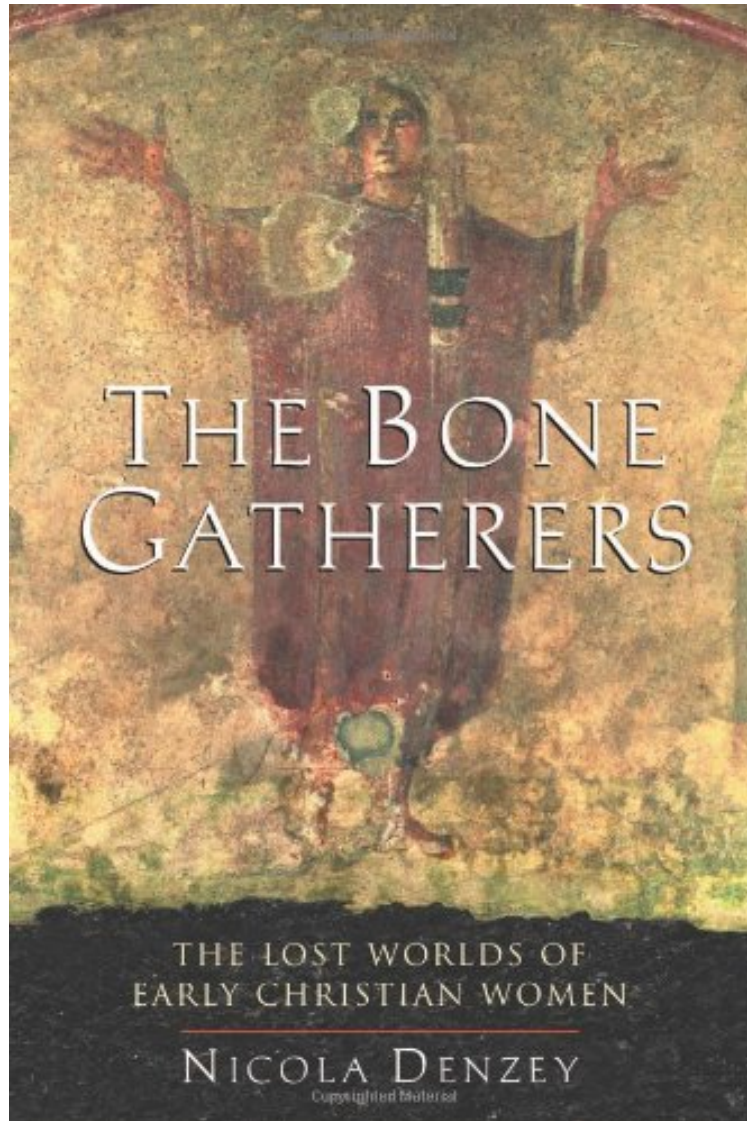


The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women

Nicola Denzey

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Nicola Denzey : The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised *The Bone Gatherers: The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women*:

7 of 7 people found the following review helpful. In Search of the Women of Roman Christianity By Dr. John B. Switzer, ObSB In this book, Nicola Denzey takes us on a most interesting journey to the lives of Christian women in the late Roman period (first through fourth centuries CE). As she suggests, it appears that the artwork of Christian catacombs might tell us some things about these women that the overt Christian tradition sometimes fails to remember.

How are they remembered -- and how are they "mis-remembered"? What influence did they wield in early Roman Christianity that was later taken from them as the faith became more hierarchical and male-dominated rather than prophetic and with much accepted female influence? This is a fascinating read that is well documented, though at times one wonders if the author is citing history or writing a historical novel. Read it carefully and judge for yourself. You'll be left with some terrific questions, many new insights, and a load of possibilities for further research. 14 of 19 people found the following review helpful. Uneven tones for women clutching bones

By Alvaro Lewis

I very much wanted to love this book because its claims to rescue women and their stories lost in the ruins of early Christian Rome seemed inherently compelling and rewarding. The explorations of the book, however, have been composed as if with forking tongs but with no effort made to return them to same tridentine handle. Are we learning how to read the archaeological evidence in a single Roman catacomb, are we following legends of matrons and maidens hoping to make singular historical sense of matrimony (for example) across three centuries, or are we reading the tales of martyrs against the grain to profit our predispositions? In fact, Nicola Denzey allows us to do all three of these. As a result though, this reader was left with a sense of a fragmented education. What thesis can hope to contain such divergent eras, methods, and aims without strain? The book seems to contain distinct essays on women, archaeology and history over a period of time rather than an argument or narrative of the social and historical experience. Denzey has read broadly and is remarkably able to sketch vivid scenes of historical and artistic pasts. She also adds some neat comparative details, for example, when she notes a population density in Rome that outstrips that of Calcutta. This book hasn't figured out if it is an academic work or a work of popular history and religion. I think that other readers will encounter this same sense of uncertainty. Many of the Latin passages are plagued with errors (blunders as simple as mistaken gender agreement between adjective and noun). An editor's keen eye could have saved this young scholar more than half a dozen such slips. In fairness to the author, the subtitle of this book offers a reading of "The Lost Worlds of Early Christian Women". This use of "Worlds" may suggest an intent to demonstrate an irreducibly diverse feminine experience in early Christian Rome. For sure, not all of these women gathered bones.

