



Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity

Kate Wilkinson

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This book offers a fresh approach to some of the most studied documents relating to Christian female asceticism in the Roman era. Focusing on the letters of advice to the women of the noble Anicia family, Kate Wilkinson argues that conventional descriptions of feminine modesty can reveal spaces of agency and self-formation in early Christian women's lives. She uses comparative data from contemporary ethnographic studies of Muslim, Hindu, and indigenous Pakistani women to draw out the possibilities inherent in codes of modesty. Her analysis also draws on performance studies for close readings of Ambrose, Augustine, Jerome and Pelagius. The book begins by locating itself within the complex terrain of feminist historiography, and then addresses three main modes of modest behavior - dress, domesticity and silence. Finally, it addresses the theme of false modesty and explores women's agency in light of Augustinian and Pelagian conceptions of choice.

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