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Public Roles for Women in the Cities of the Latin West

Emily A. Hemelrijk

In the mid-third century CE, the local council of Avioccala, a small town in Africa Proconsularis, decided to set up a statue in honor of a distinguished fellow citizen in one of the public areas of the town. The battered inscription on its base, which preserves only part of her polyonymous name, Oscia Modesta Cornelia Patruina Publana, praises her “conspicuous merits in rendering illustrious her city of origin” (*originis suae patriam*, *CIL* VIII.23832 with Hemelrijk 2004a). As the wife of a consul, Oscia Modesta (as I shall call her) lived most of her life outside her *patria*, accompanying her husband on his tours of duty in the Greek provinces and residing in Rome, where she educated her grandson (*CIL* VI.1478). After a long life, she was buried in Rome leaving a remarkable epitaph in pseudo-Homeric Greek (presumably composed by herself) in which she dwells on her marriage to a consul, her sorrow for the early death of her children, and the consolation she found in the Muses (*IG* XIV.1960). Yet, no word is spent on her North African background nor on the small provincial town that so proudly presented her as its citizen (*civis*) and patroness (*patrona*).

The example of Oscia Modesta shows to what extent Rome and the local cities were worlds apart. Feelings differed depending on the point of view one took: from Rome or from the local cities. Whereas a provincial background might be felt as somewhat embarrassing for members of the senatorial elite in Rome (Champlin 1980: 5–19; Hemelrijk 1999: 142, 199–200; cf. D’Arms 1984 on *virī municipales*), the local cities took great pride in their successful compatriots, both male and female. They honored them with public statues and hoped to profit from their high position and social connections by co-opting them as patrons of their communities. Such tokens of honor were impossible in the capital, where public statues and the construction of public buildings were, from the reign of Augustus onwards, more and more the privilege of the emperor and his family (Alföldy 1991: 296–7; Eck 1984, 1992; Lahusen 1983: 97–107). In imperial Rome, therefore, women such as Oscia Modesta did not receive public statues, nor could they erect public buildings; a co-optation as a patroness of the city was unthinkable. In the capital, non-imperial women of the upper classes have hardly left

any trace of a public role; both in the written sources and in the material evidence, they are heavily overshadowed by the women of the imperial family.

Despite their prominence in the local cities, women such as Oscia Modesta fall outside the scope of the ancient authors. Focusing on Rome and the imperial family, the literary sources only rarely pay attention to women in the cities outside Rome. Moreover, most moralizing senatorial authors firmly bind women to their homes and families, allowing them hardly any respectable role outside the domestic domain and severely criticizing those who ventured beyond these boundaries. Yet, this should not lead us to assume that this moralizing attitude towards women was faithfully copied in the local municipalities, despite their reputation for traditional morals and rusticity (Pliny, *Epistulae* 1.14.4, 6; Tacitus, *Annales* 3.55, 16.5; Seneca, *Consolatio ad Helviam* 17.3; Martial, *Epigrammata* 11.16.8; Juvenal, *Saturae* 6.45, 55–7, 66). On the contrary, numerous inscriptions testify to a much higher public profile for women in the local cities. Though this disparity may partly reflect differences of “genre” between the inscriptions and the literary sources (Dixon 2001), the sheer number and consistency of these inscriptions make clear that women could indeed play a prominent role in local civic life and be publicly honored for it. As civic benefactresses, priestesses, patronesses, and “mothers” of cities and of civic associations (*collegia*), they left their mark on the cities of Italy and the Latin-speaking provinces in the first three centuries CE.

The predominance of the literary sources and their Rome-centered approach has led to an under-representation of women from the Italian and provincial municipalities in modern studies. Of course, our knowledge of them is, at best, fragmentary, since it stems from brief and often formulaic inscriptions on statue bases for women, on the public buildings they erected, and on their tombs, all of which present their public *personae* but conceal their individual lives. Moreover, there is great regional diversity in the number of such inscriptions for women, which has to be accounted for. Yet, on closer inspection the inscriptions set up by, and for, these women show us glimpses of the rich variety of women’s public opportunities, which are neglected by the literary sources. On the basis of a body of roughly 1400 inscriptions, this essay presents a brief sketch of women’s public roles in the local towns, which both counters and complements our evidence from the city of Rome. Because of the differences from the Greek East, which shows a great variety of public roles for women unknown in the Latin West, the Greek-speaking provinces are not taken into account (see van Bremen 1996 on female *gymnasiarchoi*, *agonothetai*, *stephanephoroi*, etc.).

