Latin name for spikenard; looked up *Nardostachys grandiflora* and ordered two plants from Poyntzfield Herb Nursery in Ross & Cromarty (01381 610352), the only nursery in the British Isles that lists it. But when I turned to the recipe for Dodra (Nine Times Sauce) in which G. specifies 'half a vegetable stock cube' and proceeds to instruct how to rehydrate it ('Boil 150 ml/5 fl oz of water and dissolve the stock cube in it'), I had to wonder who this book is aimed at. Would anyone who uses stock cubes buy (never mind use) a book on Roman cookery or be likely to experiment with ingredients that are difficult to procure?

This confusion of direction is present too in the illustrations, which seem to be of the 'modern kitchens' specified in the subtitle, but I do wish they reminded me more of Roman mosaics than Edward Bawden prints. And my sense of social history balks at a book that brings together recipes from the whole span of Roman cookery, both temporally and spatially; sources range from about 400 B.C. to A.D. 500, and from Egypt to northern France. Even everyday food must have changed over 900 years and possessed its own distinctive character in different parts of the Roman world. However, the problems this presents to the cook, as opposed to the historian, are slight, and as gastronomes we can savour this anthology with the same delight we find in those Flemish still-lifes where flowers that never bloomed at the same season luxuriate together.

Cambridge HEATHER JARMAN

BLUESTOCKINGS

E. A. HEMELRIJK: *Matrona Docta. Educated Women in the Roman Élite from Cornelia to Julia Domna.* Pp. xvi + 382, pls. London and New York: Routledge, 1999. Cased, £55. ISBN: 0-415-19693-0.

The title of this book—*matrona docta*—is, as Hemelrijk readily admits, not to be found in Roman literature, where the *matrona* (the respectable married lady of rank) and the *puella docta* (the rather less respectable 'learned girl' of Latin love elegy) were kept well apart. However, it is undoubtedly the case that there were highly educated women in the Roman élite none the less, and H. sets out to investigate this phenomenon as fully as she can. She is interested, therefore, not just in the prevalence and practicalities of female learning in the upper classes, but also its wider social and cultural positioning: how did education and ideologies of gender interact around women, what were the possible congruities and/or contradictions between learning and dominant ideals of female conduct and character?

The evidence for Roman women's learning, and cultural activity more broadly, is, of course, limited, and H. chooses to restrict it still further. This is a systematic study of the literary evidence for educated women of the upper classes in Rome and Italy from the second century B.C. to the third century A.D., supported in places by some epigraphic and archaeological resources. Other élite women of the Latin-speaking provinces make the occasional appearance, though Christians (except Perpetua) are basically excluded; and the strong temptation to make use of comparative evidence from better documented times that share at least some of the features of the Roman situation is resolutely resisted.

The claim to system in respect of the literature is, however, no idle one. An opening summary of the complexities of aristocratic women's social position is followed by a pair of chapters covering, first, the circumstances of female education, then its aims

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and limitations, together with the varying reactions to it. Next attention turns to female patronage of literature and learning, and finally, to female writing itself, both poetry and prose. The discussion of each topic is pretty exhaustive, and extensively annotated.

The overall picture which emerges from this study is unsurprising, but H. does a real service in presenting it so clearly and fully. By the early empire, most (if not all) upper-class girls received an elementary education, and many also went on to the grammar course; but marriage intervened before the crucial rhetorical training began, training which would anyway have been pointless. Illiteracy was rare, but beyond that the scope and level of education varied widely according to particular circumstances. In contrast, therefore, to the standard shape of boys' education, clearly focused on the need to play a rôle in public life, girls' education was more haphazard and incidental. Social prestige could be gained from educated womenfolk, but in a more diffuse, and contested, form than that accruing to men for their cultural achievements. An ideal of educated (especially morally educated) motherhood served to justify practices of female learning; and, more broadly, it was the sense in which education could be subordinated to the traditional ideals of the *matrona* that ensured its acceptability. To avoid accusations of luxury and depravity on the one hand, and arrogance or masculinity on the other, women had to steer a careful course, but learning also had virtue, self-control, social status, and cultural participation to offer.

As cultural patrons too, women played a more limited and incidental rôle than men. But the establishment of the empire does seem to have opened up more opportunities for them to participate in Roman literary life in this manner. The lonely Cornelia is succeeded not just by women of the imperial household, from Octavia to Julia Domna, but also less elevated women, such as Argentaria Polla, who is addressed by both Statius and Martial. Both groups of female patrons are, however, praised in traditional terms, as loving wives, faithful widows, and devoted mothers, rather than for their rôle as either benefactors or arbiters of taste.

In the field of literary production, and more especially literary 'publication', further disparities emerge. Women wrote less than men and in less valued genres (letters, epigrams, elegies, and the occasional memoir, are the only assured forms of female writing). Moreover, they had less access to the literary coteries which constituted much of Roman cultural life (and were the key locations for the passage of work into public view), while ideals of female reticence, together with wider concerns about propriety, further hindered the acquisition of a wider audience for their work. All these factors, as well as other exigencies of transmission (though not discrimination against a distinctive female literary 'voice', for H. fails to identity such a thing), have contributed to the paucity of extant writings by Roman women.

This, then, is a book about the limitations of female opportunity and endeavour, the restrictive (but not inflexible) force of ideals; and there is also a sense in which these limits and boundaries permeate the scholarly undertaking itself, not just in respect of choices of evidence and methodology, but also in approaches to the wider issues involved. Possibly the most overworked word in these pages is 'ambiguous': social position, attitudes, and aims all end up in this category, but it is a frustrating term that both recognizes and masks complexity. It flags it up and then refuses to take it further, to try and unravel the complex. It becomes a mechanism for guarding the borders of the territory H. details with such welcome thoroughness and care; I just wished she had been more willing to cross them, however rashly.

King's College London REBECCA FLEMMING

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