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The Age of Marriage in Ancient Rome (review)

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Ostia showing a woman selling chickens and vegetables” No specific mention of Roman female vendors appears in the sections dealing with occupations. Furthermore, the bibliography does not include any references to Natalie Boymel Kampen’s work on this very subject (e.g., “Social status and gender in Roman art: The case of the saleswoman,” in Eve D’Ambra, ed., *Roman Art in Context: An Anthology* [Englewood Cliffs, NJ 1993] 115–132).

This representative sample of images that Lefkowitz and Fant present sends a dangerous message that we are to treat art as secondary to the literary evidence. Because of the importance of art in ancient culture and its bearing on current scholarly trends, there is a need for new source books to compile artworks and provide the requisite bibliography alongside the literary sources themselves. This is not to say that the authors are not mindful of these matters. Perhaps part of the problem stems from the complexities and costs involved in book design.

Many of the concerns raised here could be dealt with in part or in whole if this work sees a fourth edition or if the website takes off as the reference tool that the authors promise it to be. Regardless, *Women’s Life in Greece and Rome* will still be part and parcel of the required or supplementary readings of many syllabi pertaining to women in antiquity.

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ARNOLD A. LELIS, WILLIAM A. PERCY, and BEERT C. VERSTRAETE. *The Age of Marriage in Ancient Rome*. Studies in Classics 26. Lewiston/Queenston/Lampeter: The Edwin Mellen Press, 2003. Pp. x + 146. ISBN 0-7734-6625-8; SC Series ISBN 0-88946-684-X.

The purpose of this slim book is to re-examine evidence for age of marriage among Roman males and females. Specifically, the authors seek to refute the arguments of Richard Saller (*CP* 82 [1987] 21–34) and Brent Shaw (*JRS* 77 [1987] 30–46) that Romans generally married at a later age than previous studies had suggested. Saller and Shaw, utilizing their earlier study of commemorative practice in Latin tombstone inscriptions (*JRS* 74 [1984] 124–156), had suggested that the point at which the deceased began to be commemorated by a spouse rather than by par-

ents provided a better indication of age of marriage than those relatively few epitaphs that actually indicate age at marriage (or allow it to be deduced from age at death and length of marriage).

Lelis, Percy, and Verstraete instead explicitly privilege literary, not epigraphic sources, and question the validity of any statistical study drawn from Roman sources. Their own conclusion, which they claim is based on “[t]he preponderance of the available evidence,” is that “[f]or females, first marriages occurred from pre-puberty to the mid-teens with a modal range from twelve to sixteen; for males they occurred from the mid-teens to the early twenties, with a modal range of seventeen to twenty” (14). Their approach is avowedly “impressionistic”: “we believe that a well organized and suitably analyzed assemblage of information on the actual actions of Romans when contracting their first marriage will provide a more accurate understanding of this behavior and its underlying patterns than any other approach hitherto undertaken” (11). To that end, almost twenty percent of the book comprises two appendices cataloguing the ages of first marriage for men and women, along with prosopographical summaries of what is known of their careers.

There is much to be said for such an approach. It is in fact one often used by Roman social historians, and its potential for fruitful scholarship is illustrated by Susan Treggiari’s excellent book on Roman marriage, which draws on legal, literary, and epigraphic sources. The authors of this study are also to be commended for their willingness to challenge the conclusions of Saller and Shaw, which have now become received wisdom among Roman social historians (including this reviewer) who do not themselves have the background in statistics to understand fully their methodology. Their suspicion of the existence of a “Mediterranean type” of marriage in antiquity is also justified; indeed, that such a type has existed even in more recent times is now doubted by scholars of the European family (see now P.P. Viazzo in *Continuity and Change* 18 [2003] 111–137).

Unfortunately, the book as a whole is flawed by over-generalizations and failure to exploit the evidence which the authors claim to be using. To counter the statistical methodology of Saller and Shaw, who utilize extensive data (however problematical), an approach based on literary anecdote and scattered sources must offer “thick description” so full and rich in detail that the conclusions drawn will be persuasive despite the lack of quantitative evidence. But this book provides very little in the way of primary source citation, and what is given usually does not come directly from the ancient writers but from moderns like Friedlaender or articles in Pauly-Wissowa. Moreover, the authors place an inordinate burden on the scanty evidence for marriage practices in the

middle Republic: "If we keep in mind the general scarcity of vital statistics for this period, the existence of even one father-to-son-to-grandson sequence demonstrably involving early AAFMs [Age At First Marriage] is as good as proof that the practice of early marriage was ubiquitous. Here we have two such sequences" (48). Even the most confirmed positivist will demur at assuming "ubiquity" from two examples.

The authors also fail to engage with (or know of) much of the scholarship on Roman marriage, sexuality, and social mores that has been published in the past two decades, for instance recent work on infant exposure, or the debate over the use of contraception (a topic on which, surprisingly, they claim little has been said). This is no doubt due in part to the fact that the genesis of this book lies in the 1980s, but the study of the Roman family has been completely transformed over the past twenty years, and any discussion of marriage practices must take this into account or risk faulty, out-of-date conclusions. Thus the authors' discussion of the Augustan marriage laws relies on Csillag's idiosyncratic book published in 1976, which has now been superseded by Astolfi and others. This may account for the authors' misunderstanding of Augustus' restrictions on inheritance by the unmarried and childless, which they think affected children's right to inherit from their fathers. This error leads to their argument that fathers would be anxious to marry off their sons and daughters as early as possible, to ensure that their children could receive their paternal inheritances. In fact, the laws applied only to inheritances and legacies outside the sixth degree of kinship, and so would not affect a father's transmission of his property to his children. There were indeed reasons for a *paterfamilias* to want to arrange his children's marriages before he died, but this was not one of them.

