

Jenifer Neils, *Women in the Ancient World*. Los Angeles: J. Paul Getty Museum, 2011. 216 pp. ISBN 978-1-60606-091-9 (\$25, pbk.)

Jenifer Neils (henceforth N.), the Ruth Coulter Heede Professor of Art History at Case Western University, is a well-established scholar in the field of Greek art and archaeology, particularly known for her research on the Parthenon frieze.¹ In the book under review she widens her perspective so as to offer a general introduction on women in the ancient world, accompanied by a rich collection of material evidence. Published by the J. Paul Getty Museum, the book is printed on high-quality paper and contains more than two hundred color illustrations of ancient artworks, each followed by an explicatory caption. *Women in the Ancient World* provides a concise and accessible introduction to the subject, primarily addressed to a general readership and undergraduates, and sold at an affordable price.

The introductory chapter sets out the parameters of the book, whose aim is to explore, in N.'s words, 'how the imagery of women in the ancient world contributes to our understanding of their lives and roles in society' (13). This first chapter defines the geographical and chronological boundaries of what is meant by the 'ancient world'. N.'s discussion covers the cultures of the Near East, Egypt, Greece and Rome, from roughly the Neolithic period until Late Antiquity. Still, there is some imbalance in the text in favor of Greek culture of the Classical period, which is to be expected, considering the author's field of expertise. Furthermore, N. is aware of the fact that most of the artifacts probably belong to the upper social strata (13), as well as of the gap between women's representation in works of art and 'real' women (18-22). The introduction closes with a useful summary of the periods and cultures addressed in the ensuing chapters (22-32). What I missed in this chapter — a topic that I shall return to in my conclusion — is a more pronounced standpoint on how the book relates to current works on women in antiquity, and especially on its position vis-à-vis critical thinking in gender studies.

The body of the work is divided into six additional chapters. The second chapter (36-56), entitled 'Female Stereotypes', discusses how ancient cultures typified different kinds of femininity. N. identifies four categories of stereotypes: First, the 'femmes fatales' (40-3), a group which includes the concept of 'the first' woman, such as Eve or Pandora, and sex goddesses endowed with insatiable sexual appetite, such as Ishtar or Astarte. The second category somewhat bizarrely yokes together 'man-slayers and martyrs' (43-7) to discuss, side by side, figures such as the Amazons, Iphigenia, and St. Agnes of Rome. This is followed by 'witches' (47-51), under which heading feature Medea, Isis and Lamashtu. The last stereotype of women in this chapter includes the important category of 'Earth (and Sky) Mothers' (51-6).

Chapter Three (58-90) is devoted to 'Mothers and Mourners' and includes an analysis of crucial life stages (such as wedding, divorce, and adultery), as well as male-female relationships within the marriage. N. also examines the evidence for the role of midwives in childbirth, and closes with a discussion of the practices of women as mourners in funerals and their responsibility in tending graves. The following chapter is entitled 'Working Women' (92-122) and opens with a presentation of women's central occupation in the textile and food productions. Female livelihood also extended beyond the household; N. delves into women's occupation in entertainment (mainly as musicians and dancers), in prostitution, and in slavery. The conclusion of this chapter raises some important questions regarding the interpretation of visual sources, by presenting different possible interpretations of Athenian vases depicting women at the fountain (116-21).

The fifth chapter, 'The Body Beautiful' (124-58), considers the ways in which women adorned their bodies (costume, hair, cosmetics, perfume, and jewellery) and their portrayal after

¹ See J. Neils, *The Parthenon Frieze*, Cambridge 2001, as well as the collection edited by the author: *The Parthenon: From Antiquity to the Present*, Cambridge 2005.

death. I found the discussion of women's depiction in funerary contexts (126-32) very effective, as it is divided into separate paragraphs for each of the cultures under discussion, thus enabling the reader to make sense of female representation in the different funerary contexts of the Near Eastern, Egyptian, Greek and Roman cultures, and compare them.

Chapters Six and Seven examine female roles in *loci* of authority. N. is critical of what she terms 'recent feminist-driven investigations' (160) that, in her view, overemphasize the authority and power that these women might have actually possessed. Chapter Six, 'Women and Religion' (160-86), discusses the role of women in the realm of religion. It examines the role of the Vestal Virgins in Rome and questions Herodotus' evidence for temple prostitution in Babylon. The remainder of the chapter focuses on priestesses, including the priestess of Athena Polias in Athens, the Pythia at Delphi, and the Sibyl. Also discussed are women's roles in cult, such as that of maenads in honor of Dionysus and in other exclusively female festivals, as well as the variety of offerings women dedicated at shrines.

The seventh and last chapter, 'Royal Women' (188-204) investigates royal women in their role as wives of rulers, or as rulers in their own right. These undoubtedly include some of the more prominent female historical figures in antiquity. N. introduces the Hittite queen Puduhepa, wife of the Hittite king Hattusili III, and queen Pu-abi of Mesopotamia, as examples of arranged marriages of foreign women to kings (191-2). Also outstanding are the Assyrian Sammu-ramat (Semiramis in Greek), queen Boudica in Roman Britain, and Hatshepsut, who ruled for two decades in fifteenth century BCE Egypt (192-5). The chapter ends with the 'systematic' commemoration of Livia Julia Augusta in Rome and its possible derivation from that of the Hellenistic queen Arsinoe II of Egypt (195-201). Last but not least, N. presents one of the most famous women of antiquity, Cleopatra VII, discussing the stereotypes that she came to embody in later times (201-4).

