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Perfectissima femina. Femmes de l'élite dans l'Hispanie romaine (2 vols.) Scripta Antiqua, 101

Milagros Navarro Caballero, *Perfectissima femina. Femmes de l'élite dans l'Hispanie romaine (2 vols.) Scripta Antiqua, 101*. Bordeaux: Ausonius Éditions, 2017. 863. ISBN 9782356131928 €45.00.

Review by

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This two-volume book is the revised edition of Milagros Navarro Caballero's dissertation (habilitation) submitted in Bordeaux in 2012. It is a comprehensive study, examining the public roles and representation of elite women in Roman Spain based on 614 women recorded in inscriptions (and a handful of literary texts). The approach used is largely prosopographical, with numerous tables chronologically listing the names of women recorded in the inscriptions. The short introduction to the first volume explains the main objectives of her study as well as the selection of the material. The volume is divided into four parts: the first part focusses on the epigraphic and iconographic evidence for women in Roman Spain, the second part discusses the public presence of women in their cities, the third part women's familial roles and the final part their public deeds, followed by a brief conclusion. The second volume presents the epigraphic and literary evidence.

In her introduction, Navarro Caballero aims to elucidate female public presence and influence in the cities of Roman Spain in the first three centuries of the Roman Empire—the period in which the epigraphic evidence is most abundant. The main focus of her study is women of the elite, for whom she borrows Seneca's qualification *perfectissima femina* (Seneca *ad Helviam* 19.4), as this captures both their moral worth and their social esteem within their cities. Navarro Caballero takes a broad stance when defining the female elite: she includes not only women of senatorial, equestrian and decurial families, but also women of wealthy freed families and women of unknown social standing. Although this broad definition does acknowledge the varied nature of elites in Roman cities and is perhaps inevitable due to the lack of clear status-indicators on inscriptions for women, a clearer distinction between the political and economic elites and those aspiring to elite status would have clarified the discussion.¹ In a similar vein, Navarro Caballero is rather expansive in her definition of the public domain, including everything that could be seen, heard or accessed by all. It is therefore a comprehensive

study, comprising not only honorific statues set up by, and for, women and building inscriptions recording their names, but also funerary inscriptions, dedications, and statues set up in the public part of houses.

In part I of the first volume, Navarro Caballero deals with the unequal geographical and chronological spread of epigraphic and iconographic evidence. She draws up four categories of inscriptions relevant to women: epitaphs, honorific inscriptions, dedications to deities and –somewhat surprising as a separate category—inscriptions recording women's benefactions. The latter is, in fact, a mixture of honorific and building inscriptions. She also discusses the various types of women's statues and statue bases, and acknowledges that only a general view of the statues that once crowned the bases can be formed, as statues and inscriptions have very rarely been found together. She briefly touches on the tricky problem of deciding whether a statue was set up in public or private, but fails to clearly discuss the problem of statues being reused or relocated. What is more, her assumption that statues in tombs and private houses were copies of public statues (pp. 39-40) may be true in individual cases but cannot be generalized.

Part II of the first volume contains three chapters. Navarro Caballero starts by looking at the funerary evidence and describes the development of large tombs and the statues of women found in or near them. She notes that at the end of the first century AD, the self-representation of the elite shifted from the funerary domain to the centre of their cities and from funerary statues and inscriptions to honorific ones. The next chapter is the most comprehensive and traces women being publically honoured in Spanish cities until the decline of this tradition in the mid-3rd century AD. She carefully lists all surviving statues of women that may be assumed, with some degree of certainty, to have been set up in a public place, briefly discussing their iconography, their relation to the statues of empresses and the distinction between funerary and honorific statues of women.² However, in tracing the origins of women's honorific statuary back to Rome's legendary heroines and to the statue of Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi (pp. 104-105), she mistakenly cites articles by Ruck and Hemelrijk that in fact oppose this view.³ Since the number of inscribed bases greatly surpasses that of the surviving statues, Navarro Caballero quickly turns to the inscriptions. She meticulously sets out the evidence, listed in numerous tables, for inscriptions testifying to statues of women in family groups, to (posthumous) statues in honour of women and statues commissioned by them, and to public funerals held in honour of, or financed by, women. As is to be expected, women funded statues for others more often than that they received one, but as dedicators of statues to relatives they contributed not only to the public self-representation of their families but also to their own public visibility. She notes that most public statues involving women present them in a family context, as wives, daughters or mothers. This leads to a brief third chapter that deals with statues set up in the private sphere, in the houses and *villae* of the elite. The small number of portrait statues and herms discussed in this chapter have not been found *in situ* and their attribution to a domestic setting rather than a funerary one is not convincing in all cases.

The third part of this volume deals with the public representation of women's familial roles as daughters, wives and mothers. In her chapter on daughters, Navarro Caballero stresses their role as sole surviving heirs, maintaining the family memory by setting up statues for deceased relatives. In her longer chapter on wives, she discusses the marital strategies of the elites, mainly on the basis of onomastics. She starts with the marriages of freed people and then turns to elite endogamy, listing couples with the same family name, some of whom can be identified as relatives (but others may be patrons and their ex-slaves). She also draws attention to the tradition of adding the family name or *cognomen* of the mother (if sufficiently distinguished) to the names of the children, and to women's remarriage in as far as revealed by the different *gentilicia* of the children. Lastly, she shows that marriages between elites of different cities were mainly restricted to the topmost families. She then turns to the public representation of couples and to women erecting public statues for their (mostly deceased) husbands and vice versa. She concludes that the public presentation of wives (and sometimes children) of elite families served the prestige of the husband by boosting his public image as a good father and trustworthy political leader. The last chapter focuses on mothers, including mothers-in-law and grandmothers, and lists numerous women who set up statues for their deceased sons and, less frequently, daughters. Her conclusion is succinct and emphasises the importance of women maintaining the family memory, particularly when male heirs had died.