The fifth chapter, "A Reconsideration of the Epigraphic Evidence," is the strongest and most coherent. Here the authors challenge the assumption underlying the studies of Saller and Shaw, that commemoration by a spouse rather than a parent indicates that the deceased was married and an analysis of the thousands of inscriptions which actually indicate commemorator can therefore provide indirect evidence of the average age of marriage. As they note (they are not, of course, the first to do so), this "assumes an unproven correspondence between commemorative practice and demographic fact" (77). Their alternative explanation for the change in commemoration of men who died in their late twenties and early thirties, that this is the point at which most men would have lost their fathers, so that "the duty of commemoration devolves to their spouses" (87), is logical and persuasive. Their suggested reason for a changeover in commemoration from parents to spouse for women at around age twenty is a bit more forced: "the teenage girl who

died without issue would not make a deep impression on her husband or his family" (88). A more likely explanation, hinted at also by the authors, lies in Roman inheritance practice of the late Republic and early Empire, which strongly favored agnate relatives: a man's intestate successors would be his children (or, if childless, his closest natal kin), and a woman's would be her natal family (not until the later second century did her own children have preferred succession rights). Spouses did not inherit from each other upon intestacy, and were prevented by the Augustan legislation from leaving more than ten percent to each other by will unless they had children (who would then be the preferred heirs). And as the authors point out, if a wife died childless, her dowry was likely to return to her natal family, which would strengthen the interest that her parents, if still alive, would have in commemorating her.

The appendices on ages at first marriage for men (Appendix I) and women (Appendix II) include more detail than the chapters, but are still far from providing "the systematic database" that the authors claim. The literary testimony for men's age at marriage in the republican period is well-exploited (understandably, there is far less evidence for women's age at marriage), but for the Empire the entries in both appendices are limited almost entirely to members of the imperial family. This is odd when one considers that, as the authors themselves point out, emperors were more likely to marry either exceptionally early (for dynastic reasons) or unusually late (for political reasons). No attempt is made to exploit fully sources like Pliny the Younger, let alone the rich evidence from the late Empire (such as Ausonius' *Parentalia*, a veritable family tree), even when these sources are mentioned in the text. For instance, in a discussion of "hellenizing influences" on the aristocracy (44–46), which the authors claim discouraged early marriage for men in the Principate, the authors quote Pliny on the virtues of a young man who preserved his reputation despite his good looks and "was a husband at four and twenty" (*sic. intra quartum et vicensimum annum*, and so actually twenty-three). Yet Ummidius Quadratus, about whom we have a fair amount of information, does not appear in the Appendix.

This is not simply a question of failure to use the evidence available; it also vitiates the authors' attempt to refute Saller and Shaw, whose studies of marriage age were explicitly focused on the imperial period, not the Republic. Indeed, the epigraphic evidence used by Saller and Shaw is at its fullest in the Principate, the very period at which, according to Lelis *et al.*, men of the senatorial class married later than at any other time. Evidence for early marriage in the Republic does not affect Saller's and Shaw's thesis or methodology.

There are also some solecisms and misspellings, including (in both footnotes and bibliography) the names of scholars Antti Arjava and Henri Leclerq. The book would have benefitted from better proof-reading.

It is difficult to understand why this was published as a book and not as a shorter, more focused article. The authors claim that they wanted to make their work accessible to a larger audience than would read a classical journal. This is commendable, but surely that aim would have been better met by publishing a general article in a journal of social history (such as *Journal of Family History*), along with a more detailed analysis of the epigraphic question in a classical journal (as Melissa Aubin did in a critique of Shaw in *Ancient History Bulletin* 15 [2000] 1–13, apparently unknown to the authors). As it is, the weaknesses of this book clearly outweigh its strengths.

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CHARLES STANLEY ROSS, trans. *Publius Papinius Statius, The Thebaid: Seven against Thebes*. Baltimore/London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2004. Pp. xxxvii + 386. US \$55.00. ISBN 0-8018-6908-0.

Ross's work, following closely on Shackleton Bailey's 2003 prose translation and Melville's 1990 verse translation, is a testimony to the revived interest in Statius that has witnessed over the last two decades a doubling of the total number of available English versions of the poem. Ross's own view is that the *Thebaid's* popularity was, and still is, tied to tumultuous time, and Statius has special relevance to post-9/11 America: "There is, it seems, such a thing as too much success, as well as too much failure, whether in Rome two thousand years ago or today. Even unopposed power may be uneducated, unsteady, liable to new problems but old emotions. Humans are self-destructive; anger comes easily" (x).

The translation, based on Hill's edition, is prefaced with a 37-page introduction. The translation itself runs 354 pages, to which is appended a section of notes (355–376), an index of selected proper names (377–380), and an annotated bibliography (381–386). Before turning to examples of Ross's versification, I have some remarks to make on the components and structure of Ross's translation. Ross's introduction covers six topics: "Statius's Life" (xi–xiv), "Statius and Virgil" (xiv–xvi), "The Influence of the *Thebaid*" (xvi–xxvii), "Statius and his Poem" (xxvii–xxxii),