1 Women of Wealth

In the cities of the Latin West, women are found in a limited number of public roles: as civic benefactresses they financed public buildings; provided feasts, games, and distributions for their fellow citizens; and sometimes bestowed other, less common, donations on their cities, such as *alimenta* (child support schemes). Further, we meet them in priestly functions, first of all as priestesses of the imperial cult but also as priestesses of other, mostly female, deities, such as Ceres and Venus (Drine 1994; Gaspar 2011). Finally, a few women were co-opted as patronesses or “mothers” of cities and of civic associations (Hemelrijk 2004a, 2008a). Numerous women combined these functions by being, for instance, both a patroness and a priestess, or a priestess and a benefactress, and sometimes fulfilling these roles in more than one city. Their social status varied: it ranged from

senatorial rank to freedwomen and from women of ancient Roman families to those who had only recently acquired Roman citizenship. Yet, most were of local birth and belonged to the decurial elite or to wealthy families just below or outside it, whose social status I shall refer to as sub-decurial. Moreover, all were women of (some) wealth who were willing to devote money, time, and energy to the benefit of their cities and fellow citizens.

One of their most widely attested public roles is that of priestess of the imperial cult (Hemelrijk 2005a, 2006a, 2006b, 2007). Though fewer in number than male priests of the imperial cult (Fishwick 1987–2005), imperial priestesses were in many respects the male priests' female counterparts, with male priests serving the cult of the emperor and his deified predecessors and female priests that of the living and deified empresses. Their priestly titles (*flaminica* and *sacerdos (divae) Augustae*) closely correspond to those of their male colleagues (*flamen* and *sacerdos (divi) Augusti*) and, like them, priestesses were elected by the local council, or for the provincial priesthood, by the provincial assembly (AE 1984: 528 = AE 1979: 339: *ex decreto splendidissimi ordinis* and RIT 327 = CIL II. 4246: *consensu concili(i) p(rovinciae)*). Both priests and priestesses usually held their priesthood for one year, after which time some of them received the honorific title *perpetuus/a*, retaining the honor and privileges of their priesthood after their period of office. Though holding complementary priesthoods, priest and priestess of the imperial cult were, as a rule, no married couple, but fulfilled their priesthood in their own right (Hemelrijk 2005a; for priestly couples in the Greek East see van Bremen 1996: 114–41).

Though of different rank and extraction, priestesses of the imperial cult were all Roman citizens and women of wealth. Holding an imperial priesthood was expensive: not only were priestesses expected to pay a considerable sum (*summa honoraria*) when entering office but they probably also contributed to the costs of their priestly duties during their term of office. Being elected to a priesthood without the obligatory sum (*gratuita*) counted as a special honor to be bestowed on a few women from families of special merit to the city (AE 1982: 680 = AE 2005: 1006). Numerous priestesses, on the other hand, voluntarily augmented the legitimate *summa honoraria* by financing temples, porticoes, or aqueducts in honor of their priesthood; by setting up statues in precious metal; or promising great sums for distributions, banquets, and public entertainment (Hemelrijk 2006a). The magnitude of their gifts suggests that there was strong competition among women desiring to be elected to an imperial priesthood.

