Jennifer Trimble, Women and Visual Replication in Roman Imperial Art and Culture.

Maura Heyn
University of North Carolina, Greensboro

Follow this and additional works at: https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj

Recommended Citation
Available at: https://crossworks.holycross.edu/necj/vol40/iss2/10

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by CrossWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in New England Classical Journal by an authorized editor of CrossWorks.
closely, has also led to new analysis. In turn, this has led to revisionist theories
in the twenty-first century that get beyond the old debates of the “Narrative
Numismatics” in the twentieth century.

In the concluding chapters, Holt introduces what he calls “Cognitive
Numismatics.” By pulling together all of the previous disciplines, and taking a
New Archaeology approach into what he hopes will be the New Numismatics,
Holt goes beyond the kings who ordered the coins’ production to look at the
process of production itself and the people who operated the mint. The analysis
of chapter 8, “A New Beginning,” points to the fact that both Greek and native
workers figured in the design and minting, and that over time the quality of
the Greek elements diminished or were diluted, evidenced by misspellings, for
instance. In chapter 9, “Coins and the Collapse of Civilization,” Holt discusses
how the coins circulated, the fiduciary purposes to which they were put, and
the intrinsic values of the coins, and argues that in this theater the images or
sentiments on the coins were not really considerations but were secondary to the
practical usage by all elements of society in terms of both class and ethnicity. The
picture is of a multicultural society operating on a practical level.

Lost World is a tour de force in terms of its scholarship, marked, incidentally,
by some excellent plates, and charming illustrations by the author’s daughter.
It takes a complicated subject, and some esoteric methodologies, and makes
them accessible to the general reader and the specialist alike. One might call
it, mirroring Holt’s terminology, “Cognitive Narrative.” Holts blends the
historiography of the subject, with its necessary disciplines, literature, epigraphy,
archaeology, and above all numismatics, into an eminently readable monograph
and an excellent introduction to the field and ancient Afghanistan.

Winthrop Lindsay Adams
University of Utah

Jennifer Trimble, Women and Visual Replication in Roman Imperial Art and Culture.
521-82515-3) $125.00.

The inhabitant of any given city in the eastern Roman empire in the second
century CE stood a good chance of seeing a larger-than-life marble portrait of
an adult woman with a classicizing body and an individualized head as he
walked through his city’s prominent venues. At the same time halfway across
the Mediterranean, an inhabitant of Rome was likely encountering a statue that
was virtually identical to its eastern counterpart in gesture, stance, size, and
dress, with the only two differentiating aspects being the inscription and the
head, maybe. This sameness of the so-called Large Herculaneum Woman statues
was deliberate, and shared by well over one hundred examples of the type from
the cities and sanctuaries of the Roman empire, mostly in the East, in the second
century CE. This replication in no way diminished the value of this portraiture; to
the contrary: these were high-status portraits made for elite women in response
to their public beneficence to their cities. Jennifer Trimble eloquently argues for
the significance of this replicated statue type, leaving aside the simplistic model of emulation of the Greeks in favor of an explanation of the type’s popularity that is rooted in the interconnected processes at work in marble production and civic euergetism in the second century CE. These interconnections are considered in detail in seven different chapters, addressing origins, production, replication, portraiture, space, differences, and endings. Trimble also includes a catalogue of every known Large Herculaneum Woman statue (202 examples) and a useful appendix on the dating of these statues.

In the first chapter, Trimble looks both at the history of the scholarship on the Large Herculaneum Woman and at the evidence for the precursor of this type of statuary. The origins for the type probably do date back to the fourth century BCE in the Greek world, according to Trimble, but the reasons for its popularity and replication in the Roman period are likely not connected to these origins. The Large Herculaneum Woman type surfaced in the Augustan period as a means of representing female members of the imperial family. This model for female statuary was then taken up by some local elite families in order to establish a connection to the imperial family. It was not until the second century CE that the proliferation of this type would be seen (133 of the 202 examples date to the second century), largely in the civic centers of the eastern empire where the Large Herculaneum Woman statue type would be used to represent members of local and regional elite families in connection to their benefactions to a particular city or sanctuary. This type of statuary became an “authoritative cliché to represent high-status femininity, public beneficence, and financial generosity” (34).

