BOOK REVIEW

Hidden Lives, Public Personae: Women and Civic Life in the Roman West. By EMILY HEMELRIJK. Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xviii + 610. Hardcover, $85.00. ISBN 978-0-19-025188-8.

In this hefty volume, Emily Hemelrijk brings together various elements of what has been the focus of her research for more than a decade—close examination of the epigraphic record for the purpose of recovering the public lives of Roman women. Focusing on inscription evidence from outside of the city of Rome in Latin-speaking regions, she considers 1400 public inscriptions dedicated to and by women, with the specific aim of examining their various civic activities and honors.

Hemelrijk herself acknowledges the challenges of assembling and analyzing so large a collection, not the least of which is fixing selection criteria. Moreover, some women in the assemblage assume or receive more than one civic function or honor. The structure of the book treats the evidence by role with a full analysis of each, as if it stood alone. This necessitates understandable repetition of information on certain women from one chapter to the next but also results in the rather frustrating reiteration of observations, particularly with regard to the social status of the women considered and their motivation for civic participation. There is no question that each civic function or honor warrants separate scrutiny, and perhaps the author's thought was that a given reader might only consult an isolated chapter rather than the entire work, but comprehensive treatments of rank and motive would have eliminated repetition and would have provided a more integrated view of these key issues. Yet, this is but a minor criticism of an exhaustive and fruitful treatment of the assembled evidence.

In the first chapter, after a brief excursus on the behavioral expectations of elite women, particularly activities undertaken outside the home for the benefit of husbands or sons, Hemelrijk moves to a discussion of rank, focusing on the difficulty of identifying a woman's social status without knowing that of her male relatives. There is little doubt that most of the women she considers are among the most prominent in their communities, but they may be 'economic' rather than senatorial or decurial elite. Further, while the focus of civic involvement for

these women was not Rome but the municipality in which they lived, she points out that its proximity to Rome, its level of urbanization, and the size of the community are directly connected with the number of inscriptions attesting women's civic involvement there. She argues also that, though many must be native, all the women in these inscriptions present themselves as Roman (25). Italy, Baetica, and North Africa have the most examples, though there is variation even among these regions in the civic responsibilities that women assumed.

In the second through sixth chapters, Hemelrijk examines the evidence for women's public roles: in civic priesthoods; as civic benefactresses; in association with collegia; as civic patronesses and 'mothers' of cities and collegia; and as recipients of public statues and funerals. In each chapter she explains and analyzes the selected inscriptions, with painstaking consideration of their specific language, their distribution, the status of the women, and even the ranking of offices/honors within each category; for example, among women serving in priesthoods, provincial priestesses of the Imperial Cult clearly had the greatest prestige (76). When possible Hemelrijk also provides statistical comparison of the number of attested men and the women within a category. Furthermore, she frequently offers important context for her interpretation of the evidence, describing such matters as the financial expectations and public duties of a priestess, the various benefactions that donors might decide to fund, the nature and role of collegia, or the typical features of Roman statues. Throughout, she teases out details of civic involvement that combine to create a strong argument that Roman women had a persistent and significant public presence in the life of the cities to which they were connected; their involvement was social rather than political, although we cannot dismiss the influence that they surely had on the men in their lives.

Every chapter includes incredibly detailed footnotes that reflect the depth of Hemelrijk's research, interact critically with previous scholarship, and include citation of countless sources on women in the epigraphic record; these notes alone serve as an outstanding resource for anyone examining inscription evidence for the lives of Roman women. In addition, there are frequent references to the 225 page appendix, which consists of 28 tables that align with the various categories of women/honors considered in chapters two through six, providing comprehensive information for each inscription, with repetition and cross-referencing when an inscription fits more than one category. Details vary by civic function/honor but include: the text of the inscription, its date, the find site, the name and rank of the woman, her honors and/or offices, her benefactions, and any co-donors.

Finally, Hemelrijk focuses on the question of motivation, not only of the women but also of the cities that honor them. She makes clear throughout that benefaction and honors are part of an iterative process, one that requires negotiation if it is to be effective and sustainable. Thus a woman might assume an expensive civic priesthood that resulted in the city voting to honor her with a public statue, in thanks for which she might then provide its funding, perhaps from her own money, since elite Roman women increasingly had control of their own finances under the emperors. In return she received any number of benefits: prestige, social advancement, lasting reputation, et al.; and of course any honor she received would reflect well on her male family members. Indeed, a number of the women Hemelrijk considers seem to have been granted or taken on civic functions because of family connections or tradition and perhaps a concomitant sense of obligation. I would also note that by the second and third centuries AD, when inscription evidence for women in public roles is most frequent, the importance of women as conduits of status and fame for their sons had increased substantially, with sons sometimes even assuming complex nomenclature that included their maternal heritage.

As Hemelrijk concludes, civic participation by Roman women was limited to social and religious venues, but in those spheres they comprise 10–15% of the known benefactors/honorands – influence that cannot and should not be minimized or dismissed. While they could not participate in the political arena or compete for honors there, Hemelrijk has offered clear evidence of what we have long suspected intuitively: that Roman women were much more visible and active in public spheres than the literary evidence attests.

JACQUELINE M. CARLON

University of Massachusetts, Boston, Jacqueline.Carlon@umb.edu