

Meghan J. DiLuzio, *A Place at the Altar. Priestesses in Republican Rome*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, Oxford 2016. xii, 281 pp., 21 plates, \$45.00, £37.95, ISBN: 9780691169576

Meghan DiLuzio's book on priestesses in republican Rome fills a significant gap in research, as this is the first comprehensive treatment of the subject. It is published almost a decade after Joan Breton Connelly's "Portrait of a Priestess: Women and Ritual in Ancient Greece" (Princeton, 2007). DiLuzio's aim is to "restore Rome's priestesses to their proper place" in the history of ancient Roman religion (p. 1). She achieves her aim by proposing many original interpretations of the texts referring to rituals performed by priestesses and women in Rome. The author discusses a wide range of ritual activities of the priestesses, who acted in an official capacity and on behalf of the Roman people. DiLuzio draws on recent work in Roman religion by Celia Schultz, Rebecca Flemming, and Emily Hemelrijk, who have shown that modern scholars have misinterpreted ancient sources when they have argued that women were excluded from public sacrifices. Convincing arguments against the opinion of some scholars who considered women to be marginal in Roman religion are presented.

DiLuzio underlines the fact that an augur was also subordinate to the authority of the senate and the magistrates (p. 5) in order to nuance the subordination of women officials to male authorities. The author highlights that some scholars misunderstood the intersection of the public and private spheres in Rome when they described rituals focused on female chastity, marriage, fertility, childbirth, and the nurture of children as "marginal" (p. 6.). In my eyes, here lies the core of the problem of the *Forschungsgeschichte* of women in ancient Roman religion, since modern scholars have projected their own (modern) concepts of private and public on antiquity without taking into account that the concepts of private/public might have been different in ancient Rome. Modern scholars have seen rituals around childbirth and child-raising as touching exclusively the sphere of women, and women's festivals were likewise understood as concerning only private life, which is a very problematic interpretation. Although ancient texts do not describe many of the priestesses' rituals, as DiLuzio mentions, she reconstructs, by careful historical, social and literary contextualizations of the scarce sources, their religious activities on the behalf of the civic community.

Challenging is DiLuzio's emphasis on women's participation in cults with martial and political contexts, which were long regarded as male-dominated and have been downplayed in recent scholarship. Nevertheless, the salian priestesses (*saliae*) offered a sacrifice for the success of Rome's military operations in the *regia* in the Forum, the political and religious center of Rome. For the Vestal Virgins who guarded the eternal flame of Vesta and the pledges of the empire (*pignora imperii*) that guaranteed Roman hegemony, their military and political implications were well known already. Also, the idea that female virtue guaranteed the well-being of the civic community

highlights that Romans considered women's morality to be central to the success of the civic community.

Roman religion reflected and reinforced the religious roles of men and women in the family, as Ovid's depiction of ritual activities of the household during the festival of Terminalia testifies. The model presented by the poet was crucial, as the author argues, also for the cooperation of men, women, and children in religious rites. Ritual roles were determined by gender and hierarchy within a cultic community, so DiLuzio stresses a hierarchy of ritual roles which defined family members in relation to one another.

The first chapter is dedicated to the *flamen* and the *flaminica Dialis* who were Jupiter's priests. A death of a wife or a husband forced the living member of the priestly couple to resign from the priestly office. The author highlights the cooperation of the *flamen* and the *flaminica* in worship of Jupiter and Juno. At the same time, the hierarchy established by the "manus"-marriage, by which the wife was transferred from the authority of her father to the authority of her husband, leads DiLuzio to speak of the subordination of the *flaminica Dialis* to her husband. However, as ritual activities were concerned, she argues for the gender-coded complementarity and cooperation between the *flaminica* and the *flamen Dialis*. DiLuzio stresses that a strict division of labor along gender lines was a characteristic of the Roman ritual system.

The aim of the second chapter is to present an overview of priestly couples who acted as public priests. The total number of joint priesthoods filled by married couples exceeded the number of the members of the highest priestly colleges. The married couple was, as DiLuzio convincingly argues, a widespread model for priests in ancient Rome. To support the thesis that religious practice at Rome was a cooperative endeavor of men and women, the author discusses various *flamines* and their wives *flaminicae*, the *rex* and *regina sacrorum*, and priestly couples in the Roman *curiae* (political subdivisions of the Roman people) who performed public rituals. The curial rituals funded from the public treasury, thus they were part of civic cult and integral to fulfilling the community's ritual obligations to its gods. However, modern scholars have mostly ignored the role of the wives of the curial *flamines*, although Dionysius of Halicarnassus explicitly wrote that the wives of the curial priests performed rituals either along with their husbands or on their own (*Antiquitates Romanae* 2, 22, 1). Public cult in Rome required male and female priests to cooperate with one another according to their gender roles. Thus the priestly roles reinforced the traditional gender roles. Following Dionysius of Halicarnassus DiLuzio discusses the assistance of the children (*camillus*, *camilla*) in the curial rituals, so she presents a vivid picture of men, women, and children participating in rituals of the civic religion at Rome.