Certainly, the significance of these statues was connected to their essential sameness, and Trimble explores the roots of this phenomenon in the next several chapters. She looks first at the expansion of the marble trade in the second century CE and the effects of the mass production, standardization, and pre-fabrication during this period, and next at the proficiency of the local workshops where replicas of the Large Herculaneum Woman portrait type were produced with remarkable faithfulness to their model. These replicated bodies were sometimes paired with individualized heads, as is often seen in Roman portraiture, or with equally classicizing, and therefore generic, heads. The apparent paradox of portraiture which strives for uniformity is explored in the fourth chapter, where Trimble looks closely at the various components of the portrait: head, body, and inscription. In an interesting discussion of the interplay between the individual and the generic in all of these components, Trimble argues that the power behind this type of portraiture rested in its incorporation of formulaic building blocks, the type of body, the addition of the head, and the order of words in the inscription, that were immediately recognizable to the viewer. All of the elements were combined in predictable ways in order to create a public and honorific portrait of a woman from a prominent family who had contributed generously to the well-being of the city. Plancia Magna from Perge is a well-explained example.

In addition to the recurring elements in the portrait itself, the Large Herculaneum Woman was routinely paired with other types of honorific statuary in predictable, high-profile venues in the city. In the fifth chapter, Trimble describes several of these venues, including the various installations in Perge and the Nymphaeum of Herodes Atticus in Olympia, in order to highlight the widely
shared practices of display and the implications for reception. What stands out above all in this chapter is the intensely urban and public setting of this type of statuary (only seven statues were found in funerary contexts) and the resultant visibility for the elite families in the various cities. These families, with their adroit display of the visual *koine* of the empire, represent cultural competence and connections to the larger world. The proficiency with which the elite families of the (largely) eastern empire in second century CE displayed their cultural competence is further highlighted by non-canonical usages of this honorific portraiture in places as far-flung as southern Spain and the lower Danube, discussed in chapter 6. Even in these locales, however, the value of the Large Herculaneum Woman as a signifier of supra-local connections and participation in the visual *koine* of the empire is still clear, though the significance of this connotation, and expectations of fidelity, could vary greatly at the local level.

As striking as the number of Large Herculaneum Woman portraits produced in the second century CE is, even more surprising is their precipitous decline in the early third century. In the final chapter, Trimble explores the reasons for this abrupt halt in production. Moving beyond the exaggerated accounts of chaos in the third century as an explanation, Trimble focuses instead on the fragile nature of the interconnected network created in the previous century for the production and consumption of honorific portraiture, and also on changes in the societal prejudices towards the “prestige body” (318), which resulted in different expectations for elite identity in the third and fourth centuries.

This monograph is well worth reading, even if the Large Herculaneum Woman portrait type is not one’s primary interest. The volume considers much more than this particular type of statuary: there are interesting discussions of the quarrying, production, and carving of a variety of marble objects, including column capitals, garland sarcophagi, and Roman-style stage buildings, in the second century CE, as well as of the meaning and function of honorific portraiture in the Roman imperial city. Trimble’s research is thorough, and she actively engages with previous scholarship, some of it very recent, on the topic. She explains the issues in clear language, leads the reader through the argument with interesting and thought-provoking questions, and provides plenty of helpful explanatory footnotes and bibliography.

Maura Heyn
University of North Carolina, Greensboro


In matters touching on sexuality, the Western world has developed over the last half-century or so into what at least feels like a relatively frank and open place. We still have taboos, e.g., on pederasty and bestiality, and prejudices (only in 2013 did the first professional American basketball player come out as gay; the first transgender American president is unlikely to be elected for a generation or