Over and above these more or less compulsory costs, priestesses of the imperial cult—like any wealthy (wo)man—were expected to display “spontaneous” generosity, not directly related to their priesthood. Their motives for spending so much money on their cities must have been complex, combining feelings of obligation or a desire to contribute to the amenities of the city with an aspiration for prestige and self-aggrandizement. Yet the effect was the same for all: by holding a prestigious priesthood and spending money on public building, distributions, or entertainment, the women in question acquired great public prestige. Depending on their rank and extraction, this enabled them to maintain or enhance their social status within the city. For a woman of (sub-) decurial rank, a priesthood of the imperial cult must have been attractive as a means of social promotion, bringing public recognition for herself and often leading to upward social mobility among her descendants. For those of recently enfranchised families, it may also have served to display their Roman citizenship and their adjustment to Roman culture and values. Women of senatorial or equestrian rank, however, seem to have been less in need of local recognition. Their motives for holding a civic priesthood and bestowing benefactions on their home towns may at least partly have been influenced by feelings of social or moral

obligation. Nevertheless, prestige and the perpetuation of their memory were also important for them: by setting up public statues for them their native towns allowed them to enjoy the public honor and commemoration they lacked in Rome.

Civic priesthoods and benefactions entailed various negotiations with the city council, which decided whether to accept the donations and also decreed the award of public honor (for the role of city councils in civic munificence, see Johnston 1985 and Mackie 1990). An example may illustrate the scope of women's activities and the publicity this brought them by decree of the decurions. In the late first century CE, Iunia Rustica of Cartima in the Spanish province of Baetica bestowed several benefactions on her city and was honored by the local council with a public statue with the following inscription:

Iunia Rustica, daughter of Decimus, first and perpetual priestess in the *municipium* of Cartima, restored the public porticoes that were ruined by old age, gave land for a bathhouse, reimbursed the public taxes, set up a bronze statue of Mars in the forum, gave at her own cost porticoes next to the bathhouse on her own land with a pool and a statue of Cupid, and dedicated them after having given a feast and public shows. After having remitted the expense, she made and dedicated the statues that were decreed by the council of Cartima for herself and for her son, Gaius Fabius Iunianus, and she likewise made and dedicated at her own cost the statue for Gaius Fabius Fabianus, her husband. (*CIL* II.1956 = *ILS* 5512 with Donahue 2004)

Iunia Rustica's perpetual priesthood, which she was the first to hold since the town had received municipal status under the Flavians, and her benefactions presuppose preliminary dealings with the city council, which both accepted her donations and had her elected to the priesthood. The official dedication of her public buildings, which required the presence of the donor, brought her into the center of public attention; she enhanced the festivities—and, probably, the number of attendants—by giving a feast and public shows. Iunia Rustica's lavish generosity also led to a polite exchange between her and the city council concerning her public honor. In gratitude for her benefactions the council voted public statues to her and her son. Accepting the honor, she remitted the expense, set up the statues herself, and added one for her husband, thus creating a family group. Incidentally, this group of statues (of which only her inscription has survived) warns us not to misunderstand family groups as invariably paying tribute solely to the achievements of its male members. Though stemming from an opulent family (Haley 2003: 166–7; Dardaine 2001: 30; Donahue 2004: 878–84), her husband, as it seems, had no independent claim to a public statue: both he and their son owed their public statues to the generosity and social prominence of Iunia Rustica.

When we turn to the upper end of the social scale, to women of senatorial rank, we find a slightly different pattern. Being a minority (roughly twelve percent) in my corpus of civic benefactresses and priestesses, senatorial women are over-represented among patronesses of cities and—together with women of equestrian status—of *collegia*. Though greatly outnumbered by male patrons, patronesses were expected to convey similar services to the cities and *collegia* they patronized. Most important among these was the protection of the interests of the city or *collegium* with the authorities, both locally and in Rome, by means of their social connections. Most patronesses of cities were women of the highest senatorial families who lived at least part of their lives in Rome; their grand family name and their extended social network in the capital made them attractive as patronesses for their (native) cities. Not only was a senatorial patroness capable of intervening on behalf of the city and of

furthering its interests by means of her social connections, but, by officially co-opting such a highly placed woman as its patroness and associating her name with theirs, the city hoped to bask in the sun of her glory. In the eyes of the decurions of a local town, a woman of senatorial rank must have been awe-inspiring, as appears from the deference that speaks from the co-optation decree for Nummia Varia in 242 CE. Having attained her consent, the decurions of Peltuinum Vestinum, a small town in central Italy, offered her a bronze tablet confirming and commemorating her co-optation, in which they summarized the reasons for their choice as follows:

