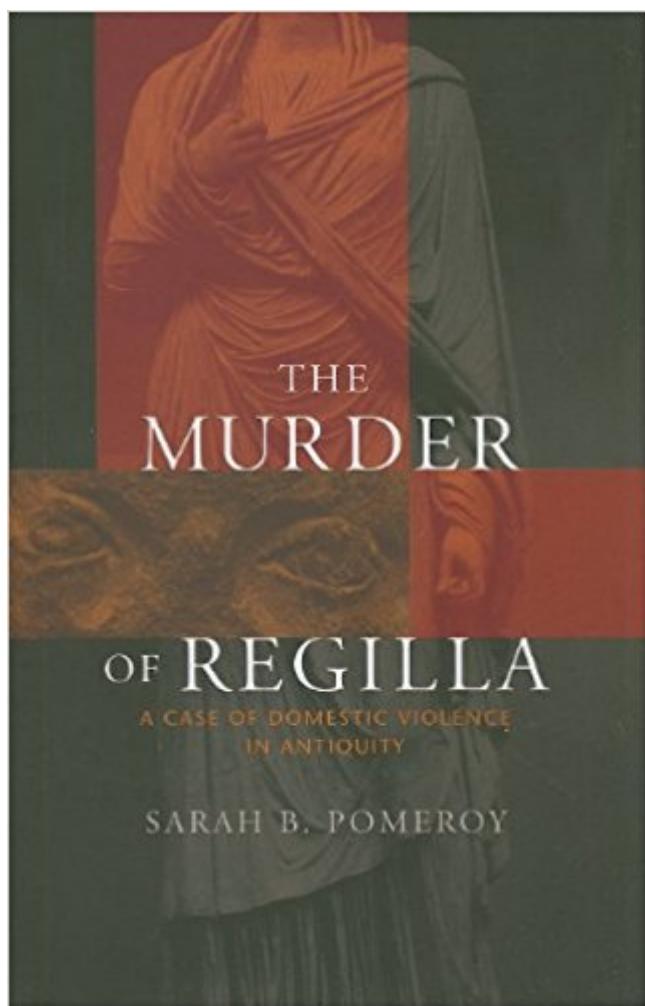


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# The Murder Of Regilla: A Case Of Domestic Violence In Antiquity



## Synopsis

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.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

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) Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

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." Copyright © 2007 Click here to subscribe to The New Yorker --This text refers to the Hardcover edition.

Pomeroy tells an historical fiction story although is is more historical than fiction. She illustrates not only the difference in Roman and Greek women, but also tells the reader more about the Roman and Greek societies. If one needed an introduction on women in the ancient world, this is the book to start with. After reading this one, I bought her other one as well as two more on women in ancient society. It will peak your interest.

The author seems to be more suited to writing historical fiction, rather than this speculative attempt at actual history. While I commend her for taking on such a difficult topic, and her thoroughness of research is not to be denied, there is only so much you can do with what she calls "evidence." It

sounds intriguing to learn about those who have been silent in ancient history--the women, the children, the lower classes--but the fact of the matter is that we can know absolutely nothing for certain about them. Prefacing every sentence with "It can be assumed that," "Perhaps," or "It may be that" does not make for good history. It makes for speculation, and speculation is not history. Beyond this, there are several problems with her historical method. In order to back up statements that are obviously born of a late twentieth-century bias, she skews her evidence to fit her claim (when a historian should be willing to change his or her conclusion based on evidence that contradicts it). The endnotes are rife with this sort of disturbing leap in logic from the meagerest of evidence to a definite conclusion. While I understand that it is a popular theory at the moment that Achilles and Patroclus were involved with each other, anyone who has read the actual Homer would know that it is not even hinted at--and clearly she has not. She has read plenty of recent historians, but I find it unfortunate that she would make definite statements of "assumed fact" that are not based on the actual texts at all. She does manage to keep the story interesting, but her historical practice leaves much to be desired--perfect for historical fiction. All she would have to do is take away some of the speculative words, admit to it being fiction, and it would be well worth a read.

Basically, this book is about a real murder case from Ancient Rome. A man beat his pregnant wife to death, to the scandal of everyone. Regilla's husband was obviously gay. Even the homoerotic Romans thought he paid a little bit too much attention to his male paramours. What role this played in the murder, though, is anyone's guess. I think this book could have been a lot more interesting than it was, considering the topic, but academic writing is often very dry and we must forgive that fact. It was sort of intriguing to learn about the criminal justice system of the time (if I'm reading right, murders did not get prosecuted automatically but someone had to bring a prosecution against the alleged killer, like a civil suit today). But I think I could only recommend this book to classics historians or women's studies scholars.

Pomeroy, a well established historian of ancient history, provides a fascinating glimpse into the world of women of the highest social class in Imperial Rome. Appia Annia Regilla Atilia Caucidia Tertulla married a very rich husband but one who was somewhat alien because of his Greek lineage. When Regilla follows him to live in one of his massive estates outside Athens, things fall apart. After giving birth to at least five children, she suffers a brutal murder, kicked in the stomach at the age of 35 while eight months pregnant. Her husband is implicated, is tried in Rome, and is acquitted. We know of Regilla's fate in the beginning of this tale. What we learn from then on is

everything Pomeroy can tease out of the few extant sources regarding Regilla - the possible reasons for the murder, the tenuous position of even wealthy women in this age, and the social milieu in which Regilla lived her short life.

Professor Pomeroy's work is an excellent exercise in speculative history, where she pieces together various fragments of evidence to weave a compelling narrative. She traces the story about how a young Roman girl came of age, was married off to a narcissistic Roman-Greek millionaire, more interested in male sex toys than serious companionship with his wife, dragged off to Greece, and eventually murdered by him. She explores issues of class, national identity, gender, daily life, sexual mores, property, and legal institutions, through her compelling narrative. Pomeroy's laconic prose adds to the sense that you're peering through a window into the ancient Roman world. Highly recommended!

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