

Grace Harriet Macurdy (1866-1946) and her Impact on the Study of Women's History

Response to Papers

The respondent's role in this panel will not be to present an independent scholarly paper, but rather to facilitate general discussion through providing a response to each of the participants' papers. Such responses might develop along the following lines:

“Feminist Scholar: Barbara McManus’ *The Drunken Duchess of Vassar.*” Grace Macurdy was ahead of her time, both in forging a career as a female professor in the early twentieth century and in choosing to tackle the subject of ancient women, a task which involved the deconstruction of multiple layers of ancient bias and scholarly prejudice. By insisting that the royal women of antiquity be measured by the same standards as the men, Macurdy challenged contemporary stereotypes not only of ancient women, but also of female academics. A response to this paper could lead to discussion on Macurdy's place both in the history of feminist scholarship and in the progress made by women in academia over the course of the twentieth century.

“Grace Harriet Macurdy and ‘Woman Power’ in Argead Macedonia: Eurydice, Mother of Philip II.” The question of ‘woman power’ is an important one in a discussion of Macurdy's work: it was the subtitle of her ground-breaking 1932 book, *Hellenistic Queens: A Study of Woman-Power in Macedonia, Seleucid Syria, and Ptolemaic Egypt*. The meaning of ‘power’ for royal women in any historical era is a hotly debated topic, and in the context of a panel on Macurdy's scholarship we anticipate significant discussion on this question.

“Grace Harriet Macurdy on the Seleucid Queens.” Several queens in the Seleucid kingdom – for instance, Laodice, the wife of Antiochos II, and Cleopatra Thea – had notorious reputations in the ancient sources. In Macurdy's time, male scholars tended to accept

unquestioningly all the claims of the ancient writers, which they reproduced without a cavil.

Macurdy herself was the first to challenge many of the negative judgements made by the ancient sources on Hellenistic queens, though her work still bears some of the marks of her own era.

Source bias is a particularly important methodological question in women's history, and

Macurdy's work on the Seleucid queens will provide a particularly apt opportunity for discussion of this problem.

“From Feminism to Orientalism: Grace Harriet Macurdy on Cleopatra and Antony.” Of all the Hellenistic queens, Cleopatra VII is by far the most famous (or infamous). The sources on Cleopatra are virtually uniformly hostile, and she is portrayed as a decadent eastern femme fatale who lures Antony to his doom. Macurdy's presentation of Cleopatra restored her to her role as a reigning monarch, as intelligent and strong-willed as any of the men who had ruled before her. A response to this paper could focus on the challenges of sifting out the ‘real’ Cleopatra from the legend in light of the many years of scholarship since the publication of Macurdy's work.