3 of 26 people found the following review helpful. Interesting Book if You Can Morally Ignore Its Female Chauvinism

By Reality Check

There are parts of this book that I found fascinating, and others that I had to skip over due to its deep hatred of men. These hateful parts should be shunned by any decent and moral human being. One may criticize the Nazis for hating 1% of the human race - what should you do for someone who hates 50% of the human race? The author's flawed, and quite frankly, bigoted, premise is that women have been oppressed throughout history (sounds like, by default, the author believes that women are truly the weaker sex, since how could they always be treated as weaker). She extends this narrow-minded thinking to the belief that in the late years of the Roman Empire stories of militant male saints were emphasized at the expense of female saints. Even though she is supposedly an historian, the author conveniently ignores the 800 pound gorilla in the room - the same time period she is discussing the elevation of martial male saints is also the same period of the fall of the Roman empire, and essentially the end of Western civilization (the Visigoths sacked Rome in 410 AD). Of course the Romans had to emphasize male saints to inspire its Christian soldiers to defend Rome. Surely this book author, even in her wildest women's libber fantasies, could not believe that Roman women, average height of 5' 2", could carry a pack and weapons load of 67 pounds many miles a day, and be willing to be cut to pieces by barbarians, while slashing a 3 pound Gladius sword for hours on end. This author also conveniently ignores how Roman women, in some senses, had more rights than modern women. Take for example the right of "parrhesia" that Roman women had for freedom of speech to their husbands. Empress Theodora used this right to publically degrade her husband, Emperor Justinian, in front of his full council of state over his handling of the Nika Riots. She got away with it, even though the Roman Emperor was the most powerful man on Earth at the time, and had life and death powers over most of his subjects (if not all of them). I do not believe that the wife of a modern day President would believe she had the right, or privilege to accomplish that kind of belittling today. Throughout this book, I have not been able to determine if the author looks down on Christians or not. Many times she is derisive of key Christian saints. For example, she twice disrespectfully refers to the horrible torture and deaths of very young Christian girls as a "spatter-fest" (page 130) or as "spatter tales of dismembered women" (page 167). In summary, I know our Western society not only allows, but encourages hatred of men, so most of the potential audiences for this book will not be capable of thinking for themselves, and will find this book a useful read, in spite of its bigotry that should be obvious to truly independent thinkers.

When Nicola Denzey leads tour groups into the Roman Catacombs, participants are struck by the splendor of the burial chambers many of which were created by or for women. Yet until Denzey began her research for *The Bone Gatherers*, no one had ever drawn on this evidence to read into those women's lives. *The Bone Gatherers* introduces us to these powerful women who, until recently, had been lost to history from the sorrowing mothers and ghastly brides of pagan Rome to the child martyrs and women sponsors who shaped early Christianity. It was often only in death that ancient women became visible through the buildings, burial sites, and art constructed in their memory and Denzey uses this archaeological evidence, along with text records, to resurrect the lives of several fourth-century women. Surprisingly, she finds that representations of aristocratic Roman Christian women show a shift in the value

and significance of womanhood over the fourth century: once esteemed as powerful leaders or patrons, women came to be revered only as virgins or martyrsfigureheads for sexual purity. These depictions belie a power struggle between the sexes within early Christianityone that women lost, and one that has had long-lasting implications for the roles of women in the Church.Written in a lively narrative style, *The Bone Gatherers* is pitched perfectly to both the interested general reader and to scholars. Denzey's expert placing of the funerary images of early Christian and pagan women into their social and cultural milieus, and her rich, well-researched iconographical reading of ancient imagery helps us to see the changing roles of womenboth Christian and paganduring the early centuries of Christian Rome. Ann Steinsapir, author of *Rural Sanctuaries in Roman Syria: The Creation of a Sacred Landscape* and education specialist at the J. Paul Getty MuseumNicola Denzey's impeccable scholarship and intimate and vivid style of writing makes tangible and credible the power of the holy that was mediated by womenwomen saints and women patrons. *The Bone Gatherers* allows the reader to transcend both historical and scholarly distance to encounter the forgotten women who also shaped Christianity. Karen Jo Torjesen, author of *When Women Were Priests: Women's Leadership in the Early Church and the Scandal of their Subordination in the Rise of Christianity*Nicola Denzey's lively, readable book opens up a fascinating, long hidden world of early Christian women. This fine work not only lets us into their world, but shows how it was kept hidden so long. Elaine Pagels, author of *Beyond Belief and Reading Judas: The Gospel of Judas and the Shaping of Christianity*The *Bone Gatherers* resurrects the voices of long-forgotten, but significant women in ancient Rome, as Denzey attempts to restore their rightful place in history. Whether or not you're religious, it's a great feminist read. M.L. Madison, *Feminist Review*Nicola Denzey is a lecturer in the study of religion at Harvard University. She earned her M.A. and Ph.D. in Religions of Late Antiquity from Princeton and recently served as a faculty research associate in Harvard Divinity Schools Womens Studies in Religion Program.

From Publishers WeeklyIn late antiquity, pious Christian women buried the remains of saints and martyrs, sometimes on land the women themselves owned. The legends of these bone gatherers launch Denzey's investigation into the experiences of third- and fourth-century Roman women based on the complex visual and archeological evidence they left behind in the city's catacombs. Denzey, a lecturer at Harvard University, uses a technique akin to feminist midrash to decipher what these women's lives were really like as the feminine ideal shifted from pagan Rome's devoted wives to Catholic Christianity's virgin martyrs. Sometimes delving into the macabre, the author probes into the meanings revealed by underground burial spaces and wall paintings that reflect women's presence. The study concludes with an analysis of Pope Damasus's impact in the fourth century: a stunning masculinization of Rome's sacred space the privatization of women's roles, and the end of the female tradition of bone gathering. Although the book's black-and-white photographs are sparse and hard to decipher, Denzey's prose paints vivid pictures of the sites she visits. Some readers may find her imaginative interpretations of the visual evidence too speculative, but her densely layered inquiry is insightful and haunting. (Aug.) Copyright Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved. . . . her densely layered inquiry is insightful and haunting. Publishers WeeklyUnique in its restricted time/place focus, the study probes in-depth with a 21st Century feminist eye. . ." Library Journal