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Forum Antike

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Übungsraum Alte Geschichte, Hauptgebäude der Universität Wien (TP)

Online: <https://univiennea.zoom.us/j/65771401141?pwd=NeytRH0hArNaGU7eK06jSlpbWjHwjZ.1>

Mariana BODNARUK (Universität Warschau)

Office and Rank: The Production of Elite Differentiation in Fourth-Century Roman Administration (Epigraphic Perspectives)

The *Notitia Dignitatum*, a late Roman administrative document compiled in the late fourth century CE, constructs an idealized vision of the imperial bureaucracy in which the prestige of an officeholder in the imperial government is calibrated by proximity to the emperor, a relationship encoded through carefully codified ranks, honorific titles, and insignia of office. Yet the meticulously stratified order presented by the *Notitia* cannot be uncritically projected onto the realities of the fourth century Roman state. The development of rank titles provides a crucial lens through which to chart how aristocratic strategies of self-presentation were gradually transformed into legally recognized distinctions of status. Just as the ancient senatorial title *clarissimus* emerged from aristocratic modes of address, so the late antique honorifics *illustris* and *spectabilis* originated in new conventions as well, circulating in inscriptions, legal texts, and literary discourse well before their eventual restriction to specific offices.

John Weisweiler's dissertation interrogates the entrenched narrative that attributes the formalization of rank to a wholesale reordering of bureaucratic hierarchy under Emperor Valentinian I. Although Valentinian's legislation on precedence—preserved in the *Codex Theodosianus*—is the earliest extant legal codification of rank, it largely officialized long-standing practices that now acquired legal force rather than inaugurating an entirely new order of precedence. While the Valentinian legislation on orders of precedence cannot be viewed as a decisive shift, the question remains whether this emperor at least can be credited with the imposition of novel rank titles upon the imperial aristocracy. This talk re-examines fourth-century senatorial inscriptions that register these emerging titles, with the aim of refining our understanding of when, and under what circumstances, the new status distinctions became legally enshrined.