

## BOOK REVIEW

*Imperial Women of Rome: Power, Gender, Context.* By MARY T. BOATWRIGHT. Oxford, UK and New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2021. Pp. xii + 404. Hardback, \$99.99. ISBN: 9780190455897.

Imperial women occupied a unique and complicated position in the Roman world, potentially powerful due to their proximity to the emperor but marginalized because of their gender. In *Imperial Women of Rome: Power, Gender, Context*, Boatwright navigates the paradoxical nature of imperial women's lives from Livia and Octavia in 35 BCE to the end of the Severan dynasty in 235 CE. Thematic chapters evaluate shifts in the presence, possible agency and influence of imperial women in relation to the emperor and imperial power, Roman law, the imperial family, Roman cult, as patrons or subjects of monuments and statuary, while at home, abroad and with the military. In her comprehensive synthesis, Boatwright employs coinage, inscriptions, papyri, archaeology and other material evidence in combination with ancient authors, acknowledging source biases and the inadequacy of documentation on imperial women while articulating moments of change and continuity in their activities and representations. Imperial women emerge as complex individuals, constrained by gender stereotypes, yet honored and revered as moral *exempla*. This is a necessary book, essential reading for students and scholars alike.

Each chapter offers an introductory vignette before tracing a given theme through time. In Chapter 1, Julia Augusta's protection of Plautia Urgulania leads to questions about the extent of an imperial woman's power, but Boatwright emphasizes that they did not have institutional privileges and the possibilities for imperial women did not transcend those of other Roman women. Boatwright draws welcome attention to the invisible influence of imperial women, such as their ownership of brick factories. Chapter 2 investigates Domitia Longina as an entry point into Roman law, considers the various crimes and punishments of imperial women and concludes that imperial women were not above the law; rather, as members of the imperial family they faced higher expectations and higher penalties. Faustina the Younger introduces Chapter 3 and the concept of the imperial

*domus* as the cornerstone of the principate, and the difficulties for women to gain individual visibility.

Coins and cult split Chapter 4, introduced by the image of Caligula's three sisters on his coinage. Boatwright provides a summary masterclass on assessing Roman coins, explicating the utility of coinage to understand imperial iconography and ideology, while underlining the impossibility of knowing an individual woman's preferences and influence on her imagery. Boatwright limits her evidence to centrally struck coins that identify imperial women by name, justifying her choice through the example of the complicated *Salus Augusta* coinage of 22-23 CE. She documents the roles of imperial women in cult, as well as the hundreds of priestesses of the cults of imperial women identified epigraphically from across the Roman world. The expansion of imperial cult to include women allowed for the participation of women outside of Rome, increasing awe for the family without gaining power for imperial women themselves.

Chapter 5 follows imperial women's impact on the city of Rome, introduced by Agrippina the Younger's appearance at the submission of Caratacus (*Tac. Ann.* 12.37.4). Agrippina is the exception, and imperial women experienced decreased visibility over the centuries. Boatwright examines funerary rituals, public banquets and other processions, and outlines the presence of imperial women on public monuments in the city through a succinct yet demonstrative survey of Rome. Her illustrative tour elucidates monuments and statues that are attested or questioned, arguing for the visibility rather than agency of imperial women. The accentuation of the imperial family as a unit "characterizes and may even excuse" instances of imperial women's presence in Rome (206). Boatwright wryly concludes, "Imperial women had roles in Rome indeed, but those roles were all in the family. Moreover, they were usually evident when the women themselves were dead and out of sight" (210).

Chapter 6 turns to statues, centering on the oversized portrait statue of Agrippina the Younger in greywacke discovered near the Temple of Claudius on the Caelian Hill. Boatwright is a cautious reader, but allows herself some speculation about the functions and messages of statues, and the exemplarity and emulation of the women they represented. Imperial women's statues are rather homogeneous, similar to statues of non-imperial women. However, an exceptional statue of Matidia the Younger as an *Aura* from Suessa Aurunca suggests that imperial women may have had agency over their imagery outside of Rome and could be represented differently. Chapter 7 analyzes imperial women abroad and with the military, focusing on the Severan women. While associations with the military

were problematic, women were present in the camps, and Boatwright wonders if imperial women reflected or guided the actions of others. Over time, more imperial women joined their husbands and male relatives on trips outside of Italy. The idea of travel may have been welcome, given the constraints of their lives at home.

In conclusion, Boatwright determines that imperial women displayed acceptable visibility and influence when it was identifiably connected to the imperial family. Despite anecdotes about imperial women's transgressions, they were generally powerless, valued as models of modesty and moderation, domesticity and deference. Their statuary and cult participation made them relatable to other elites, even as their household distanced itself as the *domus divina*. Imperial women were vital intermediaries in the life of the empire who contributed to the stability of the principate and are worthy of our attention.

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