



Dress and the Roman Woman: Self-Presentation and Society

Kelly Olson

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In ancient Rome, the subtlest details in dress helped to distinguish between levels of social and moral hierarchy. Clothes were a key part of the sign systems of Roman civilization – a central aspect of its visual language, for women as well as men.

This engaging book collects and examines artistic evidence and literary references to female clothing, cosmetics and ornament in Roman antiquity, deciphering their meaning and revealing what it meant to be an adorned woman in Roman society.

Cosmetics, ornaments and fashion were often considered frivolous, wasteful or deceptive, which reflects ancient views about the nature of women. However, Kelly Olson uses literary evidence to argue that women often took pleasure in fashioning themselves, and many treated adornment as a significant activity, enjoying the social status, influence and power that it signified.

This study makes an important contribution to our knowledge of Roman women and is essential reading for anyone interested in ancient Roman life.

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