

ANNAMÁRIA R. FACSÁDY

„*Forma bonum fragile est...*” Beauty Care in Roman Times

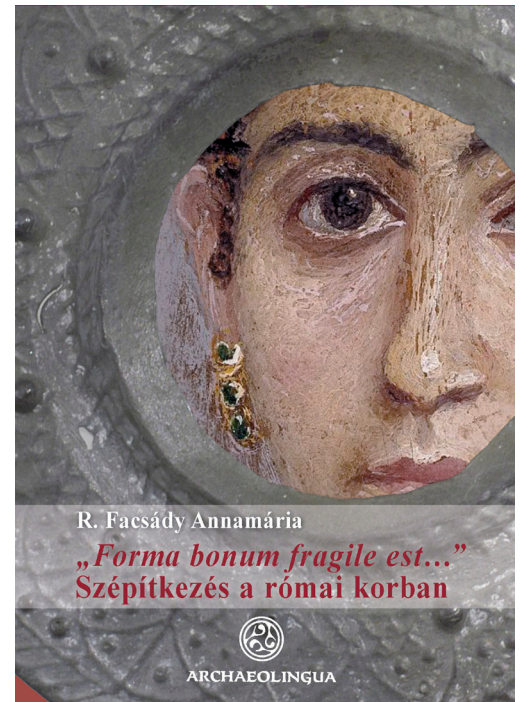
FERENC REDŐ

Annamária R. Facsády's book on Roman beauty care was published in Hungarian by Archaeolingua Foundation and Publishing House. This brief article reveals several important aspects about the main points of the work.

The author is a researcher of great experience who can boast of a wide range of achievements in field of archaeology, particularly in the realm of excavating Roman era cemeteries, while the study of Roman jewelry, iconography and numismatics occupies an important part of her theoretical work. Therefore, serious previous study underlies this seemingly light subject, and there are few precedents on this narrow topic. Interested readers, who are otherwise well-educated but uninformed on the subject, will find that there are intriguing research results in this field. In addition they will understand how its study increases our knowledge of antique civilizations and the Roman Empire in relation to the natural sciences, art history and even sociology. Archaeolingua Foundation and Publishing House, which for the most part publishes monographs or collections of essays in foreign languages, only issues works in Hungarian that are of great domestic interest. In this case, this format has been chosen because we believe that the published work will be able to speak to the Hungarian audience, due to both its outstanding scholarship and its readable style.

The introduction provides an easy to follow structural outline to navigate the content of the book. The author first deals with written sources. Histories, fiction and inscriptions are all different types of sources, but they complement one another well in the carefully collected materials. Illustrations follow this, the best known of which are the monumental sculptures and gravestone carvings, as well as mosaic works. The portraits from Faiyum are very beautiful and valuable painted examples, and a special emphasis is also placed on portraiture on coins. Finally, to complete the story, she presents archeological finds, which in recent years have provided important new information due to large-scale excavations of cemeteries throughout Europe.

The chapters that expound upon the subject more or less closely follow this structure, and they discuss care for personal beauty in Roman times essentially from two aspects. In the first of these, the author surveys the methods of personal care for the female body, in other words bathing culture, treatments for the body, face, mouth and hair, and the implements used for these. In the second she dresses and adorns the women, so wardrobe, accessories and jewelry are covered. At the end of the work, to wrap things up, she deals with men as well, in a small, relatively insignificant chapter that is like a coda.



R. Facsády Annamária

„*Forma bonum fragile est...*”
Szépipékezés a római korban

ARCHAEOLINGUA

Annamária R. Facsády
„*Forma bonum fragile est...*”
Beauty Care in Roman Times

Budapest: Archaeolingua, 2013
142 pp, 70 illustrations

Quite interesting and entertaining parts of the book are the literary quotes that talk about society's opinions on beauty care. The author has a pleasant sense of humor, and she shows her femininity in a charming and unostentatious manner that shines through in her choice of source material and her commentary that is sometimes ironic and at other times self-deprecating. Alongside this, the entire work is interlaced with recipes from scientific authors of Roman times, which serve as guidelines for how they made their witch's brews of cosmetics that were sometimes modest, other times thoroughly demanding and at times even extravagant beyond all measure. I am certain that the book will be enjoyed by women interested in antiquity but living in the modern world, and in secret they will even test out one or two of the recipes they think they are capable of preparing.

An important offshoot of the topic is the issue of fashion, which leads to the sociological examination of the entire society, or certain groups within it. This is a very interesting area of research into the multinational but highly centralized Roman Empire. The author carefully follows the variations in attire that can be observed and constantly points these out through illustrations. These differences can in some cases be due to social class and in others are based on age or profession. Of great importance are the differences in fashion or attire that can be noted between the inhabitants of the center of the empire and its periphery – in our case Pannonia. The author dedicates two sub-sections to presenting these contrasts. Differences such as these can naturally also be discovered when comparing Pannonian attire with that of the other provinces. However, these provincial customs did not spread with as much impetus as fashions from the central areas, which were propagated through the means of great works of sculpture and portraits on coins. The constant influences of tradition and fashion on one another, which was sometimes a struggle or contrast and at other times had a creative energy, as well as the even more important individual role and significance of women in these areas can be clearly discerned through the illustrations. Ethnographic parallels and the similar observations of folklorists show the conservative, traditional character of female customs, in contrast with the efforts of males to conform to the actual circumstances of the time.

The changes in fashion can also be observed through hairstyles. In this regard, there is not as much of a difference between women and men as in other branches of the beauty industry. Besides the fact that fashions in hair and beards can help in determining dates in practical archeology, and therefore are important for historical analysis, these fashions also reveal a great deal about the ideological character of the emperor in power at the time. The author skillfully analyzes the philosophical or simply militaristic characteristics in the appearance of the emperors, as well as the changes in the depiction of emperors who ruled for a long time as they aged. Of particular interest in this regard is the transition from Augustan classicism to the trend of realism that followed, or the changes with the introduction of the Dominate and the related ideological trends associated with this, which can even be observed in the appearance of a single ruler. (For example Diocletian depicts himself as an emperor – military commander – on his early coins, but later appears as a living god. Similar, but even more marked differences can be observed in the depictions of Constantine I [the Great] as well.)

All of these changes and characteristics would be impossible to follow if we had only the text to rely upon, but the pictorial depictions in this richly illustrated work (70 color photographs) complement the writing nicely. The materials of the bibliography are augmented by the works of the classical authors in their original language and their available Hungarian translations, further enhancing the value of the publication.