

*A Cultural History of Women in Antiquity*, edited by Janet H. Tulloch. Bloomsbury, 2013. 288pp., bw illustrations. Hb., \$104.00. Volume 1 of *A Cultural History of Women*. ISBN-13: 9780857850973.

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*A Cultural History of Women in Antiquity* is the first volume in a larger six-volume set that encompasses 2500 years of the cultural history of women. In the introduction to this volume, editor Janet Tulloch addresses the question regarding the significance of studying the cultural history of women who lived 2500 to 1000 years ago. Her response aptly connects the struggles of those women who lived in the past to those who live today. The eight chapters in this volume, covering 500 BCE to 1000 CE, explores eight themes: the life cycle, bodies and sexuality, religion and popular belief, medicine and disease, public and private, education and work, power, and artistic representation.

In chapter one Katariina Mustakallio takes us on a journey of the aging body. This process is not to be understood as biological development but rather the cultural process of aging, which is influenced by the “social structure and gendered system of a society” (17). Mustakallio’s primary focus is on the female life course, garnered mainly from fragmentary literary sources. The chapter is broken into three sections: “From the Womb to the Female Adolescent,” “Transition to Adulthood,” and lastly “Matronal Life.” Mustakallio concludes that while many women did indeed die young, if they lived through childhood, youth and childbearing however, they could expect to live to a ripe old age.

In chapter two Allison Glazebrook and Nicola Mellor examine the female body and sexuality. Their contribution focuses on the similarities and differences amongst the Greek, Roman and early Christian worlds. The chapter opens with a discussion of the highly sexualized and uncontrollable nature of women’s bodies and the manner in which they are controlled, through marriage and male guardianship. Elements of control, however, were not limited to male guardianship. A woman’s sexual status and availability was expressed through clothing and cosmetics, which “imposed codes of sexual behavior on women” (55). Glazebrook and Mellor argue how women who were overly concerned with beauty and adornment were often aligned with negative characteristics such as “laziness, luxury, duplicity and a lack of virtue” (41). Anxiety over female adornment continued in early Christianity, but asceti-

cism alleviated some of these irrational fears since the Christian ascetic renounced worldly concern for beauty and wealth.

Using literary, epigraphic and material evidence, Janet Tulloch in chapter three examines the role of women in ritual activities. Although her study covers a vast period, Tulloch notes that there are specific topics which are common to many of the diverse religions covered here. One topic in particular is “female priesthood and religious authority” (70). Women in pagan religious traditions held positions of authority and power, often officiating in the high priesthoods of the provincial imperial cults. Women also served as key figures in the gospels, acting as patrons as well as leaders in church houses.

In a collaborative effort Steven Muir and Laurence Totelin in chapter four employ a wide variety of literary evidence in order to illuminate the various roles performed by women in healthcare. The chapter is divided into three sections, focusing on a model of three roles occupied by women: patient, medical practitioner and medical authority. Especially interesting is the material on vicarious healing in which women would visit a sacred site, perform rituals and sleep overnight in order to obtain a healing benefit for another individual. While they maintain that female practitioners functioned within the parameters of a patriarchal system, women most likely participated in diagnosing their own health and the health of others.

In chapter five Kristina Milnor opens with an account of the idealized view of public and private space: the public space of men, which includes civic interactions, politics and the military, and the private domestic realm of women. Milnor argues, however, that women often occupied a more liminal space; that is, they were able to find a place in both the public and private worlds. One way in which they were able to accomplish this is represented in the epigraphic and visual record, which draws attention to female proprietresses who owned “cookshops, taverns, and market stalls” (121).

In chapter six Marcia Lindgren uses evidence from literary and visual representations in order to understand better women’s literary capabilities and work. Although literacy rates in antiquity are difficult to establish, there is evidence to suggest that some women were literate. Indeed, literacy had significant benefits for women of the lower classes as it gave them an element of control over their lives and in matters of business. Lindgren argues that women who were highly educated and knowledgeable, however, received negative criticism from male elites, often earning them an “unsavoury reputation” (145).

Women’s power and authority is taken up in Lynda Garland’s contribution in chapter seven. She argues that while women may have lacked official political power, they were not without authority. For example, women from the Julian and Claudian dynasties through their male relatives had “opportunities for political influence at the center of government” (160).

In the final chapter of this volume Shelby Brown examines women in the visual record, drawing attention to the way women have been represented over the centuries. Her primary focus is on female beauty, sexuality and modesty depicted in classical art. Brown argues that even though there were shifts in the visual record, artists continued to depict women in a standard classical representation which focused on beauty and modesty. It is only in the sixth and seventh centuries C.E. with the image of Mary that we see a movement away from the classical model.

By employing a variety of evidence and approaches from literary, epigraphic, and archaeological concerns, the authors have creatively woven together pagan, Jewish and Christian worlds in order to highlight the varying perceptions of women and their integral role in history. Since much of the evidence is couched in patriarchal ideology, further research in areas such as definitions of medicine as it carries cultural values and the role of women in commissioning artworks would be helpful. Overall, this is an excellent collection of essays.