

Gender and Politics in the Long Roman Empire, Spring 2025

History 500; Mondays 1:20-3:15, Memorial Library, Greek and Latin Reading Room

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Office hours: email for an appointment. I'm happy to meet with you but don't spend a lot of time in my office due to poor internet connectivity.

Course Description:

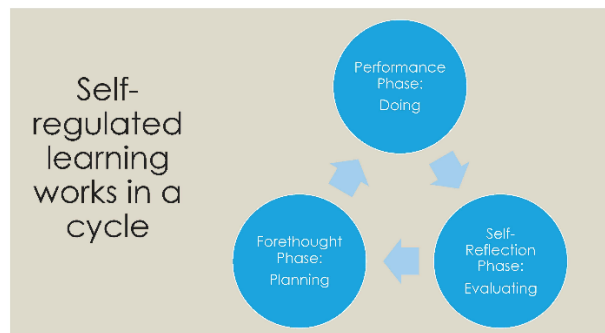
This course explores how conceptions of gender and proper gender roles impacted the highest levels of Roman imperial politics. Special attention will be given to the ways women were able to exercise power and vilified for doing so. In a departure from many treatments of Roman history, this course will address the whole span of the Roman empire from thirty-one BCE to 1204 CE. This course will assess how well theories of gender developed to explain sixth- to twelfth-century politics work for the earlier centuries. We will ask 1) whether Latin-speaking imperial families, and their critics, had different conceptualizations of ideal gender than Greek-speaking imperial families, and their critics, and 2) whether ideals of gender and politics changed over time, and if so when and what?

Learning Goals:

This advanced reading seminar serves as a capstone for the Certificate in History. It aims to be a significant and memorable intellectual adventure.

Metacognition: The most profound learning goals of this course develop your competence as self-directed learners. In this course you will:

- evaluate accurately your current competence in specific areas
- plan efforts to increase your competence and execute those plans
- evaluate the results of your planning with a view toward improving your learning
- explain how grading distorts learning
- develop a holistic plan for your education



Content knowledge:

- explain the main features of traditional Roman gender norms
- explain the impact of gender ideals on imperial politics
- create mental narratives of the careers of some imperial women
- assess the degree of continuity in gender and politics in the long Roman Empire

Skills:

- Reading quickly to understand argument
- Reading texts using a complex vocabulary and rhetorical structures
- Communicating assessments of complex texts orally
- Assessing complex texts in writing
- Self-awareness of assumptions about gender
- Awareness of and respect for the variety of possibly world views

Activities & Assessment:

To develop your skills as self-directed learners, this course requires you to **assess** your current state of knowledge and **make choices** about where to concentrate your learning efforts.

This course allows you to build your grade through successfully completing activities. All activities are graded as either meeting specifications and receiving full credit, or not meeting specifications and receiving no credit. All activities can be done as many times as you like in order to receive full credit. Beyond the fundamental requirements for C grade, you choose your activities to best pursue your learning goals.

To receive a grade of **C** the following activities are **REQUIRED**:

1. **Core Text Readings:** you must read the Core Texts assigned each week
2. **Seminar Participation:** you must contribute to the seminar conversation based on your reading of the Core Texts.

To receive a grade of **B** choose and complete 3 activities from the list below, and complete your learning plan.

To receive a grade of **A**, choose and complete at least 7 activities from the list below, and complete your learning plan.

The options in the list of activities vary considerably in their difficulty and amount of background knowledge necessary to complete them successfully. As students, you vary considerably in the amount of background knowledge and skills you possess at the beginning of this class. For you to make this a worthwhile learning experience, you need to assess what activities will stretch and challenge your current abilities. If you choose activities that are too easy for you, you will not learn. If you choose activities that are beyond your reach, you will get overwhelmed and not learn. Think of me as your intellectual personal trainer who can

help you achieve your goals. In making your choices, keep in mind that this seminar is a rare and significant learning opportunity.

Some activities can be repeated with different material; e.g. you can write several book reports on different books. These are marked as **Repeatable**. Some count for more than one activity and are labeled accordingly.

