

On Shumka, L. J., *Designing Women: Studies in the Representation of Femininity in Roman Society*, (Victoria, University of Victoria, 2000). Chapter Three: Depicting Femininity: the Iconography of Ornatus

A Summary

- In this chapter Shumka looks at artistic depictions of women and their femininity in Graeco-Roman art.
- She primarily takes evidence from representations of femininity in funerary monuments. Which, often – she states – shows women grooming, or grooming products. For example: this mid-late second century AD cippus.
- She takes into account not only native Roman art, but also foreign pieces which may have influence Rome’s art style.
- Shumka concludes that personal grooming was key to ancient Roman ideas of femininity.
- However, Shumka asserts that it is not so, as might be assumed, that this prominent iconography of grooming products was borne from efforts to please men, at least not entirely.



- Note the prominent placement of the mirror.
- Right next to this woman’s epitaph
- Certainly suggests the importance of personal grooming amongst women.



- Above is the Roman mid-late second century Ad cippus, below is a Greek fifth century BC grave stele.
- Note the inclusion of a mirror, an article of grooming, in both images.
- Shows both cultures link femininity and grooming.
- Suggests possible cross-cultural influence.

An Opinion

- Shumka introduces her chapter well, establishing the types of evidence she intends to used, and her arguments in terms which are easily understood
- Her use of evidence is considered; by looking at the potentially influential Greek works she is better able to determine which parts of the Roman works, which are her primary focus, are specific to Roman perceptions of femininity.
- Her conclusion is nuanced, she defies the more simplistic assertions of other scholars – that these grooming products significant because of nothing more male imposed standards of beauty – but does not reject it. Ultimately, her conclusion seems considered, and – because it is multi-faceted – well balanced.