

BOOK REVIEW

Civic Monuments and the 'Augustales' in Roman Italy. By MARGARET L. LAIRD. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2015. Pp. xvii, 349. \$99.99. ISBN 9781107008229.

Any student of antiquity will find *Civic Monuments and the Augustales in Roman Italy* a valuable resource. Margaret Laird investigates the identity of the *Augustales*, an important civic group, known (primarily through the study of archaeological and epigraphic evidence) to be active in communities throughout Italy in the first and second centuries CE. Careful reading of public lettering, monument inscriptions, ancient tombs, portrait statues, bases and panels of dedication allows Laird to reconstruct the role of the *Augustales* as an elite municipal organization within Roman society. The author argues that the ancient organization was not solely dedicated to emperor worship as previous scholarship suggests, but instead asserts that this was only one of the many duties performed by the *Augustales* who commissioned public monuments and participated actively in civic philanthropy.

The book is organized into three parts with an introduction and epilogue framing chapters that focus on case studies at well-known Roman sites including the ancient cities of Ostia, Misenum, Herculaneum and Assisi. The introductory chapter entitled, *Inscribed Cities*, provides the reader with characteristics that identify the group, who call themselves *Augustales*, as being wealthy members of the elite Roman community that were not otherwise able to legally participate in local municipal government. Many of these individuals were once freedman who paid an entry fee or *summa honoraria* after being selected for membership by *decurions* or other town officials. Laird believes that this membership along with expensive public construction projects and other acts of civic munificence allowed the *Augustales* to find themselves in a social status well above the average Roman. The author notes that previous research efforts on this subject have not focused on the social or political implications of becoming a member of the *Augustales*, but has been more concerned with teasing out the ties to the imperial cult. This book brings a new perspective on an affluent civic group, its examples of commemora-

tion and its intersections with other active ancient organizations such as professional guilds and local governments.

Part One is composed of two chapters and is entitled, "Representation in the Funerary Realm." Laird investigates not only the text and imagery of ancient tombs commissioned by the members of the *Augustales* but also explores the patterns of incised public lettering including common abbreviations. A group of tombs located just outside the Herculaneum Gate at the ancient city of Pompeii reveal that the *Augustales* and local magistrates alike made use of what Laird calls "insignias of authority" to commemorate their dead. Images in the funerary context that would have been readily recognizable in antiquity, such as illustrations of the *bisellium* (double bench) or *lictors with fasces* (tied bundles of wheat) on tombs indicated local power and prestige therefore promoting the deceased as elite members in the community.

Part Two of the book is composed of three chapters and is entitled, "Augustales in Their Meeting Places." Laird examines private and public gathering spaces of the *Augustales* in the ancient naval port of Misenum and in Herculaneum. Prior research on this subject is argued in an attempt to unweave the notion that *Augustales* were closely linked to municipal Augustea (site of imperial rituals). The author asserts that the *Augustales* had their own unique identity reflected in local traditions within Roman society as evidenced by epigraphic and material remains found at their meeting places. The spaces allowed for not only emperor worship but functioned much more like a multi-use facility where the leaders could conduct business, have banquets, accept donations, and pass decrees at the institutional level.

The decoration and embellishment of the *Collegio Degli Augustali* at Herculaneum reinforces the influence of local interests at meeting sites of the organization. Preserved wall paintings at this location depict mythological scenes from the life of Hercules, the heroic founder of this seaside town. We learn that the *Sacello degli Augustali* at Misenum (situated north of Herculaneum on the Bay of Naples), shared its space with sculptures from the Flavian family along with an image of the Genius Augustalium (personification of the *Augustales*). Laird effectively argues that these spaces occupied by the *Augustali* were utilized in a manner that merged imperial worship and community interests.

The chapters in Part III, entitled "Monuments in Public," investigate extraordinary acts of civic generosity by members of the *Augustales* that include monumental paving projects throughout Roman Italy. Laird describes these gifts of public works and their accompanying inscriptions within the community as

acts of *euergetism* elevating the donors in a way that could only be compared to imperial commissions. Throughout the book the author argues that the extraordinary civic philanthropy exhibited by the *Augustales* in Roman Italy provided a social mechanism that placed its members (by way of their commissions and incised dedications) within public spaces, facilitating high visibility and prestige as they intersected with the imperial hierarchy.

Margaret Laird's case study approach is an effective method to present research on this fascinating municipal group within ancient Roman society. Suggestions that I feel would enhance the book include a glossary of terms, better quality photographs of the monuments, tombs, panels and inscriptions along with a detailed map of ancient Italy.

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