1. **Attend public lecture by Prof Derek Krueger**, Friday March 14th 4pm.
2. **Background knowledge acquisition**: Keep a list of unfamiliar terms, events, & names that you look up in the course of doing the readings.
3. **Reading log**: keep track of your reading for each seminar, noting number of pages read per hour in what context, and write notes on your readings.
4. **Roman Emperor Chronology**: Memorize at least 9 of 11 centuries of the Roman & East Roman emperors in order with at least 90% accuracy. Bragging rights for the dates. Quiz will be on March 3.
5. **Leading Discussion**: Lead the seminar discussion of one of the Core Texts.
6. **Repeatable. Book Report**: Write a 3-5-page book report on either a Core Text book or an additional (non-core) book.
7. **Repeatable. Article Report & Presentation**: Write a 3-5-page review and make a class presentation on either a Core Text article or an additional (non-core) article.
8. **Repeatable: Readings in Greek** Read a selection of primary sources in Greek.
9. **Counts for 2: Primary Source Interpretation Paper**: Write an 8-10-page paper interpreting a primary source in light of the course readings.
10. **Counts for 3: Dissertation Chapter or Academic Article**: Write a 20-30-page chapter of an original research project.
11. **Doctoral Examination Preparation**: Prepare for a Doctoral Qualifying examination related to Roman gender.

If you are tempted to take an easy route, consider:

- You'll never conquer the Mediterranean with that attitude.
- Achieving goals feels good and builds confidence.
- Pushing yourself to do something difficult makes you a powerful person.
- Our choices make us who we are. By giving you the choice, I'm giving you autonomy over what kind of person you want to become.
- Are you becoming a person Caesar would despise? Would Julia Mamaea respect you?
- This class will be memorable. Will you look back at yourself with pride?
- Are you taking best advantage of your opportunities and treating your privilege with respect?

Mandatory Learning Plan: Submit a list of the activities you have chosen on February 3rd.

How Credit Hours are met by the Course This three-credit course meets as a group seminar for 115 minutes each week. You are also expected to spend an average of seven hours per week outside of class time reading, writing, and preparing for class discussions and

presentations, for a total of 135 hours over the semester (or 45 hours per credit, according to UW-Madison's credit hour policy).

1/27	Introduction	Century	Core Readings (details on Canvas)
2/3	East Roman Gender		Neville, <i>Byzantine Gender</i> Neil & Casey 2024, Messis 2024
2/10	Theodora	6 th	Procopius, Brubaker 2005, Neville 2012
2/17	Eirene	8-9th	Theophanes, Herrin 2021, Cassis 2025
2/24	Theodora, m. Theophilos	9th	<i>Life of Theodora</i> , Herrin 2021, Garland 1999
3/3	Zoe & Theodora	11th	Psellos <i>Chronographia</i> , Garland 1999, Polemis 2015
3/10	Anne Komnene	12th	Komnene <i>Alexiad</i> , Neville 2016
3/17	Long Roman Empire	1-10th	
3/31	Christian Change?	3-4th	Harper 2013, <i>Life of Mary of Egypt</i>
4/7	Cleopatra & Octavia	1 BCE	Plutarch, <i>Life of Antony</i> Cassius Dio,
4/14	Livia, Julia Augusta	1st	Tacitus <i>Annals</i> , Cassius Dio, Boatwright 2021
4/21	Agrippina the Younger	1st	Suetonius; Cassius Dio, Boatwright 2021
4/28	Julia Mamaea	3rd	Historia Augusta; Cassius Dio

Book Review Assignment

Read your assigned book thoroughly. Allow more time than usual for reading your book because it may be complex.

The paper should be a 5-7 page review and analysis of the book. A good review essay will have three sections:

1. Orientation
The orientation section provides background information that can help you assess the book. Try to find out information about your author. Where does she teach? What other books or books has he written? Try to find out if your book is part of an ongoing debate on the topic. Is this the first treatment of the topic or have many other books been written about it already?
2. Summary
The summary section should state the author's position clearly and fairly. What is the question or problem the author is trying to answer or address? What is the thesis of the book? What medieval source information does the author use to help him understand the problem?
3. Analysis

The analysis section contains your reasoned opinion about the argument of your book. Is the author's case convincing? Are the sources used in a responsible way to say something true about the past? Is the argument significant? Was it worth killing a tree to publish it?

The heart of your essay should be the analysis section. You need to do more than summarize the book to write a good essay. Spend time thinking about your book and explain what you think. Don't spend too much time talking about how it makes you *feel*.

Presentation:

The class presentation should have the same basic sections as the paper and take 5-7 minutes. You will not have time to read everything in your paper during the class presentation. Think about what would be most helpful and interesting to your classmates when choosing aspects of your review and analysis to present. Keep in mind that your classmates have not read the book and tell them enough for them to make sense of your analysis.

Book Review Grading Criteria

For this class, papers that meet either the A or B characteristics will receive full credit. Papers falling in the C or D range will receive no credit.