All expressed the opinion that Nummia Varia, a woman of senatorial rank, priestess of Venus Felix, had started to act with such affection and goodwill towards us in accordance with her custom of benevolence, just as her parents too had always done, that she should rightfully and unanimously be made *patrona* of our *praefectura*, in the hope that by offering this honor, which is highest in our city, to her so illustrious Excellency, we may be more and more renowned by the repute of her benevolence and in all respects be safe and protected . . . All members of the council have decided to proffer on Nummia Varia, a woman of senatorial rank, priestess of Venus Felix, in accordance with the splendor of her high rank, the patronage of our *praefectura*, and to ask from her Excellency and extraordinary benevolence, that she may accept this honor we offer to her with willing and favourable inclination and that she deign to take us and our *res publica*, individually and universally, under the protection of her house and that, in whatever matters it may reasonably be required, she may intervene with the authority belonging to her rank and protect us and keep us safe. They decided that a bronze tablet containing the wording of this decree of ours was to be offered her by the chief magistrates, Avidiacus Restitutus and Blaesus Natalis, and the foremost men of our order, Numisenus Crescens and Flavius Priscus. (*CIL IX.3429 = ILS 6110*)

The submissive tone of the decree shows that Nummia Varia, a daughter and sister of consuls, was regarded as ranking high above the decurions of the town, with which she was probably connected by landed property in the neighborhood (Andermahr 1998: 360–1). The local councils honored their illustrious patrons and patronesses, such as Nummia Varia, with public statues and bronze *tabulae patronatus*, praising them for their virtues and their extraordinary “love” or “affection” for the city (Hemelrijk 2004a; Nicols 1980, 1989). The hierarchical relationship between a highly placed patroness and a local town is thus cast in emotional terms, the local city laying claim to the goodwill of a patroness by pointing to the tradition of her family or by emphasizing her local citizenship and extraction (see the example of Oscia Modesta). Though for (wo)men of senatorial rank the new *patria* was Rome, care for their native *patria* was considered praiseworthy: it expressed the persisting emotional ties between (wo)men of the senatorial order and their home towns (Eck 1997; for the notion of *duae patriae*, Cicero, *de Legibus* 2.2.5; Lintott 1993: 163–7; Kriekhaus 2004). Moreover, by accepting the patronage of their city of origin, by bestowing benefactions on it, or by holding a local priesthood, city patronesses showed themselves to be worthy citizens.

In comparison to patronesses, most “mothers” of cities and *collegia* were of much less elevated rank. *Mater municipii* or *coloniae* was a rare title of honor for meritorious women of (sub-)decurial rank, which seems mainly restricted to cities in central Italy. The somewhat more frequent “mothers” of *collegia* were mostly from families below the elite; they were of the same class as most members and officials of *collegia* (Harland 2007; Hemelrijk 2008a, 2010). All “mothers” of cities and *collegia* were local women, who received the title because of their benefactions or other achievements for the town or

association. Most “mothers” of cities were honored with a public statue in their hometown. Because of their modest social status, no such honor fell to the share of “mothers” of *collegia*. Instead, they were honored within the *collegia*: their names received a prominent place in the membership lists, which were carved on large marble plaques in the clubhouse, and they shared in the distributions and privileges of the *collegium*. Moreover, the title was carved on their tombs and dedications, which shows that, in their own eyes and those of their peers, being a *mater collegii* was a reason for pride and an important aspect of their social identity.