The book includes a general timeline arranged according to the different cultures (Egypt, Near East, Greece, Rome), as well as a map of the lands around the Mediterranean basin. While no notes are included, *Women in the Ancient World* contains a glossary, a list of goddesses' names, a short bibliography for further reading, a list of illustrations, and a general index. The book has been very carefully edited. The illustrations are of excellent quality and, when necessary, are presented from multiple angles or enlarged.

As a whole, the illustrations of the artifacts and explicatory captions are helpful and are effectively balanced in respect to each separate ancient culture. However, most of the artworks are not discussed in the main text, with the notable exception of Projecta's casket in the introduction (12-18). The illustrations and their captions thus require special attention by the reader. This necessitates a measure of maneuvering between text and captions, which I found enlightening and worthwhile, although at times distracting the continuous reading of the main text. Overall, the illustrations are suitably chosen to match the theme or topic under discussion. It is important to mention that the vast majority of them are of objects now housed in the British Museum. It is thus admirable how the author managed to produce a coherent narrative on women in antiquity, defined in such broad geographical and chronological contexts, while illustrating relevant objects in the possession of a single, though admittedly rich, museum collection. However, it is lamentable that the reader of the book published by the J. Paul Getty Museum Press is never informed of this detail in the blurb of the flaps or in the introductory chapter.²

A last general point to be made touches on issues that the author chose not to raise. The title 'women in the *ancient* world' does carry an implicit contrast to 'women in the *modern* world'

² The book was published in the US by the J. Paul Getty Museum Press and in the UK by the British Museum Press. A German translation of the book appeared in 2012 (*Die Frau in der Antike*, trans. Bettina von Stockfleth. Stuttgart: Konrad Theis).

(however the term ‘modern’ may be defined in various contexts). Indeed, comparisons between ‘now’ and ‘then’, ‘us’ and ‘them’ are raised frequently throughout the book. Nonetheless, there is little discussion of the author’s own critical perspective or how she situates her work vis-à-vis current scholarship on women and gender in antiquity (with a notable exception quoted above). Unfortunately, N. chose not to expound on recent redefinitions of gender roles that have been often raised within feminist (re)interpretations of antiquity — though not only there — or how they have helped reshape old-standing scholarly assumptions on ancient women’s lives over the last fifty years. Thus the reader remains generally uninformed as to what extent the author’s own viewpoint could have occasionally drawn on this varied and growing body of literature, or to what extent she is critical of it. Nonetheless, the book offers a comprehensive yet succinct review of women in antiquity appealing to a wide readership due to its excellent illustrations and flowing narrative.

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Jason von Ehrenkrook, *Sculpting Identity in Flavian Rome: (An)Iconic Rhetoric in the Writings of Flavius Josephus*, Society of Biblical Literature, Early Judaism and its Literature 33, Atlanta: Society of Biblical Literature, 2011. 226 pp. ISBN: 978-1-58983-622-8.

This book is a revised version of the author’s dissertation submitted at the University of Michigan, under the principal supervision of Gabriele Boccaccini. The hard work, careful scholarship, extensive references to the secondary literature, and attentive reading of the primary sources that characterize a first rate PhD thesis are evident throughout. The work is also typical of scholarship written in the aftermath of the “literary turn.” There is a strong focus on rhetorical analysis of Josephus’ works, on reading them against the background of Flavian Rome, and on insisting that much of what Josephus wrote concerning Jewish attitudes towards sculptures should not be taken as straightforward evidence of reality. Ehrenkrook (hereafter E.) intends to ‘problematize’ widely held scholarly views concerning absolute Jewish opposition to sculptures (e.g. 17, 64, 101-102) with a demonstration of the complexity of the matter (e.g. 5, 63, 97, 172). His goal is to show that Jewish rejection of statues was not a mark of disloyalty to the Empire (175).

The book has six chapters: (1) ‘Reading Idolatry in(to) Josephus (1-18);’ (2) ‘Jewish Responses to Images in Cultural Context (19-60);’ (3) ‘The Second Commandment in Josephus and Greco-Roman Jewish Literature (61-98);’ (4) ‘Sculpture and the Politics of Space in the *Bellum Judaicum* (99-136);’ (5) ‘Idealizing an Aniconic Past in the *Antiquitates Judaicae* (137-172);’ (6) ‘The Poetics of Idolatry and the Poetics of Identity (173-180).’ Two Appendices (‘Statuary Lexicon in the Josephan Corpus,’ and ‘The Second Commandment in Josephus’) and several indices complete the book.

In the first chapter, E. briefly reviews the history of scholarship on the topic and argues that Josephus is not to be taken as simply describing the situation concerning ancient Jewish views of idolatry, statues in particular, but was ‘shaping unique portraits of aniconism that contribute to larger rhetorical themes within each of his main compositions (4).’ Ancient Jews, E. argues, were embedded in a Greco-Roman discourse concerning iconism, and Josephus’ remarks need to be read with that background in mind (4-5). E. concedes that the archaeological and literary evidence do not quite cohere, but does not intend to offer a definitive answer to that puzzle (16), although he sets out to question the widely held view that up till 70 CE the typical polarization of “Jew” vs. “Image” does not tell the whole story (5).

In Chapter Two, E. analyzes archaeological and epigraphic evidence, including the account of Herod’s eagle in Josephus and concludes that ‘perhaps ... it is not unreasonable to suppose that at least for some Jews the statue was seen as relatively harmless, not necessarily a violation of the