Characteristics of an **A** paper:

- It displays an entirely accurate and nuanced understanding of the assigned book.
- The analysis displays considered and subtle thought about the argument.
- The analysis makes good logical sense.
- The analysis displays historical insight and acuity.
- The conclusions drawn are supported by solid argumentation.
- It amply fulfills the instructions of the paper assignment.
- All claims are supported by citations and explanations of the textual evidence or logical argumentation.
- It has excellent English grammar and usage
- It has a well-organized structure.
- It has no proofreading errors.
- It has correct citations for all sources.

○ Characteristics of a **B** paper:

- It displays a good understanding of the book.
- The analysis displays thought.
- The analysis is logical.
- It follows the instructions of the paper assignment.
- Claims are supported by textual evidence or argumentation.
- It uses correct English grammar and usage.
- It has good paragraph structure.
- It has adequate citations for all sources.
- It may have some errors in proof-reading.

○ Characteristics of a **C** paper:

- It displays cursory reading or misunderstanding of the book.
- It does not display significant thought about the book.
- The analysis is not logical.

- It does not have clear paragraphs.
- It does not follow the instructions.
- It contains unnecessary digressions or vacuous generalizations.
- The textual evidence cited does not support the claims.
- It has not been proofread.
- It contains errors in grammar or usage.
- The citations of sources are inadequate.

- Characteristics of a **D** paper:
- It shows that the book has not been read.
- It displays no thought.
- It does not fulfill the assignment.
- It does not have paragraphs.
- It contains errors in grammar or usage or inadequate proofreading.
- Claims are unsubstantiated by citation or argument.

STUDENTS' RULES, [RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES](#)

COURSE EVALUATIONS

Students will be provided with an opportunity to evaluate this course and your learning experience. Student participation is an integral component of this course, and your feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

UW-Madison now uses an online course evaluation survey tool, [AEFIS](#). In most instances, you will receive an official email two weeks prior to the end of the semester when your course evaluation is available. You will receive a link to log into the course evaluation with your NetID where you can complete the evaluation and submit it, anonymously. Your participation is an integral component of this course, and your feedback is important to me. I strongly encourage you to participate in the course evaluation.

ACADEMIC CALENDAR & RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCES

- See: <https://secfac.wisc.edu/academic-calendar/#religious-observances>

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

By virtue of enrollment, each student agrees to uphold the high academic standards of the University of Wisconsin-Madison; academic misconduct is behavior that negatively impacts the integrity of the institution. Cheating, fabrication, plagiarism, unauthorized collaboration, and helping others commit these previously listed acts are examples of misconduct which may result in disciplinary action. Examples of disciplinary action include, but is not limited to, failure on the assignment/course, written reprimand, disciplinary probation, suspension, or expulsion.

QUARANTINE OR ISOLATION DUE TO COVID-19

Students should continually monitor themselves for COVID-19 [symptoms](#) and get [tested](#) for the virus if they have symptoms or have been in close contact with someone with COVID-19. Student should reach out to instructors as soon as possible if they become ill or need to isolate or quarantine, in order to make alternate plans for how to proceed with the course. Students are strongly encouraged to communicate with their instructor concerning their illness and the anticipated extent of their absence from the course (either in-person or remote). The instructor will work with the student to provide alternative ways to complete the course work.

ACCOMMODATIONS FOR STUDENTS WITH DISABILITIES

The University of Wisconsin-Madison supports the right of all enrolled students to a full and equal educational opportunity. The Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Wisconsin State Statute (36.12), and UW-Madison policy (Faculty Document 1071) require that students with disabilities be reasonably accommodated in instruction and campus life. Reasonable accommodations for students with disabilities is a shared faculty and student responsibility. Students are expected to inform faculty [me] of their need for instructional accommodations by the end of the third week of the semester, or as soon as possible after a disability has been incurred or recognized. Faculty [I], will work either directly with the student [you] or in coordination with the McBurney Center to identify and provide reasonable instructional accommodations. Disability information, including instructional accommodations as part of a student's educational record, is confidential and protected under FERPA. (See: [McBurney Disability Resource Center](#))

DIVERSITY & INCLUSION

[Diversity](#) is a source of strength, creativity, and innovation for UW-Madison. We value the contributions of each person and respect the profound ways their identity, culture, background, experience, status, abilities, and opinion enrich the university community. We commit ourselves to the pursuit of excellence in teaching, research, outreach, and diversity as inextricably linked goals.

The University of Wisconsin-Madison fulfills its public mission by creating a welcoming and inclusive community for people from every background – people who as students, faculty, and staff serve Wisconsin and the world.