

2000

Emeline Hill Richardson (1910-1999)

Nancy de Grummond
Florida State University

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Recommended Citation

de Grummond, Nancy (2000) "Emeline Hill Richardson (1910-1999)," *Etruscan Studies*: Vol. 7 , Article 9.
Available at: https://scholarworks.umass.edu/etruscan_studies/vol7/iss1/9

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OBITUARIES



EMELINE HILL RICHARDSON (1910–1999)

Nancy T. de Grummond

The facts about the life of Emeline Richardson have been reviewed recently, in the citation written when she received the Gold Medal for Distinguished Archaeological Achievement of the Archaeological Institute of America in 1994 (see *Etruscan Studies* 5 [1998] 22–24), and in the moving account prepared by her husband, Lawrence Richardson, for the *American Journal of Archaeology* (104 [2000] 125). Here I should like to add some personal reminiscences about this grand lady who pioneered Etruscan studies in the United States. As her student at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, I had only one course on the Etruscans with her, but it was sufficient to alter my career and my life. Emmy Richardson has influenced many of us, I know, and I wish to record something of the atmosphere she created as she drew us in and shared with us the Etruscan world that so fascinated her.

When she arrived in North Carolina in 1966, Dr. Richardson was at the height of her powers. Her book, *The Etruscans, Their Art and Civilization*, had recently appeared (1964) and was already regarded as the standard textbook in America for introducing the Etruscans. She was also absorbed in the study of ancient costume in those years, and she created quite a stir when she organized a fashion show at Duke University called “The Descent of the Toga.” The live models were prominent members of the university community, including her husband Larry, who cut a fine figure in a *toga exigua* of Etruscan style. Slides of her costumes were sold for fundraising by the Archaeological Institute of Amer-

Nancy T.
de Grummond

ica, and with the accompanying texts were used in classrooms all around the U.S.

Meanwhile, Emmy was sharing her knowledge of ancient dress with a Ph.D. student at Columbia University who was studying the Etruscans with Otto Brendel. That student, Larissa Bonfante, went on to publish her dissertation as *Etruscan Dress* (1975; the basic book on the subject) and, as is well known, many other articles and books that relate to this and other aspects of Etruscan studies. Emmy was a constant supporter and friend, just as she was to Brendel himself. Many people are unaware that in this period she was the one responsible for the appearance of Brendel's *Etruscan Art* (Pelican History of Art, 1978). When he died in 1973, he left behind an unfinished manuscript on Etruscan art, still in need of a great deal of work. Emmy took it over, wrote the final chapter on Hellenistic art, supplied extensive documentation for the 430 footnotes in the book, and oversaw the selection of 326 illustrations. ("Oh, Otto Brendel's footnotes!" we would hear her sigh.) When the book came out, it was filled with the latest scholarship and much of the bibliography remains useful (now supplemented in the second edition, by an up-to-date listing by Francesca Serra Ridgway).

Emmy gave an energetic seminar on Etruscan archaeology at UNC. I do not mean to take away from the seriousness of the scholarship in the class when I say first that I remember the great socials we had at her home (the Richardsons loved to serve hot buttered rum and whole hard boiled eggs for refreshments). If an evening grew late, those who stayed at the party were rewarded with Emmy's by-heart recitations from Macaulay's "Lays of ancient Rome." She never failed to thrill with the stirring lines:

Shame on the false Etruscan who lingers in his home
When Porsenna of Clusium is on the march for Rome!

I also recall that Emmy had a strapping Airedale named Sallie who used to attend class regularly. Sallie always behaved well, lolling in a corner and watching as the slides were changed; every now and then she ambled around the classroom and one would suddenly feel a cold nose upon arm or leg. It was in the course of this seminar that I first began to study Etruscan mirrors and mythology, a sphere that would become one of my main research interests. In later years, when I received a grant from the National Endowment for the Humanities to give an exhibition on Etruscan mirrors at Florida State University, Emmy was my chief inspiration and one of the staunchest supporters of all the activities associated with the exhibition. She contributed an important chapter to the book, *A Guide to Etruscan Mirrors* (1982; her chapter was on *Klappspiegel*, or box mirrors), and on opening night of the exhibit

she gave an unforgettable performance as mistress of ceremonies of a fashion show of Etruscan, Roman, and Greek clothing. Clad in a black silk pants suit and wearing high heels, she navigated around the stage and fluffed and tucked and rearranged the garments of her models, often employing breezy, affectionate terms of address such as “Toots” and “Ducks.” One of the models, the president of Florida State, was quite in awe of her, and was absolutely obedient to her orders when she came around to pull his toga over his head for the proper effect of *capite velato*.

For the NEH, Emmy herself had given a brilliant Summer Seminar for College Teachers at the American Academy in Rome (1979), which I was fortunate to attend. “Important Problems on the Etruscans” was what we tackled, and we were taken all over Etruria in her tow, seeing all the latest results and meeting important established scholars. Among the colleagues in our group were Helen (Ili) Nagy, who assumed the burden of researching and making sense of a collection of 800 Etruscan votive terracottas at the Lowie Museum of Anthropology, Berkeley. With support and guidance from Emmy, Ili accomplished much that summer, and eventually was able to bring forth her *Votive Terracottas from the “Vignaccia,” Cerveteri in the Lowie Museum of Anthropology* (1988). It is no surprise that in the long list of acknowledgments at the front of the book, the name of Emeline Richardson comes first.

Her fashion performances notwithstanding, Emmy seemed to me to be a modest, even reserved individual. Essentially practical of mind, in lecturing or conversation she was always direct and honest. When she was told that she was to receive the AIA Gold Medal and that she would have to go to Atlanta to accept it, her first remark was not an expression of elation as one might expect, but rather a quite prosaic concern: “Oh, my, I’m afraid I can’t go because I have a doctor’s appointment that day!” What was especially characteristic of her was that she did not expect such appreciation, recognition, or prestige. She herself probably did not reflect too much on the fact that she gave constant and generous support to her colleagues and younger scholars, and did not know that she would be remembered as one who influenced a whole generation of Etruscan scholars who are active today in America.

Department of Classics
Florida State University
Tallahassee, FL 32306
ndegrumm@mailier.fsu.edu