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Review of Emily Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae, Women and Civic Life in the Roman West*

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Abstract

This book is the culmination of E. Hemelrijk's examinations of non-imperial women in the Roman West over fifteen years. She has regularly published articles on all the topics included here, yet she energetically revisits them here and produces fresh analysis of her corpus of approximately 1,400 inscriptions coming from Italian and provincial cities from the late Republic to the late third century.

Disciplines

European Languages and Societies | Women's History

Comments

This book review is published as 2017 Review of Emily Hemelrijk, *Hidden Lives, Public Personae, Women and Civic Life in the Roman West*. in *Journal of Roman Studies* 107. Posted with permission.

EMILY A. HEMELRIJK, *HIDDEN LIVES, PUBLIC PERSONAE. WOMEN AND CIVIC LIFE IN THE ROMAN WEST*. Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xx + 610, illus., maps, tables. ISBN 9780190251888. US\$85.00.

This book is the culmination of E. Hemelrijk's examinations of non-imperial women in the Roman West over fifteen years. She has regularly published articles on all the topics included here, yet she energetically re-visits them here and produces fresh analysis of her corpus of approximately 1,400 inscriptions coming from Italian and provincial cities from the late Republic to the late third century. With her intent to document women's public roles or activities on behalf of their cities as well as any engagement with civic associations (3), H. envisions her work as a counterpart to Riet van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation: Women & the Civic Life in the Greek East in the Hellenistic and Roman Periods* (1996). While H.'s focus is on cities outside of Rome, she makes ample comparisons between Rome and other locales in the western empire, something that separates her work from other scholars' contributions. H. is driven by questions such as which type of women were active in public life and how, what motivated them, what were the benefits to themselves and their families, and what were the chronological and geographical trends. In this richly informative book, H. provides thoughtful analysis on an incredible amount of epigraphical evidence using a synchronic approach since a majority of texts cannot be securely dated.

In Ch. 1 'A World Full of Cities,' Hemelrijk defines her terms and sets out her methodology in forming a corpus of inscriptions on which her investigations are based. Terms often taken for granted, such as 'public' and 'private,' are thoroughly discussed and ample references are cited in the footnotes. She states that her focus in this book is on women's 'deeds on behalf of their communities (as civic benefactresses, priestesses, and patronesses and 'mothers' of cities and *collegia*); their social networks and organizations, their participation in the predominantly male *collegia*; and their public honour and representation (or self-representation) by means of portrait statues, honorific decrees, and public funerals awarded to them by the local council' (12). In attempting to define the term 'élite,' H. warns that the traditional distinctions cannot easily be applied to most cities, especially considering that the social status of about 50% of the women in her corpus cannot be determined from the inscribed text (18).

In Ch. 2 'Civic Priesthoods,' H. analyzes 495 inscriptions of female priesthoods, specifically those of the traditional Graeco-Roman deities and those of the imperial cult. Her thorough examination reveals the chronological and geographical spread of priestesses as well as their social status. The 281 inscriptions documenting priestesses of the imperial cult come from the denser urban areas. It was an expensive office, and one that was reserved for the most highly ranked and worthy families (82). At the

start of Ch. 3, 'Civic Benefactresses,' H. again defines the parameters for her corpus of 338 inscriptions recording the civic benefactions by non-imperial women in the West. She considers different types of benefactions, illustrated with several examples and concludes that women, for the most part, performed the same kinds of benefactions as men and for the same reasons. Notable exceptions are that women did not typically donate funds for projects that were political (e.g., fortifications or *curiae*). While van Bremen, in her study of female civic participation in the East, concluded that women financed benefactions in alignment with their family interests, H. asserts that women in the West were motivated, not only by family traditions of benefaction, but also by the desire to establish their own renown (178–179).

Ch. 4, 'Social Networks and Civic Associations,' charts women's participation with a variety of organizations, which is mainly limited to towns in Italy. Evidence for this group of women is primarily the inscriptions on tombs and on the *loculi* of *columbaria* (183). For example, Julia Felicitas donated funds to the *collegium centonariorum* in Ameria so that its members could celebrate her birthday in perpetuity with a dinner and cash distribution (194). In Ch. 5, 'Civic Patronage and "Motherhood" of Cities and Associations,' H. is concerned with formal patronage of cities and civic *collegia* (227). While the corpora of inscriptions here are unchanged from H.'s 2004 and 2008 articles (plus one recently published inscription of a mother of a *collegium*), the text is reworked and additional examples are elaborated. H. asserts that these titles were not simply honorific; rather, the women were expected to use their influence and connections, even if those specific activities are unknown to us.

Finally in Ch. 6, 'Female Presence: Public Honour and Representation,' H. discusses the public honors—specifically honorific statues and funerals—bestowed on the spectrum of women included in the book. Her interest is in determining the significance to the honorand and the city that bestows the recognition. In her corpus of 411 inscribed statue bases for non-imperial women, almost all (94%) come from the most densely urbanized regions, and they are much more restricted geographically and chronologically than honorific statues for males (285–7).

After a brief conclusion is an Appendix of 225 pages with tables of all the inscriptions consulted, arranged according to the preceding chapters. This alone is a treasure for other scholars researching women's public activities in the western Roman Empire, as some regional epigraphical corpora are not broadly accessible. Anyone engaged in research on the civic lives of women in the Roman West must consult this book, for it is the most comprehensive examination in this field of study and corrects certain misguided views on Roman women based mainly on literary sources.