The fourth and final part focuses on women's public deeds as benefactresses and priestesses. The chapter on benefactresses includes all gifts to cities in which women were involved in some way, alone or together with relatives. Gifts of all kinds are included indiscriminately, resulting in impressive tables listing 86 women in chronological order. Yet, a clearer distinction between the types of gifts and the extent of the involvement of the woman in question would have been helpful. The chapter on priestesses deals with women's priesthoods of the imperial cult. Navarro Caballero returns to the now discarded notion that imperial priestesses were the wives of imperial priests. In this, she distinguishes between municipal priestesses, who in her view were mostly widows, unmarried women or childless, and the rarer provincial priestesses who, she argues, held their priesthood at the provincial capital along with their husbands. This view is not supported by the evidence. Although some priestly couples can be attested at the provincial level, the majority of known provincial priests and priestesses were not married to partners holding a provincial priesthood.⁴ What is more, her conclusion that municipal priestesses were 'des dames seules, célibataires ou veuves' (p. 294) and that their familial condition incited them to accept the costly priesthood, is unwarranted and ignores the financial independence of married women who were *sui iuris* under Roman law.

The second volume comprises the evidence used for this study which mainly consists of inscriptions (with the exception of a few literary texts). They are ordered by province (Baetica, Lusitania and Hispania Citerior) and by city (listed in alphabetical order) within each province. Each lemma contains the text of the inscription, its modern corpus, its approximate date, the family relations of the woman in question, a brief

comment on the inscription and, where possible, a photo of the stone. Unfortunately, translations of the inscriptions are lacking. The volume concludes with detailed indices of the persons, sources, and cities figuring in the book.

The book is well-edited ⁵ and is very thorough and detailed with respect to the epigraphic and prosopographical evidence. However, the analysis of this rich material is somewhat disappointing and omits certain modern discussions, particularly in English. For instance, the *alimenta* are simply taken to be foundations for orphans (p. 270, no. 78) or for children of the poor (p. 279), ignoring the extensive modern discussion on these child support schemes. More importantly, the book lacks a clear analysis of the financial position of women under Roman law. This is unfortunate as it could have helped the reader understand the financial independence of numerous married women (not only widows) and could have explained the difference between daughters under the *potestas* of their fathers and wives who were *sui iuris*.⁶ As a result, Navarro Caballero overstresses women's importance in boosting their husbands' and sons' careers and in maintaining the family memory, while overlooking other motives women may have had in spending so much money on public statues and other amenities for their cities. However, this does not compromise the importance of this book, which lies in its careful and detailed treatment of all inscriptions testifying to women's public presence in the cities of Roman Spain.

Notes

1. For a thorough discussion of the intermediate stratum of *honesti viri* and *honestae feminae* between the elite orders and the populace, see Haley, E.W. (2003) *Baetica Felix. People and Prosperity in Southern Spain from Caesar to Septimius Severus*, Austin. For a discussion of women of the economic and political elites: Hemelrijk, E.A. (2015) *Hidden Lives—Public Personae. Women and Civic Life in the Roman West*, New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp. 12-18.
2. Here, she could have benefitted from Davies, G. (2013) 'Honorific vs. Funerary Statues of Women: Essentially the Same or Fundamentally Different?', in Hemelrijk, E.A. and Woolf, G. (eds.) *Women and the Roman City in the Latin West*, Leiden and Boston, pp. 171-199, which is not in the bibliography.
3. In fact, Ruck, B. (2004) 'Das Denkmal der Cornelia in Rom', *RM* 111: 477-493 and Hemelrijk, E.A. (2005) 'Octavian and the introduction of public statues for women in Rome', *Athenaeum* 93.1: 309-317 argue that, in the city of Rome, honorific statues of women, including that of Cornelia, started with the reign of Augustus.
4. The chapter misses recent discussion by Williamson, C.H. (1987) 'A Roman Law from Narbonne', *Athenaeum* 65: 173-189; Hemelrijk, E.A. (2005) 'Priestesses of the Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Titles and Function', *Antiquité Classique* 74: 137-170; Hemelrijk, E.A. (2006) 'Priestesses of the Imperial Cult in the Latin West: Benefactions and Public Honour', *Antiquité Classique* 75: 85-117; Hemelrijk, E.A. (2007) 'Local Empresses: Priestesses of the Imperial Cult in the Cities of the Latin West', *Phoenix* 61.3-4: 318-349.

5. I found only a few typos, mainly in the names of modern authors, such as Hemerlrijk instead of Hemelrijk (p. 19, n. 41), Timble instead of Trimble (p. 24 n. 6), Zancher instead of Zanker (p. 30 n. 10), Fefjer instead of Fejfer (p. 157). Further, on p. 163 n. 172 Navarro Caballero 2000 is not included in the bibliography and the same holds for McInerney 2003 (p. 183 n. 3).

6. The book briefly touches on these issues on p. 183 n. 2 and p. 191, but fails to provide a discussion of the implications.