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978-1-107-03027-5 - Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity

Kate Wilkinson

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IN LATE ANTIQUITY

*Women and Modesty in Late Antiquity* is a new look at 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 Anicii 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 ethnographies of Muslim, Hindu, and indigenous Pakistani women to draw out the possibilities inherent in codes of modesty. Wilkinson's 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, Wilkinson addresses the theme of false modesty and explores women's agency in light of Augustinian and Pelagian conceptions of choice.

KATE WILKINSON is Assistant Professor of Women's and Gender Studies at Towson University and Director of the graduate program in Women's and Gender Studies. Her research combines interests in early Christian asceticism, social history, and theology with feminist theory and feminist ethnography.

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## *Acknowledgments*

Augustine, Jerome, and Pelagius were all fond of alluding to 1 Corinthians 3:7, “So neither the one who plants nor the one who waters is anything, but only God who gives the growth.” They all tended to frame the women to whom they wrote as crops and themselves agriculturalists. I put more emphasis on the planting and watering that the Anician women and other female ascetics did on their own than the patristic authors did; however, I share the belief that creative work is always a group effort. I have relied on the help of many people, scholars, colleagues, friends, and family, since starting this book.

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Every project has a beginning. I trace this book back to my first curiosity about women religious, their lives, and history that arose from a summer

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## *Note on sources, translations, and abbreviations*

CCSL	<i>Corpus Christianorum, series latina</i>
CE	<i>Carmina Latina Epigraphica</i>
CIL	<i>Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum</i>
CSEL	<i>Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinarum</i>
PL	<i>Patrologia Latina</i>
SAEMO	<i>Sancti Ambrosii Episcopi Mediolanensis Opera</i>
SC	<i>Sources Chrétiennes</i>

Unless otherwise noted, all translations are my own.

Abbreviations of patristic works are those of: Albert Blaise, *Dictionnaire latin–français des auteurs chrétiens*. Turnhout, 1954.