

EMILY A. HEMELRIJK: *Matrona docta: Educated women in the Roman élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna*. Routledge Classical Monographs. Routledge, London – New York 2004. ISBN 0-415-34127-2. XVI, 382 pp. GBP 22.99.

The education of women is a subject of a very obscure nature in the study of Roman history. Interpretations about the education of women are usually based on rough assumptions and estimates that are seldom supported by reliable sources. Likewise, it is surprisingly difficult to find an inclusive study about educated Roman women, even though that kind of research would be useful for students of both Roman womanhood and elite society. In her monograph, Emily Hemelrijk attempts to respond to this need and answer questions that have far too long remained unasked.

Hemelrijk stresses as her goal to "explain and evaluate the obscure --- role of women in the field of learning" (p. 1). She attempts to examine both the means through which women acquired their education and the nature of that education itself. An effort is also made to find out what aims the education of women served in Roman society and what kinds of attitudes educated women provoked. As a part of forming the general view about women in the field of learning, the author studies different roles women could acquire in literary life – patronesses of literature and female poets are taken under special examination.

Hemelrijk limits her study to the period of time from the second century BC to AD 235. In my opinion, this period seems rather long to be inclusively examined in one study, even though the task has been made easier by the scarce evidence concerning the education of women. I assume it is due to both the scarcity of sources and the long period of time that relatively little attention is paid to the chronological development. The author acknowledges this, and has, thus, made an effort to offer some speculation about the chronological development at the end of chapters where the subjects especially demand it.

In the first chapter, Hemelrijk offers background information about the social position of elite women, and examines their role in educated society. She also clarifies the Roman conception of the life of learning which, I feel, is an extremely important matter to stress. The author explains the attitudes Roman elite had towards literary culture, and highlights the fact that in addition to gender, multiple factors such as family background, social status and wealth, had an impact on what sort of education a Roman could acquire. Concerning women specifically, Hemelrijk explains three factors she finds most important in examining the haphazard nature of women's education – first, the changing familial status of elite women during the course of their lives, secondly, their indirect relation to the leading *ordines*, and thirdly, the norms that prescribed the behaviour of an upper-class woman. She points out that the status and social role of an elite woman developed throughout her life, usually increasing a woman's authority and that this also had an important effect on her opportunities in the field of learning. Hemelrijk concludes that the reasons why it was relatively difficult for elite women to acquire extensive education were the pressures and expectations placed on them by both their class and their gender.

The second chapter is dedicated to opportunities women had for acquiring an education. Since little girls did not enjoy the same kind of three-stage schooling system as boys, the chapter is divided into two parts: education before marriage and studies during it. Hemelrijk attempts to find out how the education of girls was determined by, e.g., their domicile, family background and the age at marriage. As she concludes, it seems believable that due to these

conditions, the education provided for daughters varied immensely among the elite families. I would find it important to further discuss the importance of parents' attitudes and values – as we know, there were greatly differing attitudes among the elite concerning literary pursuits and the position of women. These must have had a remarkable impact on the education of daughters.

After marriage, women had various opportunities for completing their education – however, nearly all were dependent on the approval of the husband. Based on literary sources from the imperial period, Hemelrijk claims that at the beginning of the Principate, it had become favourable among Roman men to home-school their wives and thus deepen the harmony in marriage and strengthen the authority of a husband over his wife. If a husband's attitude was favourable, a woman could also hire a private tutor, benefit by attending social events – such as recitations or literary dinner parties – and make use of private libraries. Despite the challenging nature of the subject – there are hardly any sources concerning women's reading habits or library visits – Hemelrijk has succeeded very well, drawing credible conclusions based on information we have about the Roman family and literary life.

In the third chapter, the aims behind the education of women and the attitudes towards it are examined. The author claims that the primary reasons for educating daughters were the prestige expensive education gave to the family and the social role of an elite matron who acquired a highly cultured background. The moral justification that appears in literary sources – the claim that education would make women better wives, help them hold to feminine virtues and raise their children well – seems, according to Hemelrijk, more like a later defense for an already established practice. I agree with the author when it comes to the primary practical reasons, but I still would not rule out the possibility that moral arguments also had a real and remarkable effect on Roman parents' minds when considering the schooling of their daughters. I find it probable that these kinds of value issues were not merely an excuse but an important part of decision-making together with practical concerns.

