

BOOK REVIEW

Portraits of the Vestal Virgins, Priestesses of Rome. By MOLLY M. LINDNER. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2015. Pp. xxii + 296. Hardcover, \$95.00. ISBN 978-0-472-11895-3.

The concluding chapter of *Portraits of the Vestal Virgins, Priestesses of Ancient Rome* by Molly M. Lindner says it all (260). In her own words, Lindner states “This book has addressed subjects about the portraits of the Vestals that no other scholar has considered...” Among the areas examined, she looks at “relocating the portraits within the history of honorific statues of Roman priestesses in Italy... [e]stablishing criteria for identifying a Vestal Virgin’s portrait... [r]ecognizing quotation of the Vestals’ *infulae* in private women’s portraits of the late first and early second centuries and offering explanations for this phenomenon...” The author has done what she set out to do in Chapter 1 (4).

The first chapter by way of introduction sets the stage for what is easily known of the Vestal Virgins, what one wishes to be known of these women, current research being done, and the book’s plan. The clear chapter subtitles here and in the following chapters break the technical aspects of the presented material into manageable topics. Individual chapters then proceed to cover the aforementioned contributions.

Lindner argues for Chief Vestal Virgin statues being posed in “an innovative and pathbreaking design” of them in the act of burning incense (261-262). Lastly, she speaks to “the Vestal Virgins’ involvement in the imperial cult” (262).

The author says she is “the first scholar to ask what Vestal portraits might tell us about their relations with imperial women during the second and early third centuries CE” (261). What follows is a comparison of elements found in the portraiture of the two groups. Emphasis is on the Vestal Virgins’ portraiture copying facial and stylistic features of the imperial women’s statues and busts. Examination of the possibility that specific Vestal Virgins may be actual relatives of those same imperial women is barely touched upon.

What is of special interest in this work is the history of the Atrium Vestae itself, the placement of the statues found therein, and the paucity of extant Vestal Virgin statues in general. The role of the imperial women (especially during the

reigns of Trajan, Domitian, and Hadrian) with regard to the iconography of the Vestal Virgins is to be noted. One traditionally thinks of the Vestal Virgins only in Rome, but Lindner reminds us of their presence in the provinces as well as in their more ancient locales (e.g., Alba Longa). Lindner's information of the cult during the days of early Christianity is informative. The discussion on the history and architecture of the Atrium Vestae is welcome in light of this Roman Forum site being open to general public visitation. The statue reproductions that line its garden today have more meaning for the casual visitor after reading this book.

Eighty-seven figures, some highlighting specific details, support Lindner's themes. A fair number of figure photographs are within close page proximity to their initial mention. Others are clustered in a central section within the book. Even when figures are referred to later on in the text, locating them is relatively easy. Each figure is identified by a caption bearing a descriptive title, time period/date, present physical location, and, in the case of photographs, the appropriate photographic credits and permissions. Some photographs are those taken by the author.

This book is reader friendly. The font is clear and crisp. Individual footnotes appear at the bottom of the page on which they occur. Chapter titles appear on the first page of the Table of Contents with the Afterword, Bibliography, and Index on the next. The List of Figures (xi–xiii) is most helpful since not only does each figure's title appear, but also its page location. A List of Abbreviations (xv–xxii) is also useful. The extensive Bibliography includes not only the standard works of the late 1800s (e.g. *Giornale dei Lavori*, 1882–1884), but also those of the present century (e.g. Dillon 2010). While not required nor expected, annotation of the bibliographical items would have been an interesting addition.

The well-thought-out Index (281–291) covers the Vestal Virgins (as expected), topics of relevance to Roman women in general, and terminology specific to Roman portraiture. This helpful Index leads to variations and subsets of a given term (e.g., looking up the term "*infula*" leads to six topics under "headdress of Vestal Virgins" and nine under "beaded *infula*").

This book appeals to the lay reader in that it provides "all you ever wanted to know and more" about the statuary of these young priestess caretakers of Vesta's eternal fire. There are thought-provoking statements aplenty for the Latinist or Roman historian to ponder. For the archaeologist, art historian, and other field experts, points of controversy, opinion, and contention abound. The author initiates a discussion on multi-facets of these little known women.

Molly M. Lindner, a retired Associate Professor in Kent State University's Department of Art, has written a book on a topic of interest to the broader communities of both classicists and art historians. She is to be commended for such an undertaking. May this text become a reference to future scholars of these Virgins of the goddess Vesta.

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