

*Review: Elite Women in Hellenistic History, Historiography, and Reception* edited by Marc Mendoza and Borja Antela-Bernárdez with the collaboration of Eran Almagor. *Women of the Past: Testimonies from Archaeology and History*. Brepols publishers: Turnhout, Belgium, 2024, pp. 170 ISBN 978-2-503-61106-8.

by Guendalina Daniela Maria Taietti

The volume addresses the role of royal women in the Hellenistic period, both as historical agents and as historiographical and artistic tropes. The book positions itself well within the growing body of scholarship from the last few decades, which has seen increased interest in the study of women's agency in antiquity following the seminal works of Sarah Pomeroy (*Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves: Women in Classical Antiquity*, New York, 1975) and Elisabeth Carney (*Women and monarchy in Macedonia*, Norman OK, 2000). A notable recent contribution is Elisabeth Carney and Sabine Müller (eds.)'s *Routledge Companion to Women and Monarchy in the Ancient Mediterranean World* (London-New York 2021), which features interdisciplinary studies from the ancient Eastern civilizations to late antiquity and also explores some aspects of the reception of royal women in ancient and modern contexts. Regarding non-royal women, several important recent publications include Mary R. Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Fant (eds.)'s *Women's life in Greece and Rome: a Source Book in Translation* (Baltimore, 2005); Giampiera Arrigoni (ed.)'s *Le Donne in Grecia* (Rome-Bari 2008); Bonnie Maclachlan's *Women in Ancient Greece: A Sourcebook. Bloomsbury sources in ancient history* (London-New York, 2012); and Stephanie Lynn Budin and Jean MacIntosh Turfa (eds.)'s *Women in Antiquity: Real Women across the Ancient World* (London-New York, 2016).

*Elite Women in Hellenistic History, Historiography, and Reception* belongs to the new Brepols series *Women of the Past: Testimonies from Archaeology and History* and originates from a panel on royal and non-elite women held at the Celtic Classics Conference in Coimbra in 2019—although eventually several papers read at the conference did not make it into the volume. The editors acknowledge that a comprehensive and systematic study on both royal and non-royal women throughout the Hellenistic period is still a desideratum, and this little collection surely takes a further step into that direction. It offers original contributions through an interdisciplinary approach (history, archaeology, epigraphy, numismatics, and art history) and provides a broad geographical and chronological overview of Hellenistic royal and elite women, while it also addresses some of their predecessors and forerunners in Epirus, and their reception in Gandhāran art.

The book comprises six studies:

a) ‘The Power of Names, Women, and the Aeacid Dynastic Image’ by Elisabeth D. Carney, in which the author reappraises naming practices under the Aeacids, drawing parallels with the Argeads and the Hellenistic dynasties. Carney convincingly demonstrates the pivotal role of royal women in shaping and sustaining the Aeacid dynastic image. Greek ruling dynasties often employed a variety of tactics to construct a compelling image that would reinforce their power within and outside their realm, and genealogies (i.e. claiming descent from a mythical or heroic figure) were widely used in the Classical and Hellenistic period. The Aeacids (fifth century BC-232 BC) claimed descent from Achilles through his son Neoptolemus and, from the outset, women played an important role in the Aeacid dynasty. Carney compares the accounts of Thucydides (I.136.1-137.2), Plutarch (*Them.* 15.1-3), Diodorus (XI.56.1-4), and Cornelius Nepos (*Them.* 8.4-5) and discusses the tale of Themistocles, who, while escaping from his pursuers, is helped by the wife of Molossian king Admetus I (c.471 BC). The queen suggests to Themistocles that he holds her son in his arms and waits for the king. Indeed, at this sight Admetus refuses to turn him over to his pursuers and help him flee to Persia. Carney aptly shows the similarities between this tale and the Homeric account of Odysseus’ supplication to Arete,

wife of the Phaeacian ruler Alcinous (*Od.*VII.139-206) and the supplications of baby Pyrrhus at the Illyrian king Glaukias’ court, who instructs his Aeacid wife to bring Pyrrhus up (*Plu. Pyr.* 3.1-2). Thus, these variants of Themistocles’ tale portray the fifth century Aeacid court as Homeric and as one where royal women exercised power and agency.

Naming someone after an ancestor was another method to construct a compelling image, as it ‘is both a commemorative act (a reference to a grand past)’, and ‘an assertion that the newly named person embodies the qualities of their namesake’ (p. 22). Although at the beginning the Aeacid did not bear heroic names, from the reign of Alcetas I (ca. 390/85-370 BC), they began to use names related to Achilles and/or Trojan ancestors, perhaps because of the king’s dealings with Dionysius I of Syracuse and the Athenians, and thus the need to construct a stronger heroic dynasty’s image. Notably, the Aeacids emphasized female names, as they focussed on the heroic ancestry—rather than just giving the name of the grandmothers, the most common Greek naming practice—and inventiveness, which distinguishes them from other ruling dynasties, whose naming practices ‘focused on continuity via repetition of both names and epithets’ (p. 28).