When examining attitudes towards educated women, Hemelrijk stresses the contradictory nature of the Roman mindset. In practice, the education of women had increased remarkably from the late Republic on, and educated women were usually considered the pride of a family. In theory, however, Romans seem to have feared the influence an education might have on women, and especially on their traditionally appreciated virtues, *pudicitia*, *castitas* and *modestia*. The *puella docta* admired and praised by love poets affected the image of an educated woman, and made people question learned women's sexual morals. Criticism towards educated matrons – accusations of pretence, *luxuria*, promiscuity or unfeminine behaviour – was most vicious in the end of the last century BC and in the beginning of the first century AD. This is why Hemelrijk believes that this attitude had more to do with the changing political and social role of women than with learning itself. I strongly agree with the author, and find it important that she has been able to bring the close connection of education and politics into the discussion.

The fourth chapter scrutinizes the role of women as patronesses of literature and learning. Hemelrijk studies the patronage of women of the imperial family from the time of Augustus to Julia Domna. She has also made a great effort to trace a few women mentioned in literary sources who might be considered patronesses. The attempt is made to examine the motives behind women's patronage, the support they provided and the way they were described and praised by their protégés. It is notable that, even though women's motives were probably

very similar to those of male patrons – interest in literary life, pursuit of a reputation as a cultured benefactress and desire to be immortalized in literature – they could seldom provide their protégés with the same kind of social and political benefits as men, and their roles were often limited to financial support and encouragement. Hemelrijk also raises an interesting point when she explains that despite their presumable high intellect, education and interest in society, Roman patronesses are almost exclusively praised for their traditional feminine virtues alone. This formula probably had a lot to do with suspicious attitudes towards educated women's morals, and in my opinion, it is the single most important point concerning the differences between male and female patronage.

The last two chapters discuss women as writers, first examining the field of poetry and then moving on to prose. Hemelrijk concentrates on studying the almost complete lack of works written by women and possible reasons for this. She approaches the subject by introducing four known Roman women poets. Two of these were somewhat well-known elegiac poets with a detectable female viewpoint, while the work of two others was more of a humdrum nature and only preserved as inscriptions. As the author points out, it seems clear that any general voice of women in poetry can not be traced. This also goes for prose – mainly letters – written by women. It seems that the same standards applied to language and style of both women's and men's writings, and women usually filled these demands quite well. The meager amount of women's works left is described as the result of three factors: women's minor activity in writing, their difficulties in getting their work published and the poor preservation of women's writings – the works of women represented the less valued genres of literature and often dealt with everyday themes not considered worth preserving. Altogether, the author analyzes profoundly and in detail the loss of women's writings – a subject that in most studies is overlooked as a self-evident phenomenon.

All in all, Hemelrijk has succeeded in writing an accomplished study about a very little examined yet highly interesting subject. Her handling of the theme is refreshingly versatile compared to the somewhat superficial image of women's education hitherto. She has made an effort to scrutinize the role of women in educated society from multiple perspectives, using a variety of literary sources, and even attempted to trace the voices of women themselves. One must admit that due to the scarcity of sources, and the ambiguous nature of the subject itself, there is very little undisputed evidence to support some of the interpretations, and many of them can – and undoubtedly will – be argued about in the future. In my opinion, this can, nonetheless, be considered one of the accomplishments of this book. As a thorough handling of a controversial subject, Hemelrijk's work will hopefully pave the way for a broader discussion about the intellectual life of women in Roman society.

Elina Pyy

JACQUELINE M. CARLON: *Pliny's Women: Constructing Virtue and Creating Identity in the Roman World*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2009. ISBN 978-0-521-76132-1, IX, 270 pp. GBP 45, USD 85, EUR 52.

The Younger Pliny's corpus of 368 letters contains a great deal of information about the upper-class of Roman society in the late 1st and early 2nd century AD: social relationships, the daily activities of the senatorial class and the mechanisms of imperial administration. It is then