

# Review

ELIZABETH D. CARNEY and SABINE MÜLLER (EDS), *THE ROUTLEDGE COMPANION TO WOMEN AND MONARCHY IN THE ANCIENT MEDITERRANEAN WORLD* (Routledge Companions). London and New York: Routledge, 2021. Pp. xviii + 537, illus. ISBN 9781138358843 (hbk). £190.00.

Queenship studies focus on female roles and the gender element in monarchical rule from a *longue durée*, comparative or global perspective. They are fast becoming an established research field for more recent historical periods (e.g. E. Woodacre (ed.), *A Companion to Global Queenship* (2018)). Through the sheer variety of case studies assembled, the present volume will go some way towards anchoring the theme also in the field of Ancient History, where hitherto studies of single women or individual dynasties have prevailed, if the relationship between women and monarchical rule has not been altogether neglected. This is very welcome because monarchy and family are intrinsically linked historical concepts.

The volume offers a breath-taking panorama, taking the reader through the three millennia from the Old Kingdom of Egypt to the end of Sassanid Persia. After an introduction by the editors, the contributions are grouped into six parts, of which four are organised around regions or political entities: Egypt and the Nile valley, the ancient Near East, Greece and Macedonia, and the Roman empire. Within these sections, chapters are arranged chronologically with different endpoints: for Egypt, Greece and Macedonia this is unsurprisingly the arrival of Rome, for the Near East the seventh century C.E., while for Rome, readers are taken only up to the time of Constantine. The absence of the later Roman empire creates a slight imbalance in coverage, which is deplorable since the monarchical and dynastic element arguably became much stronger in the post-Constantinian empire. This arrangement also means that Hellenistic kingdoms and their relationships with each other are dealt with in several chapters and from many different angles. The editors, who are also specialists in Hellenistic history, have reined in this volume of information by adding a fifth section on ‘commonalities’, which mostly focuses on aspects inherent to the role of women in Hellenistic monarchies. A short final part is dedicated to ‘reception’. It contains two very illuminating chapters on Roman authors’ use of ‘Eastern’ queenship to comment on archaic Roman and Roman imperial monarchy (Truschnegg on the Roman literary life of Semiramis; Hallett and Hersch on Livy’s caricature of Etruscan queens as Hellenistic queens), and one chapter that investigates the role of Roman empresses in twentieth-century film, finding it wanting (Wieber).

The editors have done an admirable job in pooling expertise, including non-Anglophone scholars, and the authors in keeping chapters short and succinct (most are around twelve pages long, including substantial, up-to-date and multi-lingual bibliographies). The chapters are invariably captivating and of high quality, and offer a variety of methodological approaches. The majority focus still rather conventionally on single women (Van der Perre: Nefertiti; Müller: Berenike II; Schäfer: Kleopatra; Dirven: Zenobia; Kunst: Livia) or on groups of women and women from different generations of the same dynasty (Bielmann Sánchez and Lenzo: Ptolemaic women; Fink: ‘invisible’ Mesopotamian women; Olbrycht: Seleukid women; Ruzicka: Karian women; Wilker: Hasmonean women; Wiesehöfer: Sassanid women; Cenerini: Julio-Claudian women; Priwitz: the Faustinas; Bertolazzi: Severan women; Dirschl Mayer: Constantinian women). They feature some unusual suspects (especially sole-ruling Hasmonean women), offer many original insights, are important to provide historical background and will find their specialist readers. The uninitiated reader may, however, often find it hard to relate the details of biographies and political history offered here to conceptional questions about the changing roles of royal women in ancient monarchy more generally, or at least in Egyptian, Near Eastern, Macedonian or Roman monarchy, rather than in their very immediate historical contexts. At the very least, it would have been useful to have supporting visual materials, genealogical charts and timelines (in the entire volume, only Dirschl Mayer’s chapter includes a family tree, and there are very few images overall).

More accessible in this regard are chapters focused on pertinent aspects of the female element in monarchical rule, such as the ranking of different kinds of royal women (Sabbahy and Mirón on royal mothers in Old and Middle Kingdom Egypt and Attalid Pergamon respectively); the meaning of titles (Ayad on the Egyptian ‘God’s wife’ title; Ramsey on the Seleukid *basilissa*); the

factors determining co-regency or even sole rule (Minas-Nerpel on regnant women in Egypt); female religious and artistic patronage (Pfeiffer and Barbantani on the activities of Ptolemaic women in these areas; Moore on the patronage of Octavia minor); marriage alliances (D'Agostini on Seleukids; Ager on brother–sister marriage in Hellenistic kingdoms); and material forms of representation (Plantzos on Hellenistic jugate images; Alexandridis on Flavian female portraiture). These may serve more easily as a source of inspiration for readers working on similar topics in different eras, which is, after all, what a Companion volume should do.

Especially successful are those chapters where the discussion of particular dynasties is structured around such analytical categories, rather than biographical or political narrative (Lohwasser: royal women in Kush; Brosius: Achaemenid women; Madreiter and Hartmann: women at the Arsakid court; Müller: Argead women; Carney: Antigonid women). These chapters systematically explore the parameters laid out in the editors' introduction as constitutive for charting the importance of women to royal ideology on the one hand and their actual spheres of action and access to power on the other: first, the extent to which women were included in royal representation to consolidate male power; second, the ways marriage was used to integrate a royal family into or exclude it from other social groups; third, whether monogamy or polygyny structured dynastic succession. To understand whether there was something like 'Mediterranean ancient monarchy', it would have been useful to have more comparative insights into similarities and differences on these points from across the case studies offered, beyond the very welcome discussion of Hellenistic 'commonalities'. Here, Strootman's chapter stands out, showing lucidly how the fluid boundaries between Hellenistic courts as households and as political centres seeking permanency turned women into cardinal points of power (this is, not incidentally, the only chapter that cites J. Duindam, *Dynasties. A Global History of Power* (2016), an indispensable theoretical reference point for the topic).

At over 500 pages, few readers will read this volume cover to cover. This is a shame because they would miss many threads worth following. An intriguing one concerns the role of Greco-Roman sources in shaping our modern Western understanding of (perhaps not only) ancient royal women, as many contributors here lament the fact that we owe to them, rather than to more indigenous sources, the image of the meddling royal woman in their respective historical scenarios. Another is the influence in antiquity of literary role models for royal women, starting with the 'queens' in Homeric epics and Greek tragedy, discussed here by Heinrichs and Roisman. A third, especially for readers of this journal, is the importance of women for the creation of a quasi-hereditary principle in the Roman empire, perhaps the most unusual monarchical construct discussed in this volume. Readers would really need a bit more editorial handholding to make the most of these and other prompts within the amount of material offered, but the volume will doubtlessly become an indispensable starting point for new, and much needed, research on ancient monarchy.

University of Bonn  
jhillner@uni-bonn.de

doi:10.1017/S0075435823000837

JULIA HILLNER

© The Author(s), 2023.

Published by Cambridge University Press on behalf of The Society for the Promotion of Roman Studies.