b) *‘Oh, Heaven is a Place on Earth. Imperial Paradigm and Local (Female) Agency in Late Achaemenid and Early Hellenistic Bactria: A Model of Paradise Politics’* by Marco Ferrario. Building on Wouter F.M. Henkelman’s work on the Achaemenid administrative structure and system beyond the Iranian plateau, Ferrario examines the political strategies adopted by the Achaemenids to establish their rule over Bactria, and how the Persians’ transformation of the territory actually allowed local elites to gain more power. Marriages played an important role in forming power balances and alliances between the Achaemenids and the local ruling class. Ferrario argues that that local aristocratic women, such as Rhoxane, were not passive recipients of power but actively sought strategic marriages to maintain control over estates and territory; thus, economic interests laid behind the marriages between the Macedonian generals and some daughters of the Central Asian aristocracy. While the chapter provides valuable insights on

Achaemenid Bactria and its local elite, I would have appreciated a deeper focus on women’s roles, to better align with the topic of the volume.

c) ‘The Wives of Lysimachus. A Study of Dynastic Relations’ by Branko F. van Oppen de Ruiter. This chapter explores Lysimachus’ numerous marriages as diplomatic tools, and how Lysimachus’ women actively took part in the political scene. It re-evaluates the chronology of events and challenges existing assumptions about Lysimachus’ serial monogamy, showing that, like Philip II, Alexander III and other Hellenistic rulers, he was practicing *polygyny* (cf. Plu. *Comp. Demetr. Ant.* 4.1). van Oppen states that so far neither Lysimachus nor his wives received the scholarly attention they deserve as they lack dynastic continuity, and that the dynastic importance of his wives is stressed by the city foundations and coins minted in their name, a policy that Lysimachus did not apply for his son Agathocles, nor for any other male family member. In the chapter, special attention is given to Amastris, the daughter of Oxyathres, a brother of Darius III. During the mass wedding at Susa, she was wed to Craterus, who, given his devotion to Macedonian tradition, allegedly repudiated her upon his return to Macedon. Following Memnon (*FGrH* 434 fr. 4.4), van Oppen suggests that, with Craterus’ consent, Amastris offered herself to Dionysius of Heraclea. Amastris was a valuable wife as she was part of the Persian nobility; she received Greek education before her wedding at Susa and became acquainted with Macedonian affairs through Craterus. After Dionysius’ death, she also became regent of Heraclea, a fact that gave her an even greater appeal to Lysimachus. After her return in Bithynia in 290s BC, Amestris probably ruled the Pontic area on his behalf and expanded his influence along the Black Sea.

d) ‘Polygamy and Queenship under Antiochus II. The King’s Wife Laodice I and the *basilissa* Title (or the Lack Thereof)’ by Altay Coşkun. This chapter delves into Laodice I’s marriage, her power dynamics, and the politics surrounding the use (or absence) of the *basilissa* title. This Seleucid example is paralleled by similar practices of other Hellenistic royal women and kingdoms. Coşkun has refined his views on Laodice I through several studies, and suggests that the negative literary portrayal of Laodice is modelled on Olympias, the mother of Alexander,

also accused of murdering her husband in order to secure power for her son. Although Laodice I was never granted the title of *basilissa*, she held a more prominent position than Berenice, and her name was imbued with Seleucid royalty. I commend Coşkun for his command and new interpretation of a variety of Babylonian and Greek sources, such as the literary and historiographical tradition, inscriptions and papyri.

e) ‘Queenship in Pergamon. Public Agency and Dynastic Image’ by María Dolores Mirón Pérez. This chapter sheds light on the concept of queenship in the Attalid realm and challenges the notion that Attalid queens were passive subjects. Mirón Pérez shows how the *basilissai* Apollinis and Stratonice played a significant role in the creation of a monarchic image and propaganda as much as other Hellenistic royal women. The author also explains that peculiar traits of Attalid queenship were the centrality of motherly virtues and family harmony, together with religious euergetism—characteristics that contributed to legitimizing the Attalid dynasty as a whole and crafting its public image.

f) ‘The Dream of Queen Māyā in Gandhāran Art’ by Ashwini Lakshminarayanan. This study examines the transmission of Hellenistic imagery, motifs, and royal notions in Gandhāran art, which is to be found in Buddhist monuments between the first and fourth century AD. Specifically, Lakshminarayanan shows the mutual influences between native Indian, Central-Asian, and Graeco-Roman art via the example of Queen Māyā’s dream, in which she dreams of an elephant striking her with its tusk(s) and miraculously impregnating her. Māyā will then bear the Shakyamuni Buddha to the world. The author suggests that, although normally in Gandhāran art female characters have a secondary role, as the main topic is the life of Shakyamuni Buddha, in the reliefs depicting the dream, conception, and birth, Queen Māyā is the central character. She is portrayed according to popular motifs circulating in the area and blended with visual elements of the Hellenistic period, such as the ‘reclining female figures’ in terracotta which became popular in the East. Thus, reception and adaptation of both Hellenistic and local cultures helped the development of the Gandhāran repertoire and give prominence to the role of Queen Māyā.

Although I would have welcomed the inclusion of a female editor, the presence of three female contributors out of six reflects the editors’ commitment to ‘break[ing] the silence of time’ around historical women from the past—and also of today. This volume wants to make a stand in giving ‘the other half of humankind’ the place they deserve in history, and also carries a timely and thoughtful message about the ongoing fight for women’s rights of equality, dignity, respect, and safety. In their introduction, the editors also state that the volume seeks to determine whether women’s increased visibility was the result of a historical change stemming from the new political and structural developments of the Hellenistic kingdoms, but they leave the question unanswered. Surely, beyond its academic value, the volume serves as both inspiration and a call for future interdisciplinary collaboration, especially in the underexplored field of non-elite women in the Hellenistic world.