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*Women's Influence on Classical Civilization* by Fiona McHardy and Eireann Marshall:

### Book Review

The representation of ancient women in economics, politics, science, law, and the arts and their real position in this field depended on many factors. In addition to the economic situation, the general level of scientific development, socio-cultural traditions, and the system of legislation also had a serious impact. The classical civilization has gone down in history as a century of rapid growth of women's participation in various spheres of public life. The book *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization*, edited by Fiona McHardy and Eireann Marshall, covers some of the most important aspects of women's influence on the development of the classical civilization.

Both McHardy and Marshall specialize on classical studies, their other works also being dedicated to this historical period. McHardy is the co-editor of *Lost Dreams of Classical Athens*, and Marshall edited *Death and Disease in the Ancient City* (McHardy and Marshall 3). The authors wrote the book under review in 2004 – the period that was marked as the beginning of the active promotion of the feminist movement in the USA, the birthplace of the authors.

The authors' aim is to refute the stereotype that in the era of classicism, all great discoveries were made by men. From McHardy and Marshall's point of view of, in antiquity, there were many women who directly influenced the course of history (4). Thus, the authors' goal can be regarded as an attempt to draw the readers' attention to famous personalities of the

classical era, while respecting historical accuracy and objectivity. In order to support the feminist movement and destroy the one-sided perception of women as keepers of the family hearth, the authors describe the fate of the great women of antiquity.

The reader can feel that the authors' purpose has been achieved. First of all, McHardy and Marshall prepared the ground for reflection by expressing their opinion on the formulated problem in the introduction. Further, they support their stance by writing about more than fifty outstanding women of the classical era. Each of the chapters contains valuable research on outstanding females of the classical era. Besides editing the book and writing the introduction to it, both McHardy and Marshall have authored one chapter each.

In the conclusion, McHardy and Marshall summarize the work, consolidating and generalizing the information given in each chapter. As a support of the authors' and editors' achievement, one can state the fact that they are authoritative scholars in the field of classicism. McHardy and Marshall turn to the collective stock of their knowledge. Since they are historians and feminists, they are able to characterize historical figures without violating historical authenticity. McHardy and Marshall use their own point of view only where it is appropriate. Generally, the book is based on facts and not on personal opinions.

Although in most cases the text refers to reportorial writing, the authors make an effort at interpretive writing. They do not take responsibility to assess the significance of historical events and personalities. However, when citing facts, McHardy and Marshall emphasize their importance with hyperboles and metaphors. The book is written in a popular science style, so it is intended for different groups of readers. The addressees of the book can be scientists and future specialists in the field of history. Although the authors of the texts are experts in the field of classicism, the book is not overloaded with highly specialized scientific concepts. This makes

it acceptable for people interested in history but without specialized education.

The social and political history presented by the authors is slightly emphasized. Although McHardy and Marshall try to sound unbiased, their writing style, for example, the artistic characteristics they give to historical figures, affect readers' perception of historical events. Although all of the women mentioned in the book had social and political significance, perhaps it was less important than presented in the book. The dates of the classical era are quite difficult to establish with absolute certainty, which is due to the insufficient number of well-preserved sources. Despite this, McHardy and Marshall use as many dates as possible. On the one hand, this provides the text with facts. However, at the same time, in places where historians' opinions differ, the authors choose the dates and interpretation of events that are best suited for their chosen thesis.

The book *Woman's Influence on Classical Civilization* is a revision. It compares the information from earlier editions written before 2004 with the authors' more pronounced feminist point of view (McHardy and Marshall 3). The editors included the works of other scholars who are specialists in narrower areas of classicism. McHardy and Marshall also resort to examples of antiquity's preserved written and material heritage. Their text is based on historical facts, analysis of historical sources, and literature of specialists – contemporaries or eyewitnesses of historical events of classicism. McHardy and Marshall also use historiography quotes that are controversial due to different interpretations by various historians.

The authors use various methods of working with scholarly sources, such as quotations and paraphrasing, but still, the analysis of literature prevails in the book. For example, McHardy and Marshall often resort to deconstruction, which is based on changing the sequence of presentation of the author's thoughts. The researchers carefully selected the material and included

fragments at appropriate moments concerning the source. By interweaving the main idea with the proven hypotheses of other authors, they argumentatively describe their position.

The subject matter is discussed in specifics: every woman's story is integrated into the historical context. The authors pay attention not only to the historical person but also to their surroundings. The book is particular: sometimes, too many details about women are given, which are hypotheses since it is impossible to know much information reliably. This applies to gossip, guesses, and legends surrounding prominent historical figures: although such details cannot be refuted, there is no direct evidence of them (McHardy and Marshall 3). The account is given using facts, and the interpretation of events is very profound.

The story of each woman begins with a detailed summary of events. McHardy and Marshall provide a transparent background of an important event, a biography of a historical person, and a political and social context. Next, the authors analyze the information provided: they deduce assumptions from previously proven statements. McHardy and Marshall, relying on well-known events, logically lead the reader to new hypotheses, supplementing facts with personal conclusions.

The book is intended for a scholarly audience as it contains numerous notes. It is not intended for the general reading public as it is a collection of facts and their scholarly analysis. However, the text does not contain too many highly specialized scientific terms that are difficult to understand. Thus, the book can be read and comprehended by people who are interested in history and do not have a technical education. The difference between this work of others within the same genre is the feminist orientation of the book. Previously written papers included only a few outstanding women, whereas the vast majority of the personalities in question were men. Meanwhile, the book under review is devoted exclusively to women of the antiquity era who had

the most pronounced influence on the course of world history.

The book includes illustrations, figures, and tables, which depict physical evidence of the scientific facts cited by the authors. For example, they portray archaeological findings of the classicism era. Charts conveniently present various data referred to in the text for establishing the chronological order of events. All illustrations, figures, and tables are accompanied by an appropriate text explaining the features of its informational purpose. An adequate visual representation of the data obtained more clearly demonstrates the differences, the trend of change, the nature of the relationships, and the very fact of the existence of the historical phenomena being studied, compared with just a text. The informational essence of such images reflects either quantitative characteristics and qualitative features in the form of visual elements with the indicator under study using a photograph or an artistic vision of a historical object.

The significance of McHardy and Marshall's work is the explanation of how women in the classical era performed not only the social roles of homemakers of wives and mothers. The book provides evidence that females were also prominent political, social, and cultural figures, which contributes to the feminist community. Although the book cannot claim to be completely objective, it includes many famous female names of the classical era who have taken a worthy place in the history of human civilization. The authors and editors have analyzed many credible sources and supplemented each chapter with factual evidence. Therefore, this work may be considered the complete list of the great women of the world of antiquity.

## Work Cited

McHardy, Fiona, and Eireann Marshall, editors. *Women's Influence on Classical Civilization*.

Routledge, 2004.