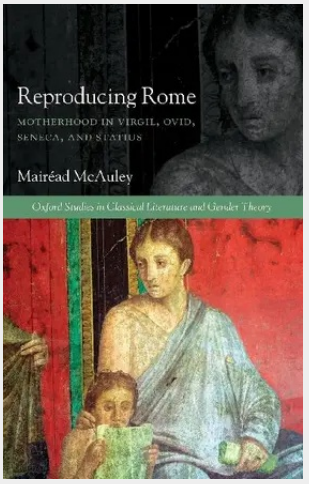
McAuley

Reproducing Rome

Motherhood in Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius



In the conservative and competitive society of ancient Rome, where the law of the father (patria potestas) was supposedly absolute, motherhood took on complex aesthetic, moral, and political meanings in elite literary discourse. Reproducing Rome is a study of the representation of maternity in the Roman literature of the first century CE, a period of intense social upheaval and reorganization as Rome was transformed from a Republic to a form of hereditary monarchy under the emperor Augustus. Through a series of close readings of works by Virgil, Ovid, Seneca, and Statius, the volume scrutinizes the gender dynamics that permeate these ancient authors' language, imagery, and narrative structures. Analysing these texts 'through and for the maternal', McAuley considers to what degree their representations of motherhood reflect, construct, or subvert Roman ideals of, and anxieties about, family, gender roles, and reproduction. The volume also explores the extent to which these representations distort or displace concerns about fatherhood or other relations of power in Augustan and post-Augustan Rome. Keeping the ancient literary and historical context in view, the volume conducts a dialogue between these ancient male authors and modern feminist theorists-from Klein to Irigaray, Kristeva to Cavarero-to consider the relationship between motherhood as symbol and how a maternal subjectivity is suggested, developed, or suppressed by the authors. Readers are encouraged to consider the problems and possibilities of reading the maternal in these ancient texts, and to explore the unique site the maternal occupies in pre-modern discourses underpinning Western culture.

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157,10 €
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Lieferfrist: bis zu 10 Tage

Artikelnummer: 9780199659364
Medium: Buch
ISBN: 978-0-19-965936-4
Verlag: Oxford University Press(UK)
Erscheinungstermin: 01.12.2015
Sprache(n): Englisch
Auflage: Erscheinungsjahr 2015
Produktform: Gebunden
Gewicht: 804 g
Seiten: 462
Format (B x H): 161 x 240 mm

Kundenservice Verlag Dr. Otto Schmidt KG
Neumannstraße 10, 40235 Düsseldorf | kundenservice@otto-schmidt.de | 0221-93738-997 (Inland)