopted succession; her main evidence here is Pliny the Younger and Tacitus (e.g. pp. 14, 92–3), an instance of her general presumption of unchanging norms for Roman Senators and authors. Images of Domna aimed at the *populus Romanus* were to quell concerns about Severus' 'ethnicity' by linking him with important Roman historical monuments (pp. 68–9): no evidence substantiates this concern, and the Roman populace itself was quite diverse. L.'s repeated downplaying of Domna's influence and agency undercuts her argument that the Senate designed the series of honorific titles in 211 to remind her to reconcile her sons (p. 113).

Editorial choices limit the book's effectiveness: references to ancient sources are in notes rather than in the text; endnotes are used rather than footnotes; inscriptions are printed in capital letters, making them difficult to read; and the notes often simply list alphabetically a series of scholars, even when referencing opposing viewpoints (e.g. p. 101 n. 63). Numerous typographical errors mar the text, especially the notes.

Julia Domna was clearly a captivating figure, and L.'s book usefully compiles the hoards and inscriptions in which she features. Its focus on 'maternal megalomania' and

loose argumentation make for limited conclusions, however, and less appeal for those investigating Domna's life and depictions, or even the Severan period overall.

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## THE GODDESS OF ERYX

LIETZ (B.) *La dea di Erice e la sua diffusione nel Mediterraneo. Un culto tra Fenici, Greci e Romani*. (Tesi 8.) Pp. xiv + 454, pls. Pisa: Edizioni della Normale, 2012. Paper, €28. ISBN: 978-88-7642-436-6.
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L. discusses one of the most famous (and debated) cults of ancient Sicily, which has generally attracted scholars' interest for its 'esotic' aura and for its early integration into Roman religion. The heading already reflects the 'pluralistic' approach – really the only one suitable for such a complex matter – applied by L. to the composite deity of Eryx, whose native name remains unknown to us, while certainly every people that adopted her cult labelled the goddess with a familiar name: Astarte for the Carthaginians, Herentas for the Oscans, Venus for the Romans.

L.'s work aims at collecting and analysing all the relevant data: literary and epigraphic sources, numismatic and archaeological evidence. The comprehensive catalogue is easy to consult through numbered entries (80 literary texts, TL; 27 inscriptions, TE; 9 coins, TN) provided with an analytical discussion, a critical apparatus, the quotation and the Italian translation of the literary and epigraphic texts and an updated bibliography. The illustrations are, unfortunately, relatively few (19 plates) and of low quality.

L. rightly begins with a critical review of the modern historiography (Chapter 1), from the Euhemeristic approach traced back to Renaissance Humanism (according to which the goddess was the sharmant local queen Lycastes/Venus, divinised post-mortem by her son Eryx), to the widely accepted nineteenth-century paradigm of the '*Grande madre mediterranea*', and finally to the model of the 'emporic' sanctuaries dedicated to a powerful deity of love and war identifiable as Astarte or Aphrodite. This latter model is reflected by the title of the conference held in 2009 at Erice, *La devozione dei naviganti. Il culto di Afrodite ericina nel Mediterraneo* (edited by E. Acquaro, A. Filippi and S. Medas [2010]), which, unfortunately, has not been taken into consideration for L.'s book. Another recent article has not been included in the discussion (D. Demetriou, 'Τῆς πάσης ναυτιλίης φύλαξ: Aphrodite and the Sea', *Kernos* 23 [2010], 67–89), though Demetriou's observations on Aphrodite as a patron of seafaring and sexuality together would be helpful in supporting L.'s claim that 'sacred prostitution' – well documented at Eryx, despite controversies over its origins and functions – is not a proof of the 'emporic' cultic model. Notwithstanding L.'s doubts about the 'emporic' nature of the sanctuary of Eryx – more suited to controlling sea routes than to functioning as a meeting point of sailors and traders, due to its location at the top of a hill – the 'maritime' connotation of the cult is confirmed by the literary tradition, according to which the founder hero Eryx was a son of Aphrodite and Poseidon or Boutes (who had been saved from the Sirens by the goddess).

In Chapters 2–3 L. analyses the historical and geographical development of the cult in the sanctuary of Eryx and in Sicily, and outside Sicily (Arcadia, Rome, South Italy, Africa, Rhaetia). Chapter 4 reassembles all the data in a comprehensive overview, dealing with mythological themes – concerning the foundation of the sanctuary and the origins of the