2 Public Honor

Various kinds of public honor were bestowed on women, the most important of which was a public statue. Such statues were mainly reserved for members of the (local) elite; only rarely was a public statue decreed for a woman of lower social rank. Not all public statues were set up for women of proved merit. Some statues were erected without any stated reason, perhaps as part of a family group or as a tribute to the high rank and renowned family of the honorand. By setting up an honorific statue for a woman of elevated rank and associating its name with hers in the inscription, the city enhanced its prestige. Moreover, a public statue encouraged the honorand to reciprocate by using her wealth and social connections for the good of the city. Thus, a public statue was set up not only as a reward for past benefactions but also with an eye to future ones. Lavish gifts, city patronage, or the outstanding fulfilment of a public priesthood often led to public honor, sometimes even eliciting the award of more than one statue. For example, Annia Aelia Restituta, *flaminica perpetua Augustarum* of Calama (Africa Proconsularis), was honored with five public statues because of her “conspicuous liberality”: she promised 400,000 sesterces for the construction of a theater in her hometown (*ILAlg* I.287 = *CIL* VIII.5366 and *ILAlg* I.286 = *CIL* VIII.5365 = *CIL* VIII.17495). Consequently, in the first centuries CE a small but growing percentage of the portrait statues that decorated the public areas of the local towns were set up in honor of women.

Signaling their esteemed position in their cities, the honorific statues of the foremost women encouraged others to emulate their example, thus leading to a lively competition for public honor among local women. Following “the example of distinguished women” (*exemplo inlustrium feminarum*), Agusia Priscilla, priestess of Spes and Salus Augusta in Gabii (Italy), incurred expenses because of her priesthood and showered benefactions on her city and fellow citizens. In return, she was honored by the city council with a public statue, the costs of which she offered to bear herself (*CIL* XIV.2804 = *ILS* 6218). Women’s eagerness for public statues is not only manifested in their frequent willingness to bear the costs: some women actually demanded a public statue as a condition for their benefactions or ordered one in their will. For example, Baebia Crinita, priestess in Arucci (Hispania Baetica), left 200,000 sesterces to her native city for a temple and a public banquet, ordering a public statue to be erected of her from this sum as well (*CIL* II.964 = *ILS* 5402; see also Fabia Fabiana, *CIL* II.1923).

Though a public statue honoring a priestess or benefactress greatly contributed to the prestige of her family, we should not assume that these women sought public honor only for the sake of their families (Navarro Caballero 2001). Women were not isolated from their social context, and the Roman preoccupation with public recognition and personal commemoration must have affected them as much as their male peers. Inscriptions show

Figure 35.1 Busts of Cassia Victoria and her husband, L. Laecanius Primitivus, on the tympanum of the sacellum of the Augustales at Misenum. Photo: courtesy of Paola Miniero, after figure 4a, *The Sacellum of the augustales at Miseno* (Electa Napoli, 2000).

that the prestige and perpetual remembrance that a public statue guaranteed was coveted also by those to whom it was not awarded and who, therefore, tried to achieve it for themselves. This could be done by means of a funerary foundation for the perpetual remembrance of the deceased (for instance, *CIL* XIV.2827 = *ILS* 6294) but also during their lifetime by setting up a public building that perpetuated the name of the donor. Inside such a building, moreover, portrait statues could be set up for the donor and her (or his) family without the authorization of the city council (Lahusen 1983). In an exceptional case, the donor went beyond these restrictions: embellishing the *sacellum* of the *Augustales* with a monumental *pronaos*, Cassia Victoria, priestess of the *Augustales* in Misenum (Italy), boldly portrayed herself and her husband on its pediment (Figure 35.1; *AE* 1993: 477, with Adamo Muscettola 2000). In their unusual self-presentation on the pediment of a temple devoted to the imperial cult, the couple imitated imperial portraits: the portrait of Cassia Victoria was modeled on that of the younger Faustina while her (probably deceased) husband showed the, at that time old-fashioned, look of Antoninus Pius.

