



# The Murder of Regilla: A Case of Domestic Violence in Antiquity

By Sarah B. Pomeroy

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**The Murder of Regilla: A Case of Domestic Violence in Antiquity** By Sarah B. Pomeroy

From an acclaimed author comes a fascinating story of the life, marriage, and death of an all but forgotten Roman woman. Born to an illustrious Roman family in 125 CE, Regilla was married at the age of fifteen to Herodes, a wealthy Greek who championed his country's values at a time when Rome ruled.

Twenty years later--and eight months pregnant with her sixth child--Regilla died under mysterious circumstances, after a blow to the abdomen delivered by Herodes' freedman. Regilla's brother charged Herodes with murder, but a Roman court (at the urging of Marcus Aurelius) acquitted him. Sarah Pomeroy's investigation suggests that despite Herodes' erection of numerous monuments to his deceased wife, he was in fact guilty of the crime.

A pioneer in the study of ancient women, Pomeroy gathers a broad, unique array of evidence, from political and family history to Greco-Roman writings and archaeology, to re-create the life and death of Regilla. Teasing out the tensions of class, gender, and ethnicity that gird this story of marriage and murder, Pomeroy exposes the intimate life and tragedy of an elite Roman couple. Part archaeological investigation, part historical re-creation, and part detective story, *The Murder of Regilla* will appeal to all those interested in the private lives of the classical world and in a universal and compelling story of women and family in the distant past.

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### Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

*Starred Review.* In one of the great scandals of second-century Greece, Regilla, the pregnant Roman wife of Greek philosopher and rhetorician Herodes, died from a blow to the abdomen. Drawing on archeological and textual evidence, Pomeroy (*Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves*) carefully reconstructs Regilla's life, her eventual murder and Herodes's trial and acquittal, splendidly recreating the Greek culture of A.D. 160 and its attitudes around class, culture and sex. An upper-class woman with some schooling and exposure to the cultural affairs of her husband, Regilla owned her own property, which became a sore spot in her marriage. In other ways, though, she was hardly unique. Regilla likely could not communicate well in Greek, nor could she match wits with her husband. She married at 15, died at about 35 and ably performed the primary duty of a wife in the Roman Empire: bearing children. Numerous illustrations and quotations lend depth to Pomeroy's masterful depiction of second-century Greece and the tragic portrait of a woman whose story has been lost to history until now. Illus. (Sept. 25)

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From [The New Yorker](#)

In Athens in 160 A.D., Regilla, a Roman aristocrat who was eight months pregnant, died after being kicked in the abdomen. Her husband, Herodes, a wealthy and powerful Athenian orator, was tried for the killing but cleared, thanks to the influence of Marcus Aurelius. Pomeroy argues that he was guilty. She pieces together what is known, or can be deduced, about Regilla's life and death—with few exceptions, she notes, "the words of women in antiquity are not extant"—and provides an absorbing analysis of justice, society, culture, and customs in the second-century Roman Empire. Women had less standing in Athens than in Rome, and Herodes was a leader in an intellectual movement that sought to reassert the glories of Attic culture (and perhaps some of its misogyny) in the era of Roman rule. He was quick to erect monuments to his dead wife, but Pomeroy reads guilt in his haste and calls them "tantamount to a confession."

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Review

A fascinating and vivid portrait, by one of the greatest authorities on ancient women. Drawing on a wide variety of ancient sources, Pomeroy enables us to see Regilla in her complex and dangerous environment. An informative and accessible introduction to the world of the second century AD.

--Mary Lefkowitz, Wellesley College

A bold and well-informed first history of Regilla herself. Pomeroy is supremely well qualified to assess literary, epigraphic, architectural, and sculptural evidence. Her dramatic narrative and sympathetic presentation afford a gripping read.

--Barbara Levick, Oxford University

Imaginatively deploying sparse and disparate sources, Pomeroy has constructed a dazzling mosaic, setting the biography of a unique woman into the little-known world of second century Roman Greece.

--Jo Ann Kay McNamara, author of *Sisters in Arms: Catholic Nuns through Two Millennia*

Sarah Pomeroy has been one of the most influential voices in the study of women in antiquity. It's good to find her now turning to the multi-cultural world of Greece under the Roman Empire--and to a nasty case of domestic murder.

--Mary Beard, Cambridge University

In one of the great scandals of second-century Greece, Regilla, the pregnant Roman wife of Greek philosopher and rhetorician Herodes, died from a blow to the abdomen. Drawing on archeological and textual evidence, Pomeroy carefully reconstructs Regilla's life, her eventual murder and Herodes's trial and acquittal, splendidly recreating the Greek culture of A.D. 160 and its attitudes around class, culture and sex...Numerous illustrations and quotations lend depth to Pomeroy's masterful depiction of second-century Greece and the tragic portrait of a woman whose story has been lost to history until now. (*Publishers Weekly (starred review)* 2007-06-04)

[Pomeroy] provides an absorbing analysis of justice, society, culture, and customs in the second-century Roman Empire. (*New Yorker* 2007-12-10)

Sarah B. Pomeroy's passionate account in *The Murder of Regilla*, following her from birth to death, is a sharp reminder of the brutally blunt edges of gender inequality.

--Joy Connolly (*Times Literary Supplement* 2008-04-11)

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