

evident that any published work that examines this formidable source of information in more detail is very welcome. Jacqueline Carlon's book on Pliny's women will surely become an important point of reference for any study on the role of elite women in Imperial times as well as on Pliny's character.

In her work, Carlon has selected 38 letters which either focus on women or are addressed to women or include women prominently. These female characters of the Plinian corpus are classified in five distinct groups defined by family and thematic ties: those associated with the Stoic opposition to the principates of Nero, Vespasian and Domitian (Chapter 1); those connected to Corellius Rufus as Pliny's protégé (Chapter 2); those who receive Pliny's benefaction or loyalty (Chapter 3); those who represent the ideal wife-type (Chapter 4); and those who are portrayed as unseemly (Chapter 5).

Each chapter offers a detailed analysis of these five women-types, as they appear in the Plinian letters, in terms of familial and political connections, prosopography and historical background. The letters are also carefully analysed in their rhetorical structure and diction with particular focus on choice and disposition of key words.

The ultimate goal of Carlon's analysis is Pliny's image as it is manipulated by the Roman author through his letters. Following the more recent scholarship on Pliny's correspondence, in fact, the author argues that the women described in the letters have been carefully selected by the Latin writer as a means of self-presentation. The social position of specific women, the choice of some words for their description, the insertion of anecdotes, and even the arrangement of the letters within the corpus are all intended to reinforce the positive image and role of Pliny in Roman society under Trajan's rule as well as to preserve his *gloria* and to secure his *aeternitas*.

As Carlon's main interest is Pliny's self-representation, her book shows a male-oriented approach when measured against the ideals and aspirations of the male members of the Roman upper class, who alone produced literature. Surely, they cannot be counterbalanced by images of women as they perceive themselves in relation to the male dominant group, as literature written by women is not attested. However, it would be interesting to know in what way and how Roman women may have responded to men's use of female characters for constructing or enhancing their social status and identity by means of other sources (visual arts, for example). Perhaps this area could be explored in future research.

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RICHARD SEAFORD: *Dionysos*. Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World. Routledge, Abingdon 2006. ISBN 0-415-32488-2. XII, 158 pp., 7 figs. GBP 14.99.

*Dionysos* by Richard Seaford is part of the series "Gods and Heroes of the Ancient World" targeting the general reader and student. It provides an outline of various aspects of the cult of Dionysus, drawing on sources as diverse as vases from Magna Graecia, Nietzsche, anthropology, and the New Testament. After a brief summary of some of the scholarship on Dionysus over the centuries, Seaford discusses themes he considers important to the understanding of the cult. The section on nature outlines the animal companions of Dionysus as well as the blurring of lines between human and animal, especially among the maenads.

The second chapter discusses communality and Dionysus being more at home "among the people" than in Homer's epics (where he is scarcely mentioned and even then not in a particularly flattering context), which ties in with the epiphanies forming the focus of the next chapter. Sections on the mystery-cult, death, theatre, and psychology and philosophy talk about the chthonic and even morbid aspects of Dionysus on the one hand, and the comfort the good, Dionysian kind of madness could provide on the other. Finally, chapters on Christianity and the heritage of Dionysus discuss how the cult of Dionysus survived through the centuries while metamorphosing into different forms.

The merits of this book include the wide range of sources Seaford draws on. He mentions incised strips of gold bearing instructions on how to navigate the underworld (using the help of Dionysus, who could act as an intermediary between humans and deities), authors ranging from Homer to Clement of Alexandria, as well as wall paintings from the Villa of the Mysteries (where he speculates the winged figure might be a personified Ignorance flagellating an initiate). This, along with the many different aspects and themes introduced, makes *Dionysos* a good introduction to the subject, or a handbook on Dionysus in ancient literature and art.

Perhaps because of the brevity of the work, one is left missing certain cohesion and an overarching argument. Some broad statements such as "for most people in ancient societies life was a struggle to *control* nature" are given as granted, and certain parallels drawn between, for example, passages in the Bible and Dionysus seem forced. Much is made of the *Bacchae* – perhaps too much – as Seaford argues that any case of madness in Greek tragedy echoes the madness of Pentheus in Euripides' play. Regardless of this, *Dionysos* is a pleasant read and makes good points, in particular about Dionysus and the underworld, the cathartic aspects of Dionysian rites, and the importance of the theatre in illustrating myths.

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*Ethne e religioni nella Sicilia antica. Atti del convegno (Palermo, 6–7 dicembre 2000). A cura di PIETRINA ANELLO – GIUSEPPE MARTORANA – ROBERTO SAMMARTANO. Supplementi a "Kókalos" 18. Giorgio Bretschneider Editore, Roma 2006. ISSN 0452-2907. ISBN 88-7689-190-0. XII, 435 p., 19 tavv. EUR 210.*

I contributi del volume *Ethne e religioni nella Sicilia antica* coprono la storia delle religioni in Sicilia dalla protostoria fino all'età di Gregorio Magno. Alle utili considerazioni introduttive di Mario Mazza seguono puntuali discussioni sulle epoche preistoriche (Sebastiano Tusa, Rosa Maria Albanese Procelli, Pietrina Anello, Giuseppe Terranova) e su Sicani (Domenico Pancucci), Siculi (Nicola Cusumano) ed Elimi (Stefania De Vido). Soprattutto l'articolo di Cusumano (pp. 121–45) è un ricco e importante contributo sulla questione. Mi limito a un commento che non riguarda direttamente il tema, ma il quadro teorico, legato a *Orality and Literacy* di Walter Ong e, tra l'altro, ai lavori di Jack Goody (pp. 141–2). Questi ultimi vedono la religione nelle culture non alfabetizzate come "ambito di valori indifferenziato" (p. 142 nt. 77). Roy Harris ha pubblicato recentemente una critica interessantissima di questa linea di pensiero, nel suo *Rationality and the Literate Mind* (New York – London 2009).

Di altissima qualità sono anche i contributi sulla religione coloniale dei Greci (Colette Jourdain-Annequin, pp. 181–203) – con un riassunto utilissimo alle pp. 202–3, sulla religione