

men's. It has been stated that women principally participated in cults dealing with the feminine sphere of life, referring to fertility, chastity, and reproduction. The traditional Roman religion, in particular, has been defined as suppressive of women. On the other hand, some interpretations are based on ideas about their presumed magical power.

Scholars with an outright feminist approach may have been more fascinated by the so-called mystery cults which, allegedly, gave more emotional satisfaction to women than the traditional cults. Thus, it is pleasing to see that Darja Sterbenc Erker has devoted her study to women's role in the official Roman religion and showing new aspects in this subject.

Erker finds it problematic and simplified to connect the lower social status of Roman women with their religious roles. Furthermore, she criticizes the view that women only participated in cults dealing with female life. The starting point of Erker's study is the view presented by, for example, John Scheid that virgins and matronae had a marginal status in ancient Roman religion. This marginality has been explained also by the supposed tendency of Roman females to participate in cults of foreign origin. Foreign seems to be equated with feminine in a negative way.

Erker focuses on two aspects of Roman religion in her book. First, she studies so-called Greek rituals (*Graecus ritus*) performed by Roman matronae for the benefit of the state. Secondly, she is interested in the intertwining of the concepts of feminine and foreign in ancient discourses on religion. Prior to the analysis of these themes, Erker gives the reader an overview of woman's judicial status in ancient Rome, traditional Roman cults of women, and literary descriptions of their virtues and cults in the Augustan era. The backbone of Erker's study consists of an analysis of sources describing their participation in the cult of Ceres, expiatory rites of the Mid-Republican era as well as Livy's narrative of the so-called Bacchanalia scandal, and stories about the Cybele-cult in Rome.

There are many methodological challenges in the study of ancient religions, such as the incoherence and scarcity of sources. There is also the danger of projecting modern views on gender differences as unchanged in Antiquity. Furthermore, there is the essential question of men's capacity to know anything about women's cultic activities. Erker points out that ancient authors often describe female religious roles using negative stereotypes. Thus, these descriptions usually reveal only little about actual cult practices and their social significance.

The second main chapter of the book deals with the cult of Ceres and especially those aspects of the rituals defined as Greek. Erker shows that by taking on religious duties in the worship of Ceres, marginalized social groups, plebeians and women, were actually integrated into the official religion. Erker's analysis of the supposed foreignness of the rites performed by women in the Ceres-cult is particularly interesting. As for the

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During the last decades, women's status and roles in ancient Roman society have been widely studied. Female religious roles, too, have been discussed by several scholars using different approaches. Women's participation in the official Roman religion has usually been interpreted as marginal and subordinated to

alien traits in Roman religion, in general, it is pointed out that foreign elements are present even in the stories about the foundation of Rome. The strong Etruscan influence is described by the ancient authors in stories about the early Rome. In the Roman historical myths, the Romans themselves are descendants of Trojan refugees. It is, after all, difficult to define a strict line between Roman and foreign in Roman religion.

The festival called *Sacrum anniversarium Cereris* is an interesting case, since it was defined as belonging to *Graecus ritus* and it was celebrated by women during night time. According to Cicero, nocturnal rites of females were allowed only if performed for the benefit of the state (*pro populo*). The official significance of the festival is reflected in Livy's story about the situation in Rome after the defeat at Cannae during the Second Punic War in 216 B. C. According to this historian, the celebration was in danger of being neglected while almost all Roman wives were mourning. Thus, the senate decided to cut women's mourning period so that the celebration could be carried out. The celebration was considered essential for the well-being of the Roman state.

Livy's story as well as Cicero's passage on women's nocturnal rites in *De legibus* reflects the official and respected status of the *sacrum anniversarium Cereris*, not marginality. Furthermore, Erker criticizes the conventional view of the *sacrum anniversarium Cereris* as a Roman parallel to the Greek *Thesmophoria*, an all-female festival of Demeter and Kore. The Roman goddess Ceres was not particularly connected to human fertility, but rather to fruitfulness in general. Ceres was also honoured as the founder of civilization. The temple of this goddess was founded in Rome during the first years of the Republic, and thus the cult was also connected to the new political system in which plebeians could have offices. According to Erker, in the Augustan era Ceres was rather worshipped as a goddess of civilization than a deity of agriculture.

Erker tries to reconstruct the rites performed in honour of Ceres by females. These rites include fasting preceding the celebration, a procession of women, and a sacrifice which, according to Erker, was an animal immolation. The participants at the *sacrum anniversarium Cereris* were Roman matronae. On the other hand, priestesses leading the rituals and performing the sacrifices were originally from *Magna Graecia*. They were given the Roman citizenship and an official status. The sacrifice was performed according to *Graecus ritus*, that is, without a wine offering.