Among the provincial women whose statue bases have been preserved, quite a few appear to have stemmed from non-Roman families, who had only recently received Roman citizenship. An example is Fabia Bira: her Punic or Libyan *cognomen*—together with the indigenous name of her father (Izelta)—points to a non-Roman background. She was the first priestess of the imperial cult (*flaminica prima*) in Volubilis (Maur. Ting.), which earned her two statues on the local forum (*IAM* II.439–40). The much-debated concept of Romanization seems relevant for women like her, in spite of its controversial nature (for different opinions in this debate see Millet 1990; Whittaker 1997; Woolf 1998; MacMullen 2000; Webster 2001; Mattingly 2002, 2004; Hingley 2005). When the claim

of homogeneity of Roman culture with its simplifying dichotomy of “Roman” and “native” is avoided, it is, to my mind, a very useful concept for understanding what was going on in the western provinces. Therefore, I shall use it here as an umbrella term for participation in a way of life, customs, and values that, despite local differences, were recognized as “Roman.” In this sense, Romanization is not a static or homogeneous concept but a dynamic process or “discourse” (Revell 2009) that led to locally specific identities and experiences of what it meant to be “Roman.”

In the discussion on Romanization, surprisingly little attention has been paid to women and gender. The assumption that because of their domesticity and their exclusion from political office women were less affected by Roman culture than men (Cherry 1998: 156–7; Croom 2000: 124; Fontana 2001: 161–72) needs reconsideration. Though not directly involved in the Roman administration, women were affected by it in varying ways depending, for instance, on their social status and domicile. The influence of Roman rule on women in the frontier regions (Allason-Jones 1999; van Driel Murray 2008, 2009; Allison 2009) must have been of a different nature from that on women in Roman *municipia* and *coloniae* in the Mediterranean areas, and women of the poorer classes were probably affected differently—though not necessarily less—from women of wealthy families. Obviously, the women discussed here are a special group: though predominantly of local descent, most were Roman citizens belonging to families of the political or economic elites of their towns. We know of them because they set up or were honored by inscriptions in Latin and their portrait statues conform to the Greco-Roman tradition of public statuary: they are slightly over life-size standing figures with standardized body types and more or less individualized heads. Let us, for example, have a look at the statue of Minia Procula (Figure 35.2), perpetual priestess of the imperial cult in Bulla Regia in Africa Proconsularis (*CIL* VIII.25530; Hemelrijk 2007). It shows her as an elderly woman, dressed in a *tunica* and a mantle (*palla*). Her raised hand, as in prayer, and her covered head indicate her priestly status or, at least, her piety and female modesty. The heavy and complicated drapery and modest pose of such honorific statues are in accordance with traditional female values, while at the same time showing them to be women of substance. Moreover, the timeless dress, which may have been very different from what women wore in their daily lives, underlines their assimilation to Roman values and customs (Davies 1997, 2002, 2008; Trimble 2000; Hemelrijk 2004a: 227–31).

3 Public Roles for Women: A By-Product of Romanization?

In spite of the differences in rank and extraction, provincial women such as Oscia Modesta, Iunia Rustica, Fabia Bira, and Minia Procula had in common that they were Roman citizens, held priesthoods in cults that were oriented on Rome (such as the imperial cult), and used their wealth for the benefit of their cities in agreement with the Greco-Roman tradition of “euergetism.” They were honored with public statues, which portrayed them as chaste and dignified women, dressed in what may be called the uniform of Roman womanhood: a *tunica* and a mantle (*palla*), in some cases showing the *stola*, a symbol of the Roman *matrona*, between these garments (Scholz 1992; Sebesta 1994). Their Roman-style portraits and inscriptions demonstrate their successful adaptation of Roman values and customs. Yet this does not mean that their lives and possibilities were the same as

Figure 35.2 Portrait statue of Minia Procula from Bulla Regia, now in the Bardo Museum in Tunis. Photo: courtesy Joop Derksen.

those of women in Rome. Contrary to what we might expect, their prominence within their cities surpasses that of women of similar rank in the capital and is, to some extent, reminiscent of the public role of the empresses (Hemelrijk 2007). This raises the question as to how far these women were exceptions or representative of a wider group of women in public life. To assess the scope of women's public roles in the cities of Italy and the western provinces I shall look at their spread, focusing especially on civic benefactresses and priestesses of the imperial cult.

