

Framing Assemblages: Female Commemoration in Cyrene

In 2017, Jennifer Trimble examined a female portrait statue from Cyrene to argue that different aspects of social identity come into focus depending on the “frame,” or viewpoint, from which a statue is analyzed. However, in the middle of her discussion, Trimble shifted her argument from this statue, whose exact findspot is unknown, to a statue from Ephesus so that she could expand the frame to include an inscribed base and known physical setting. Trimble’s chapter successfully articulates that each scale of analysis relies on the viewer’s ability to understand the relationship between individual parts and increasingly larger frames. However, her need to switch to a different portrait statue in order to continue her discussion highlights an important issue within the study of female commemoration: when a statue is lacking in specific context, it is studied only as an individual object or as it represents an example of a standardized type. I argue that the frame of analysis for statues lacking specific context can go beyond their existence as examples of an oft-copied type to a more archaeological interpretation based on assemblage theory (for a recent discussion of this approach, see Jervis 2019). This paper aims to frame the discussion of female commemoration, both written and sculpted, not at the level of individual monuments, but rather as objects that are a part of larger assemblages related to discrete places from Hellenistic and Roman Cyrene.

In the city of Cyrene, the extramural sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone, the sanctuary of Apollo, and the agora and adjoining streets were all utilized frequently as spaces for female representation from a relatively early time in the city’s history (for major publications on these spaces, see White et al. 1984 - 2012, Smith and Porcher 1864, and Stucchi 1965, respectively). These large yet relatively bounded places will serve as the frames through which to examine a corpus of inscribed monuments and statues connected with local, elite women from the

Hellenistic and Roman periods. Although their exact findspots are typically unknown, these commemorative monuments do possess a more generalized context (e.g. within the agora, near the temple of Apollo, etc.). Even the statue with which Trimble began her discussion can be given a relatively secure provenance within or near Cyrene's temple of Venus (2017; see Rosenbaum 1960, no. 41 for the statue's findspot). Mapping the spatial and temporal distributions of this evidence presents an opportunity to see what can be learned by treating these monuments as part of larger assemblages related to a space and not just as individual objects.

By investigating intra-city patterns for when and how women were represented, this paper builds upon Trimble's framing approach and uses assemblages to examine aspects of social identity as they relate to subsets of the community. For example, as my distribution maps indicate, women in the extramural sanctuary of Demeter and Persephone were at times more likely to be represented by a statue than to have dedicated a statue for another person. These patterns can then be compared to those bound by the other spatial frames. How do the characteristics of this assemblage relate to those in the city's agora? This paper reveals that assemblages of commemorative monuments connected to women followed preexisting traditions and precedents and reflect social practices within these predefined places. In this way, we might be able to understand more about one monument by placing it in the context of the other commemorative practices of the community or, in this case, within the subset of benefactions found within these spaces, or frames of analysis. It is this possible idea of community, created by repeated actions in distinct spaces, which I hope to explore at Cyrene more broadly.

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