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Forschungsschwerpunkt Kulturen des euromediterranen Raums und Altertumswissenschaften



# Forum Antike

Online



Mittwoch, 30. März 2022 | 17:00 (CEST)

Grace STAFFORD (Uniwersytet Warszawski)

**More than a Muse?**

**Learned Women, Education, and Literary Culture in Late Antiquity**

Late Antiquity offers rich material for the study of women intellectuals in the ancient world, from scientists and poets to religious philosophers and erudite aristocrats. Names like Hypatia, Macrina, and Proba are all familiar to modern scholars. But what about the women whose names and writings have not been preserved in the historical record? What prospects existed for them to follow in the footsteps of their more famous sisters? This paper explores the opportunities for women to construct intellectual identities through analysis of the hugely popular visual motif of the 'learned woman'.

In the third and fourth centuries CE the depiction of women with attributes of learning became ubiquitous in visual culture. The phenomenon was part of a larger trend which saw a boom in individuals celebrating their intellectual cultivation: women and men were shown in the guise of Muses and philosophers, as well as simply holding books, scrolls, musical instruments, or with their hand posed across their chest in the speaking gesture. The popularity of the 'learned man' has been readily accepted in scholarship, while the 'learned woman' has been largely relegated to a supportive or complementary figure, a helpful Muse. This interpretation, however, fails to explain the widespread popularity of the figure of the learned woman, which was one of the most prevalent modes of female representation. This paper will examine why being shown as learned was so desirable for women in this period and identify the complex developments in gendered intellectual ideals that emerged. It will resituate the visual representation of the learned woman within the cultural context of female education, literary production, and the development of the ideal Christian female intellectual to show how late-antique society came to increasingly recognise and reward learned women.

Veranstaltet von:

Institut für Alte Geschichte und Altertumskunde, Papyrologie und Epigraphik  
Institut für Byzantinistik und Neogräzistik  
Institut für Numismatik und Geldgeschichte

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