Of the 354 inscriptions for benefactresses who alone (or at most with one co-donor) bestowed substantial benefactions, such as public buildings, the majority are found in the cities of Italy (with the exception of Rome, where public building was in the hands of the members of the imperial family), followed by the cities of the North African provinces and those of Spain (Figure 35.3). Apart from a few benefactresses from the cities of Gaul (mainly Narbonensis) and Germania Superior there is hardly any evidence for civic benefactresses in the other western provinces. When we consider the benefactresses' chronological spread, we find inscriptions for them in the cities of Italy from the last

Figure 35.3 Graph of inscriptions of civic benefactresses (total = 354).

decennia of the Republic onwards, with a peak in the first and early second centuries, followed by a steep decline in the third. In the provinces of northern Africa and Spain, the evidence for women's benefactions started later, in the mid-first century; increased in the second; and, for Spain, sharply dropped in the third. In northern Africa, the peak lay in the early third century. A similar pattern is found for priestesses of the imperial cult (Figure 35.4). Here, however, the greatest number of inscriptions is found in the cities of northern Africa, followed by those of Italy (again with the exception of Rome), Spain, and Gaul, mainly Gallia Narbonensis. A few priestesses of the imperial cult are attested in Germania Superior, Dalmatia, and the provinces of the Alps (Hemelrijk 2005a, 2006a, 2007).

When we differentiate within these areas, the picture is striking. Apart from Italy, the provinces that were most densely urbanized and Romanized, such as Africa Proconsularis (with parts of Numidia) and Hispania Baetica, predominate: eighty to ninety percent of the inscriptions recording benefactresses in Spain and northern Africa are found in these provinces. Moreover, they were attested there mainly at the time of the highest prosperity, which was for Spain in the late first and second centuries and for northern Africa in the second and early third. The inscriptions of benefactresses and imperial priestesses that are found outside Italy, Spain, and northern Africa are mainly from the cities of Gallia Narbonensis, which, again, is the most Romanized and urbanized region of Gaul. Virtually no civic benefactresses or imperial priestesses were attested in the more thinly urbanized provinces of the northwestern part of the empire such as Britannia, Gallia Belgica, and Germania Inferior.

The concentration of inscriptions for civic benefactresses and imperial priestesses in the more densely urbanized, and Romanized, Mediterranean regions during periods of peace and prosperity roughly conforms to the spread of the "epigraphic habit" (MacMullen 1982; Meyer 1990; Woolf 1996, 1998: 77–105). Yet, their virtual absence from the area with the highest "epigraphic density," the city of Rome, and from the inscriptions of the militarized frontier zones, shows that their distribution cannot be interpreted as merely reproducing the "epigraphic habit." Like the habit of setting up inscriptions, civic munificence and imperial priesthoods were typically urban phenomena

Figure 35.4 Graph of inscriptions of priestesses of the imperial cult (total = 281).

that were closely connected with Romanization and the spread of Roman citizenship (Mackie 1990; Meyer 1990). Possible influence of indigenous traditions notwithstanding, the participation of women in public life in the cities of the Mediterranean regions may be explained by these interconnected factors, especially by the spread of Roman citizenship and Roman civil law. Of special note are the Roman laws of inheritance, the separation of property between husband and wife in Roman marriage without *manus* (the common form of marriage in the Imperial period), and the *ius trium liberorum* (the right of three children), which gave full legal capacity as property-owners to female Roman citizens with three or more children. Together, these rulings made wealthy women *sui iuris* (“not in a man’s power”; that is, women married *sine manu*: “without a living (grand)father”) unprecedented legal and financial independence (Gardner 1990, 1993: 85–109, 1995; Champlin 1991; Treggiari 1991). Even when still in *tutela*, women in the Imperial period were not much hampered by it; as has been remarked by Jane Gardner (1995: 393), “where property is concerned, the legal capacity of Roman men and Roman women is virtually the same.”

