

*Studying Gender in Classical Antiquity*, by Lin Foxhall, 2013. (Key Themes in Ancient History.) Cambridge: Cambridge University Press; ISBN 978-0-521-55318-6 hardback £50 & US\$80; ISBN 978-0-521-55739-9 paperback £18.99 & US\$29.99; xi + 188 pp., 17 figs., 5 tables

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Lin Foxhall's long-standing interest in gender in classical antiquity (her published work includes no fewer than three edited or co-edited volumes on related subjects: Foxhall 1998a,b; 2013), together with her expertise in using both texts and material culture, mean that she is ideally placed to write this volume. It represents the latest contribution to a series offering a thematic approach to Greek and Roman history and culture which is aimed at undergraduate students of classical antiquity together with scholars in adjacent fields wishing to know more about the Greek and Roman worlds. Foxhall's book is well calibrated to this audience, providing a wide-ranging and accessible introduction to recent research showing how conceptions of gender played out in a variety of different spheres of life. She combines discussion of modern scholarship with analysis of a range of ancient evidence. As she comments in her first chapter 'no one kind of source provides the magic key to understanding gender in classical antiquity' (p. 21). Texts of different genres are therefore treated alongside a diverse selection of archaeological material, from urban topography (such as the location of athletic facilities in Classical Athens, pp. 127–8), through to the jointed dolls usually thought of as the property of Athenian girls (pp. 58–9). Foxhall is not explicit about the geographical and chronological scope of her inquiry. In the Greek context, however, she deals mainly with Classical (fifth and fourth century BC) Athens — source of the majority of our textual and iconographic evidence, although she also incorporates material from further afield: the law codes from fifth-century BC Gortyn in Crete provide a recurring

reference point. In relation to the Roman world her focus is on Italy during the first centuries BC and AD, although again she does sometimes cast her net more widely to include, for example, census data from second- to fourth-century AD Egypt (as at pp. 53–4). Variability within (as opposed to between) the Greek and Roman worlds are also hinted at, although given the length and scope of the discussion these points cannot be developed in detail.

The book opens with an important introductory chapter which I will focus on here as this is likely to be of most interest to readers of this journal. In it Foxhall sets out, first of all, to define the object of her inquiry: while acknowledging objections to 'essentializing' approaches which conflate gender with biological sex, she rightly points out that such definitions were fundamental to both Greek and Roman societies. Scholarship on gender in classical antiquity, she notes, has its origins in the study of women, in an intellectual climate in which, for generations, the discipline of Classics had been dominated by a concern with the lives and deeds of men. At the same time, she also stresses that academic work refracts the current interests of society as a whole: an increasing interest in Greek and Roman women coincided with the publication of seminal works on gender and sexuality by de Beauvoir and Foucault. She concludes that a continuing interest in issues of gender is justified by persisting sexual inequalities in contemporary (British) society. (While Foxhall is clearly concerned here to convince her readers the topic is still interesting in the light of contemporary gender politics, one might wonder whether the fundamental influence of gender on ancient society should not be justification enough.) In the remainder of this first chapter Foxhall turns her attention from intellectual history to her use of some of the tools of her trade. Particular reference is made to the difficulties posed by interpreting different textual genres, as well as to the way in which ideas about materiality facilitate the use of the archaeological evidence. She also mentions the role of individual agency, although apparently not in the strict sense in which the term was used by Giddens. This chapter, then, offers the justification and academic context for the volume, but also sets up the approach. In later chapters, archaeologically oriented readers will notice scattered words and phrases with theoretical resonance, not only 'agency', but also others not introduced in Chapter 1, including 'entanglement' (p. 110) and 'the social life of things' (p. 106). These serve as indicators of the theoretical frameworks underpinning Foxhall's use of the material evidence, although uninitiated readers should not be distracted by them.

As the author herself notes, a short book aimed at non-specialists does not lend itself to a comprehensive treatment of gender in the Greek and Roman worlds, which has been the subject of extensive research. Instead she adopts a selective approach, offering an account of some of the ways in which gender distinctions defined social roles in a series of interlocking arenas. The core of the volume thus consists of six chapters devoted, respectively, to Households (including household membership, marriage and adultery); Demography (including family life-cycles, status and treatment of children, and death and burial); Bodies (including ancient ideas about male and female biology and reproduction,

masculinity, the political role of sex, and violence); Wealth (considering the relationship between gender and acquisition and display of resources); Space (domestic, civic and athletic); and Religion (including participation in a variety of rituals such as sacrifice and the dedication of offerings). Together these topics offer an opportunity to consider how gender operated at different organizational scales, from the individual, through the domestic to the community sphere. At the same time they highlight the broad range of aspects of ancient life which were infused with gendered thought, from subsistence through to the ideological sphere. This framework enables Foxhall to explore how the question of gender intersects with a variety of problems in which scholars have recently been interested. (For instance, in discussing the body, she raises the question of how Roman viewers conceived of the relationship between sculpted portraits and the individuals they were supposed to represent, pp. 77–9; while her discussion of religion considers iconographic evidence for gendered consumption of the choice cuts of sacrificial meat p. 138.)

By the end of the volume, the reader is likely to take away several major points: first, as Foxhall notes in her brief concluding chapter, gender was one of the structuring principles of both Greek and Roman societies, and one might add that the evidence discussed throughout makes clear the extent of the gulf between male and female roles, in all of the spheres of life considered. Further than this, however, it is clear that our picture of gender in the Greek world is significantly different from that in the Roman world, for the two are wisely treated largely under separate subheadings, and significant differences in social practice are highlighted alongside contrasts in the available source materials. Occasionally, however, we do glimpse the effects of Greek cultural heritage on Roman thought (as, for example, when Foxhall discusses the similarities and differences between marriage laws, and the influence of the Greek philosopher Aristotle on Roman thought, p. 30). A final major point is the big difference in social attitudes and practices between the ancient and modern worlds — for example in the length of adolescence, which in both Athens and Rome routinely extended into a man's mid-twenties (pp. 58 & 60), while by contrast (in Athens, at least) girls seem not to have had such a phase, instead passing directly from childhood to marriage (p. 58).

In sum, the wide range of topics, evidence and contexts covered by the book represents a significant achievement. Foxhall's discussion is at its best when she is exploring the various primary sources in detail (as with her treatment of women's roles through the distribution and curation of loom weights, pp. 110–11), or when she is critically evaluating some of the secondary sources on which her discussion is based (for example, Saller and Shaw's demographic inferences from Roman grave monuments, p. 39). One might occasionally wish for additional images (for example, a plan of a Pompeian house would have been a useful addition to parallel that of the Greek example at p. 119), for more discussion of an image which is included (for example the plan of the Stabian baths, p. 131) or for a reference to sources for a general statement (for example 'Wealthy girls would probably not have gone to the agora at all, and

certainly not unaccompanied', p. 57). These, however, are minor points. Overall, the volume is well-suited to its intended audience: at a practical level it is easy to read and to navigate; frequent subheadings and summaries guide the reader and set out brief conclusions on each topic (although a map and chronological table might helpfully have been included). Readers wishing to follow up particular points can usually do so with the help of numerous in-text references or the Bibliographical Essay. There is no glossary, but unfamiliar terms are often explained in the text, and such explanations are easily located using the Index. In short, this volume would make a good text-book or library resource.

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