The third chapter focuses on priestesses associated with the public cults of Mars, Fortuna Muliebris, Bona Dea, Liber, Magna Mater, Ceres, and some further female

religious officials. The author discusses e.g., the *saliae* (salian virgins) who probably danced along with the male counterparts, the *salii*, and sacrificed on behalf of the Roman people in the *regia* on the Forum, Rome's political and religious center. The social status of the *saliae* was not as low as assumed by some modern scholars who translated the word referring to the salian virgins *conducticiae* as "hired". Instead, the translation of the word by "assembled" or "brought together" as attested in Cicero's *De inventione* leads the author, who follows the analysis of Fay Glinister, to argue that it indicated that the *saliae* were "brought together" to assist the *salii* (p. 81). The rituals of the *salii* and the *saliae* are an example of cooperation between the male and female halves of the same priesthood. The discussion of the priestesses of Fortuna Muliebris which develops a new approach to the study of the military realm which is considered as non-female. In this approach she draws similar conclusions about female implication in war as the contributions in the volume edited by Jacqueline Fabre-Serris and Alison Keith, *Women and War in Antiquity* (Baltimore 2015, for my book review see:

<http://ancienthistorybulletin.org/wpcontent/uploads/2016/11/AHBOnlineReviews2016.27.ErkerOnFabre-SerrisKeith.docx.pdf>).

The analysis of the various female priesthoods allows DiLuzio to stress that their rituals positioned women at the heart of the civic community. My impression is that such a conclusion would not have startled the readers of Livy, Dionysios of Halicarnassus or Ovid, however, it presents a turning point in the history of the Roman religion.

In chapters four to seven the author studies various aspects of the Vestals, the public priestesses of Vesta, the goddess of the public hearth of Rome. She examines the symbolism of the Vestal ritual costume and how the Vestals expressed their identity and their status as priestesses through their clothes, hairstyle, accessories, and shoes. Differently from the widely accepted interpretation of Mary Beard who saw the sexual status of the Vestals as in-between virgins and matrons, DiLuzio specifies the Vestals' sexual status as virgins. The Vestals as ideal virgins modeled the virtue for married and unmarried women (p. 152), e.g., chastity, purity, and moral probity. Furthermore, DiLuzio analyses the Vestals' rituals and how they leveraged their status for political gain in favor of their families.

Many of the sources discussed are fragmentary and very complex. For many rituals performed by female officials we know only their names and we do not have further details, therefore there is a lot of scholarly discussion about the fragmentary sources. Although the overall interpretation of the role of the priestesses in Roman religion is very convincing, there are some weaker points, which could be revised. In the discussion of the Bona Dea cult, I am not sure if the *damiatrix* mentioned by Festus is a different priestess from the *sacerdos* mentioned by Propertius (4, 9, 51; p. 98). I doubt that Italian Ceres priestesses were in the republic generally unmarried as DiLuzio concludes (p. 111), especially since the Augustan Campanian inscriptions

mention their husbands and their children (CIL X 1074a and b). The chapter on the *flamen* and the *flaminica Dialis* would profit from refraining from methodologically problematic interpretations of “apotropaism” and “fertility” symbols among the accessories of the *flaminica Dialis*. A precise definition of the concept of “priesthood” is not provided, the author only stresses the diversity of priests. However, DiLuzio’s interpretation of the Roman priestesses provides new insights into the questions which seemed for a (too) long time to be already resolved in the history of Roman religion.

Instead of accepting an alleged marginality of women, the book focuses on female officials and married citizen women whose values and performance of rituals expressed and reinforced female concerns for the civic community. The author adopts an eclectic methodology which is applied according to the main characteristics of the transmitted sources; sometimes she focuses on historical and political contexts, sometimes she studies social contexts or language. Additionally, close readings of antiquarian sources on female priestesses which have not been yet studied carefully reveal a new picture of the Roman priestesses and women in the religion. Although the complexity and fragmentary state of the sources endanger any kind of a general interpretation, the author convincingly presents a new approach to the study of Roman religion by making visible not only the priestesses but also women, children, freedmen, and slaves in republican Rome.

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