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LADIES WORTHY OF THEIR ANCESTORS

20 min

An abstract for the FIEC conference

Valerius Maximus gives a story according to which Sempronia, sister of Gaius and Tiberius Gracchus, had to defend the honour of her family in court in her old days. Valerius Maximus praises Sempronia by saying that she did nothing unworthy of the greatness of her family. One has to ask what is the family Valerius Maximus is thinking about. Is he referring to the complicated and contradictory memory of the Gracchi or to the family of her mother, the great Cornelia Scipiones?

In my paper, I shall discuss not only Sempronia but also other known Roman noble ladies of the second century BC. The focus is on the way in which these women were remembered and how they were connected to their family tradition. Which virtues made them representative members of their families? I am arguing that the women were described in a certain way to emphasize the glory of their families. It is a question of those families which made Rome great, such as Cornelia, Fabii, Aemilia, Metelli and others.

The families of the Roman elite competed about glory and power. On the other hand, Roman elite was interconnected by marriages to a great extent. So, were did women stand in this political game? Or should we rather ask where was their memory connected to? Finally, I shall compare the stories told about noble women of the second century BC to few examples of women of the first century BC. I find funerary *laudationes* especially interesting. By the Early Empire, the time Valerius Maximus was compiling his collection of historical examples, men and women of the Mid-Republican era were set as examples for all Romans. Persons who were praised as worthy of their ancestors were now understood as ancestors of all Romans.