

**Jelena Anđelković Grašar, *Femina Antica Balcanica*, Arheološki
institute, Ed. Evoluta, Belgrade 2020, 281 p.**

The book that will be presented in the following short review, has a long-awaited topic for the Balkan provinces of the Roman Empire and even if it is not addressed mainly to specialists, it manages to be a very useful instrument to them, due to the complexity of the information provided and the unique way of the author to communicate her research. This is the main reason for which we can hardly wait the book to be translated into an international language as soon as possible.

The research of women in Antiquity and specifically in Late Antiquity has not received much attention in Serbian contemporary science. This is almost a state of fact in the Balkan modern countries and reflects a stage of research and certain historiographical trends in this area. However, in the last years we can see that, little by little, changes occur and certain social and demographic categories have been receiving the attention they deserve in terms of archaeological and historical studies. This also means that Jelena Anđelković Grašar's research has an interdisciplinary approach, which comprehended iconological and iconographical methods, as well as cultural anthropology, sociology of arts and religion, women's studies, feminist theories and gender studies. Owing to these methodological approaches, the images of women presented in this book is reinterpreted and placed within the framework of modern academic studies, widely accepted globally. Woman's image is not only based upon pictorial representations, such as paintings or modelled images, but rather the author tries and succeed to present us the mental projections that were created in the minds of ancient people, influenced by the personal experience and also by the major political events that occur in the time of their life.

At the beginning, this book is provided with a short *Preface* (pp. 7–16), in which the subject is being introduced to the reader, followed by short *Introduction* (pp. 17–21), in which a brief but concise account of the history of Moesia is made. The author also presents the limits of the discussion and the purpose of the paper.

The body of the book consists of six chapters, each dealing with one particular side of the role

played by women in society, presented and discussed with the help of the images and objects which are depicting women or with the help of items that have been used by them. By discussing the way they are represented, how they lived, or in which manner they are adored in this period of time, the author tries to recreate for the readers the vivid image of the antique society in which these ladies lived and evolved.

The first chapter, entitled *The portrait in late antiquity* (pp. 22–23), presents us the world of ancient portraiture, being treated here the male imperial portraits during the Principality but also during the Late Empire. The author tries to equilibrate the speech and introduces a comparison term and emphasizes the artistic characteristics of the Constantinian renaissance and also the Justinian epoch. It is a very important chapter because it sheds light on different artistic techniques, on symbolism and by discussing them, it documents the transition from antiquity to the Christian era, emphasizing continuity but also the structural differences of the art of portraiture, between the two epochs and also between two genres.

The first role studied refers to the life of the ancient woman in her role as *Empress* (pp. 25–56), by presenting the duality *Empress Mother* and *Empress Wife*, the most significant examples being the one of Romula and Galeria Valeria, wife and mother of Emperor Galerius. Apart from these, the book also presents the discoveries related to another imperial mother, the one of Maximian Daia, as well as the life events of Helena and Fausta, well known mother and wife of Constantine the Great. All the important facets related to the public function and also to the private life of these empresses are analysed from the perspective of their actual life style, their palaces and funerary mausoleums as well as from the discoveries of objects associated with them, such as jewellery sets and cameos with the image of empresses, but also with the image of the imperial apotheosis according to the representation on the coins. The author also analyses the physical presence of later empresses, such as Ariadne, Euphemia, Theodora, Sophia, and all the small changes in mentality that lead to the

migration of legitimacy and thus to a migration of political power, which allows them to hold power in their own right.

The next chapter, *Women in public and private space* (pp. 57–98), focuses upon the image of the simple woman, as she appears represented in the major statuary, on objects used in everyday life, but also in a funerary context, through image reflected by the funerary monuments. The religious importance of the woman is mentioned in the next two chapters *Wife and Divine Mother* (pp. 99–142) and *Mother of God* (pp. 143–152), after the conversion of the local provincial world to Christianity. The female deities are discussed here, among them Athena, Tyche – Fortuna, Dea – Dardanika, Aphrodite – Venus, Hygeia, Victoria, Magna Mater, Cybele, Artemis – Luna, the personifications of the province and also mythological animals such as Medusa. All of them are investigated according to their representations on objects from everyday life, statues found on Serbian territory in archaeological contexts, such as the temples at Romuliana Felix or Mediana.

The last chapter is dedicated to the ancient women from the late Empire, namely the *Wife Mother, Empress* (pp. 153–198), in which are discussed the changes that occurred in the image of women between early and late Roman Empire.

The paper concludes with *Acknowledgment* (p. 199), *Bibliography* (pp. 200–240) and an extensive *Summary* (pp. 241–263) in English.

In conclusion, the book succeeded to present testimonies of the visual and material culture dealing with the feminine imagery from the period between the 3rd and the beginning of the 7th century, in the most part is usually known as Late Antiquity. In her discourse, Jelena Anđelković Grašar, used and explored the archaeological material from museum collections and archaeological sites from the territory of present-day Serbia, and compared it with various analogies from major or provincial artistic centres across the Roman Empire. She succeeds to recreate the image of women in Antiquity, and marks all the changes of mentality and also those which occurred in representation of this category, from empress to slave, and from pagan deities to the Mother of God, shaped by the political and ideological turnarounds within the Empire. We can easily see that the greatest changes that befell the late Empire took place under Constantine the Great's reign and are marked by two crucial decisions: the edict of Milan, issued in 313 and the moving of the Roman state capital to Constantinople in 330. Unfortunately, the

larger part of the urban settlements in the area of the former provinces of today's Serbia, was devastated by the Huns' invasion in 441 and entered under barbarian control until the beginning of the 6th century, when they were again included within the borders of the Eastern Roman Empire, under Emperor Justinian I. The attacks of the Slavs during the 7th century and their settlement in the northern areas of the Central Balkans marked the end of Roman domination in these regions, paved by the Avars' destruction of the Danube Limes at the end of the 6th century. These are the military-political and religious events that left their mark on the image we have today about the women who lived in this area during the Antiquity.

We do hope that the next edition will be at least in English, and with a better illustration, better quality pictures of the beautiful artefacts presented within the pages of this book.

We congratulate the author, and we recommend this paper to be read by the specialists, even though it is mostly a popularization book.

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