The application of Roman law for Roman citizens must have enabled an increasing number of female citizens in the provincial cities to inherit, own, administer, and control vast amounts of property virtually without male interference. According to a recent estimate, the spread of Roman citizenship and the adoption of Roman civil law in provincial cities in the second and early third centuries brought thirty to forty-five percent of the private property of the civic elite into the hands of women (Arjava 1996: 70–1; for a lower percentage see Champlin 1991, criticized by Pölönen 2002). Despite regional variation, this accumulation of wealth in the hands of (some) women and their legal capacity to control it made it hard for their cities to overlook them, especially when those cities faced financial difficulties. Though outnumbered by male benefactors and imperial priests by almost five to one (Hemelrijk 2006b: 187 n. 31), their wealth gave them a public face. By spending their money for the embellishment of their cities, by holding expensive priesthoods, and by using their social connections for the benefit of their towns, they reaped prestige and informal authority both for themselves and for their families. In reward, they received the same signs of public honor as their male

colleagues and the statues and inscriptions set up for them betray no prejudice against their public prominence.

4 Epilogue

The literary authors are almost completely silent about the public role of women in the local towns. Apart from possible objections of a moralizing nature, they may simply have regarded such roles as uninteresting. The munificence expected from wealthy women is mentioned in passing by Apuleius, who felt forced to celebrate his marriage to the rich widow Aemilia Pudentilla in her suburban villa in order to avoid the pressure of the city populace flocking together for a distribution of money (Apuleius, *Apologia* 87.10–88.1). Incidentally, his remark reveals that not all donations were bestowed willingly and that social pressure and a feeling of moral obligation must have mingled with other, philanthropic or self-seeking, motives of civic benefactors, both male and female. The disparity between the literary sources and the inscriptions is even more striking in Pliny's letter on the death of Ummidia Quadratilla, a woman of senatorial rank from Casinum. In his lively sketch of the old lady, Pliny dwells on her physique, her character, and her habits, such as her inappropriate predilection for her troupe of pantomimes (*Epist.* 7.24), but pays no attention whatsoever to her importance as a benefactress to her home town. Inscriptions from Casinum, however, show that she built a temple and an amphitheater, and repaired the local theater, giving a public banquet to the decurions, the people, and the women of the town to celebrate the theater's dedication (*CIL* X.5183 = *ILS* 5628 and *AE* 1946: 174 = *AE* 1992: 244). These conspicuous public buildings, which still carry her name, changed the face of her town and perpetuate her memory until this day. When reading solely Pliny's letter this aspect of Ummidia Quadratilla's life is ignored; only the epigraphic evidence illuminates her public role as a prominent local benefactress (see also Ash, this volume, Chapter 32).

As we have seen, the difference between the literary sources and epigraphy is not merely a matter of perspective: it also reflects a real difference between Rome and the local towns. As the capital of the empire and the seat of the imperial administration, Rome differs fundamentally from the other cities of the Roman empire. Moreover, the presence of the senate and the imperial family greatly influenced the social position and the opportunities for public display of (men and) women of the elite within the city of Rome. Therefore, we must be wary of using the more ample evidence for the city of Rome as if it were valid for the other cities of the Roman empire. In imperial Rome, a possible public role for women was both controversial in the light of traditional values and overshadowed by the imperial family, whereas the local cities showed no scruples in acknowledging the public roles of women of wealth. As civic benefactresses, priestesses, patronesses, and "mothers" of cities and *collegia*, women contributed to the beauty and amenities of their towns and to the wellbeing of their fellow citizens, thus enhancing the pleasures of city life. Their honorific statues and the public buildings carrying their names lent them prestige and also reminded later generations of their benefactions or priestly roles. In this, no contradiction seems to have been felt between their private lives and their public roles. Their heavily draped statues, which portray the women in accordance with traditional female values and bear inscriptions extolling their selfless "love" for their cities, their "extraordinary" generosity, and their exemplary moral and civic virtues present them both as virtuous women and as ideal Roman citizens.

RECOMMENDED FURTHER READING

On Roman portrait statues for non-imperial women see Fejfer (2002, 2008) and Hemelrijk (2005a). An in-depth study of honorific statues of non-imperial women addressing (regional) variations within the well-known types remains a *desideratum*. For women's dress see Olson (2008a) and the collections edited by Cleland et al. (2005) and Edmondson and Keith (2008). Schultz (2000, 2006, 2007) and Spickermann (1994a, 1994b) discuss aspects of women's religion, as does Holland, this volume, Chapter 15.