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Elite Women of Roman Sparta

Classical Sparta's fascination has long lain in the perceived singularity of its institutions, constitutional and social, conspicuous among which was the relative freedom afforded women. The later city, on the other hand, suffered until recently from scholarly neglect and disparagement, precisely because it had clearly lost its distinguishing characteristics in the turmoil of the late third to mid-second century BC. But Spartan history did not end with the battle of Leuctra or even the Achaean War, and the late Hellenistic and Roman city can be a suitable object of study in its own right, as recent scholarship has begun to make clear (e.g. Cartledge and Spawforth, *A Tale of Two Cities*, 1989, and Kennell, *The Gymnasium of Virtue*, 1995) The same holds true for upper-class women in Roman Sparta, whose active participation in the city's public life is amply attested by inscriptions (e.g. IG V.1, 573-602). Although it has been pointed out that such activity was nothing unusual for the Roman period (Cartledge & Spawforth, pp. 200-201; van Bremen, *The Limits of Participation*, 1996, p. 82), this very fact makes it possible, by drawing upon the extensive parallel epigraphical evidence from other Greek cities under the empire, to sketch the contours of the public life of elite women in this historically and culturally important city to a degree not possible for earlier periods.