

WOMEN ON THE VERGE IN LIVY AND VALERIUS MAXIMUS

HELMKE (T.) *Exemplarisches Krisenwissen. Gender in Narrativ und Narration des frühen Prinzipats*. (Hypomnemata 217.) Pp. 329. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2023. Cased, €90. ISBN: 978-3-647-30228-7.

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Any reader of Livy's first pentad notices that bad things often happen to women at crucial historical junctures: Rhea Sylvia, the Sabine captive 'brides', Lucretia, Verginia. While Livy famously sees history as a set of moral *exempla*, we assume he means that these *exempli documenta* illustrate *his story*, not *her story*, as the old feminist pun goes. Yet there is much that is exemplary in Livy's women, even if the scope of their agency rarely rises to the strictly political (cf. the intrigues of Tanaquil and Tullia, or the interventions of Veturia and Volturnia with Coriolanus). For a patriarchal culture given to defining *virtus* as manly self-assertion, Roman women figure prominently in its stories of foundation; so, what are we to make of this?

Livy's women have drawn the sporadic attention of scholars in the past, but P. Keegan's *Livy's Women: Crisis, Resolution, and the Female in Rome's Foundation History* (2021, reviewed in *CR* 72 [2022], 173–5) and the book under review here show that new discourse-based approaches find much to talk about in Rome's exemplary matrons and maidens. Neither is a book about Roman women per se, but rather both concern the discursive role female figures play in the complex web of narratives making up Roman history, particularly in the work of Livy. Although H. is aware of some of the English-language scholarship on this topic (especially R. Langlands, *Exemplary Ethics in Ancient Rome* [2018]), he was apparently unable to read Keegan's 2021 book. Since this is a 'light revision' of his 2020 doctoral dissertation, perhaps the two books came out too closely in time for him to interact with Keegan's findings. They both share an interest in crisis, informed to some extent by contemporary 'crisis studies', and both see the role of women in the discursive resolution of crises as central. H.'s original thesis grew from a German research project between the universities of Osnabrück and Göttingen, *Die Krise ist weiblich: Soziale Struktur und diskursive Macht als Gender-Problem im klassischen Altertum*, which sought to test the validity and universality of contemporary gender research for the ancient world; so H.'s research is steeped in a wider discussion among ancient historians in Germany. Keegan excels at presenting schematic data in useful charts and tracing key terms in Livy, but his overall focus remains essentially close readings of Livy's *AUC*. H.'s study, in contrast, has a wider arc, comparing Livy's female *exempla* to those of Valerius Maximus with the aim of showing a discursive shift from the reign of Augustus to that of Tiberius, reflecting the consolidation of a change in the understanding of values (*Werteverständnis*) by the later period. As such, H.'s work will be of interest to those looking at gender and representation in the Principate more generally.

H. has steeped himself in the works of Judith Butler, particularly on gender and performance, and has a tighter focus on the nature of *exemplum* as manifested in Livy's history vs Valerius' commonplace collection (here Langlands' impact is felt – in contrast, Keegan does not list Langlands' 2018 book). Whereas Keegan offers a wealth of suggestive detail from the *AUC*, H. provides readers with greater conceptual clarity and a thoroughly structured comparative approach. Both books are worth reading, though H.'s academic

German is challenging at times; for example, the title phrase *Exemplarisches Krisenwissen*, ‘exemplary crisis knowledge’, is compact and clever, but enigmatic to the English speaker. The title’s addition of *Gender in Narrativ and Narration des frühen Prinzipats* clarifies that the book follows a narratological approach, but does not quite spell out the epistemological implications of *Krisenwissen*. H.’s first chapter on Livy suggests a pattern that usefully models how the epistemological component works: in the early Roman narratives of conquest and the consolidation of Roman society male agency dominates, but the narrative is often slowed and deconstructed at crucial junctures, allowing a space for female intervention. The men’s ‘performative deficit’ invites ‘gender-transgressive action’ on the part of women, who both make demands or requests and display an ability to regulate their emotions, unlike the men. The women’s perspective thus reveals the crucial values at stake, even – or especially – if men are blind to these values in the moment of action. In H.’s more abstract formulation, ‘Livius verortet Frauen an zentralen Schnittstellen von Krisennarrativen, an denen männliches Handeln stagniert. Die epistemische Inszenierung von Frauen erzeugt dabei eine weibliche Innensicht, durch die ein Zugriff auf die entscheidenden Werte der Krisen geschaffen und somit eine epistemische Gendertransgression erzeugt wird’ (p. 41). This essentially is to say: in Livy’s configurations of crisis, women are good to think with. For example, the Sabine women reveal to their kinsmen and their Roman captors the greater value of peace in the interests of the children than war in revenge for their own abduction, which the men then turn into political incorporation. By appealing to the men as both husbands and (grand)fathers and thus revealing the potential for *parricidium* in this conflict, the Sabine women map themselves into the role of *matronae*, creating a ‘gender-constitutive’ position for themselves that the men then formalise by the political resolution. H. concludes that this staging of the Sabines’ intervention not only depicts the unification of the Roman people, but also the marital ideal of *concordia* that Augustus propagated in his legislation. Thus, ‘Die Konstruktion eines weiblichen Krisenwissens muss als Strategie der Narration verstanden werden, die normative Geschlechterordnung der frühen Kaiserzeit abzubilden und als Aspekt der *mores maiorum* in der Frühgeschichte zu verankern’ (p. 70). In this way, then, a story like that of the Sabine women constitutes the *Exemplarisches Krisenwissen* of the title.

The book comprises five chapters neatly outlined in the table of contents, each ending in a helpful conclusion. After the general and theoretical introduction, there comes a chapter on ‘Livius und weibliche Ideale in frühromischen Krisen’, followed by ‘Valerius Maximus und die weiblichen Exempla der Frühzeit’, which maps the shift in values of the Tiberian age. This is effectively one where crises are no longer seen as upheavals at the state or institutional level, but as embedded in the social sphere. When Veturia intervenes with Coriolanus, her ‘inner view’ (*Innensicht* again) ‘ausschließlich dazu diente, die *pietas* ihres Sohnes sichtbar zu machen’, something that H. claims shows that ‘Dazu wird ein Handlungsraum der Exempla geschaffen, der abseits historischer Umbrüche diese Krisen als Werteprobleme im sozialen Bereich abbildet und damit eine Ideologie republikanischer Kontinuität vermitteln kann, die Umbrüche auf staatlich institutioneller Ebene negiert’ (p. 166). H. then observes, ‘Valerius’ Exempla sind damit ein literarischer Reflex der monumentalen Darstellung bedeutender Männer auf dem Augustus-Forum’ (p. 167). This chapter concludes with perhaps his most succinct formulation: ‘Bei Livius wurde die Emphase von *concordia* und *libertas* als Reflex der augusteischen Zeit und der Suche nach Einheit erkannt, die auf die Wirren des Bürgerkrieges folgt. Dagegen ist der Wert von normativer Weiblichkeit in den ‘alten’ Exempla bei Valerius von entscheidender Bedeutung für die moralische Ausrichtung des Wertediskurses nach innen, hin zu einer moralischen Normierung des sozialen Raumes’ (p. 169). Two further chapters repeat the

comparison of Livy and Valerius Maximus, and a concluding chapter restates the thesis that a decisive shift can be detected in Roman value discourse between the Augustan and the Tiberian eras, whereby the exemplary status of women changes from actively negotiating the terms of crisis in the former, to becoming 'passive Charaktantinnen männlicher Exempla und eines männlichen Wertewissens' (p. 301) in the latter.

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