



Roman Women

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This collection of essays features important Roman women who were active in politics, theater, cultural life, and religion from the first through the fourth centuries. The contributors draw on rare documents in an attempt to reconstruct in detail the lives and accomplishments of these exceptional women, a difficult task considering that the Romans recorded very little about women. They thought it improper for a woman's virtues to be praised outside the home. Moreover, they believed that a feeble intellect, a weakness in character, and a general incompetence prevented a woman from participating in public life.

Through this investigation, we encounter a number of idiosyncratic personalities. They include the vestal virgin Claudia; Cornelia, a matron; the passionate Fulvia; a mime known as "Lycoris"; the politician Livia; the martyr and writer Vibia Perpetua; a hostess named Helena Augusta; the intellectual Hypatia; and the saint Melania the Younger. Unlike their silent female counterparts, these women stood out in a culture where it was terribly difficult and odd to do so.

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