

## BOOK REVIEW

*Women of Ancient Rome: A Sourcebook.* By BONNIE MACLACHLAN. Bloomsbury Sources in Ancient History. London and New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2013. Pp. x + 222. Paperback, \$39.95. ISBN: 978-1-44116-421-6.

This book's purpose is to be a sourcebook in a course on women in classical antiquity, ancient Rome or another such course with a unit on women in ancient Rome. The passages are drawn from a wide array of sources, such as: inscriptions, historical accounts, medical texts, philosophical texts, and other literary genres such as epic, elegy, comedy, epigrams, and satire. The material is arranged chronologically into five parts ("Rome's beginnings," "The Early and Middle Republic," "The Late Republic", "The Julio-Claudian Period," and "The Later Empire"). Each part contains 4 to 8 chapters, themselves organized thematically around an important historical moment (e.g. Ch. 9 "The Punic Wars") or a social, political, or legal topic (e.g. Ch. 11 "Women of the upper and lower classes"), or a literary genre (e.g. Ch. 20, "The Latin elegiac poets").

In her introduction MacLachlan states that an important aim of her book is not only to facilitate both diachronic and synchronic exploration and analysis of what she refers to as "gender interactions" in ancient Rome, but also to explore and analyze modern gender interactions (vii). The book's structure makes possible this cross-cultural comparison by offering both a chronological and a thematic organizational structure. For example, Chapter 1, "Women and the legendary past", could certainly spark conversation about the role of women in legendary foundations more broadly.

The book has a nice blend of chronological structure and thematic groupings to help both the instructor and student make useful connections between the selected texts both within and across time periods. For example, one could compare the women of Chapters 1-4 (women in the regal period), 6 ("Courageous women of the Early Republic"), 14 ("Some remarkable Roman women of the Late Republic"), 19 ("Women of the imperial households" - Julio-Claudian), and 24 ("Women of the imperial households" - later empire) to get a sense of what they have in common and how they differ within the context of their time period, or how their differing representations reflect shifting ideas about what

makes the ideal woman. Or, one could look at all the chapters in Part 2 (chapters 5-12) to get a sense of how men conceived of women's roles in the early and middle republic. Nearly every Part has a chapter on law, which would also facilitate interesting comparisons.

MacLachlan acknowledges other sourcebooks and introductory texts to which she offers her book as a complement. Indeed, her sourcebook would work well with Eva D'Ambra's *Roman Women* (Cambridge, 2007) or especially Suzanne Dixon's *Reading Roman Women* (Duckworth, 2001). In terms of focus and price point, MacLachlan is most comparable with the 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of *Women's Life in Greece and Rome* (Johns Hopkins, 2005). Comparing the source indices of MacLachlan and *Women's Life in Greece and Rome*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed., reveals important differences, to be expected given the different scopes and aims of MacLachlan and *Women's Life*. While they include many of the same authors (e.g. Livy, Tacitus, Cicero, Plutarch, the Plinys) and inscription types (e.g. funerary, graffiti, dedicatory), the individual selections tend to differ; MacLachlan provides more from individual authors, e.g. Plautus, Sallust, Livy, Tacitus, Plutarch. In addition, MacLachlan includes several important texts not in *Women's Life* that would be particularly suited to a course or unit focused on ancient Rome: selections from all the elegists, the *Aeneid*, Lucan, Ovid's *Ars Armatoria* and *Fasti*, Terence, Horace's *Odes*, and the *Historia Augusta*. This broad array of sources gives the instructor flexibility in the course's focus. One could explore how women are represented in different media, display contexts, time periods, and genres.

The translations are lucid and preceded by informative introductory paragraphs that give enough context to make the passages comprehensible but with minimal interpretation, thereby enabling the instructor and student to interpret the text from a wide variety of viewpoints and methodologies. A later edition could benefit from a glossary to help students keep names, titles, and terminology straight. A few maps would be very useful—the Mediterranean at large, the city of Rome at various time periods, and maps that show the range of the empire at different periods.

I could imagine using this book for a course on women in ancient Rome, women in Roman literature, or a Roman culture course. It offers a wide-ranging and thoughtful selection of different source materials, which would enable fruitful discussions about what the reality of daily life for women may have been and the challenges of reconstructing such a picture along with the complexities of interpreting their literary representations.

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