Erker points out that details of both the *Cerialia* festival, celebrated in April, and the *sacrum anniversarium Cereris* are known insufficiently. She considers it problematic to parallel the *sacrum anniversarium* with the story about the rape of Proserpina. The details of the myth do not explain the rituals performed in the celebrations. According to the author, reducing the Roman religion to peasants worshipping invariably for centuries wishing to get the fertility of land guaranteed

is misleading. Myth and ritual are two distinct phenomena.

In the third main chapter Erker focuses on expiatory rites performed by females in the cults of Bacchus and Cybele. Women had prominent roles in official expiatory rites performed in Rome from the third century B. C. on. A novelty in the worship of Ceres, a fasting by the matronae (*ieunium Cereris*), was introduced as an expiatory rite in 191 B. C., and it was included precisely in the Greek style of the Ceres-cult. The author compares this to the expiatory rites performed by Roman matrons and maidens in 207 B. C. Greek *peplophoria* are introduced as possible models for the new expiatory rites in Rome. According to the historian Livy, the expiatory rites were carried out because of many appalling prodigies, including an androgyne child. During the preparations for the ceremony, a lightning struck the temple of Juno Regina on the Aventine, and new expiatory rites were ordered to be performed by the matrons. The structure and organization of these rites show that women were well integrated into the official religion, and their participation was regarded necessary for the Roman state.

The matronae's participation in the Ceres-cult and various expiatory rites was highly official and apparently respected even if rituals carried out by them belonged to the category of *Graecus ritus*. There were, however, other religious sects and practices that were labelled as foreign and feminine and far from respectable. Such religious communities as those of Isis and Bacchus and Christianity were denigrated, and the label of feminine was an essential part of the denigration. Suspicious religious phenomena could be defined as magic or superstition. Women were stereotypically considered especially prone to superstition. Livy's description of the so-called *Bacchanalia* scandal is an illustrative example of this kind of stereotype.

Erker very convincingly studies Livy's narrative in the context of the Augustan policy. The details of the historian's narrative cannot be taken for face value. The rewards given to Hispala who revealed the Bacchic conspiracy anachronistically reflect Augustan legislation on family and marriage. Erker also sees reflections of the rise of the equestrian order in the story. As for the actual Bacchus-cult she points out that it is very difficult to reconstruct the Bacchic rites because of the partial and unreliable sources. The author convinces when criticizing interpretations (Ross Shepard Kraemer) of women's participation in ecstatic rites to be a compensation for their subordinated role in society and for their frustration. She is rather positive about the idea (*Synnøve des Bouvrie*) that a Dionysiac trance integrated the worshipper back into society. According to Erker, the Bacchic rites were not more feminine than in other private cults but the label of feminine was a means of denigration.

The Cybele-cult is the author's last example of the difficulties in defining the line between Roman and foreign elements in Roman religion. There seems to

have been a double structure in the cult. The officials and magistrates were involved in the rituals, but also priests and priestesses who were of a lower social status than celebrants in old Roman cults. Women play a prominent role in descriptions of the introduction of the goddess in Rome. Erker argues that there was no clear line between foreign and Roman ways of worshipping Cybele. According to Erker, even the ritual practices of the Roman cult of the goddess from Pessinus were romanized practices and institutions of Greek origin. She recalls that Magna Mater came from the mythical country of Aeneas, the progenitor of the Romans.

Erker also discusses the story about Claudia Quinta, the virtuous Roman matron who played a pivotal role when the black stone of Cybele was brought to Rome in 204 B. C. There are several variations of the story in Roman literature, but the author focuses on the version told by Livy. She points out that Claudia Quinta was not just any noble woman of Rome, but represented the gens Claudia, the family of Augustus' wife Livia. In Livy's story this matron is paragon of feminine chastity, a virtue particularly important in Augustan ideology.

In the conclusion of her book Erker underlines that the concept of Romanness was complex and included foreign elements. She argues that Graecus ritus was a discourse discussing differences between the sexes and not a sign of feminine marginality. Furthermore, the spheres and virtues of women were not only of private importance. Reproduction was also a political matter. The religious politics of Augustus promoted traditional female virtues. Erker regards the official religious roles of Roman women as a result of a division of religious competence. In ancient literature, such rituals performed by females that benefited the Roman state, were described in a positive light, while the others were esteemed rather negatively.

The book is a significant contribution to the scholarly discussion on females in Roman cults, Roman identity, and Roman religion in general. The author is widely read in scholarship on women and Roman religion. Her analysis of ancient sources is solid, her study of the Augustan sources in their contemporary context particularly convincing and insightful. As for the use of Christian and Late Antique sources, I would have welcomed more nuanced analyses paying attention to the impact of Christian agenda.

Darja Sterbenc Erker has wisely focused on a restricted number of female's rituals and not tried to survey all possible details concerning women in Roman religion. The careful study of their tasks in the rituals of Graecus ritus enables her to give a new and fresh insights to the scholarly discourse on gender in Roman society.