

The Other Theodosian Girl: Thermantia's Marriage

Thermantia, the other niece of Theodosius I (Emperor 379-395), did not leave much of an imprint in the historical record. Just as her father Honorius, the Emperor's older brother, Thermantia's fame was eclipsed by that of her younger sister Serena, and her name survives because of her familial ties. In this paper I will reconstruct Thermantia's marriage based on well-known literary sources (namely, Claudian's poems, Consolino and Charlet) and a more recently unearthed inscription (Feissel 1983; Scharf 1998).

The aim of my paper is twofold:

1) By proposing a reconstruction of Thermantia's marriage, I demonstrate that Theodosius' marital strategy belies a subtle and elaborate scheme for consolidating his power following his sudden and surprising ascent to the imperial throne (McLynn; Omissi).

2) Far from being a marginal event, the marriage of Thermantia offers important clues for a reinterpretation of the history of the period. By offering a critical reexamination of the traditional reconstruction of Theodosius' accession, I discuss some ingrained prejudices about gender and power that affects reconstructions of the period and, particularly, the writing of women's history.

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