



Widows and Patriarchy: Ancient and Modern

Thomas A.J. McGinn

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In "Widows and Patriarchy" Thomas McGinn begins with the view that ancient society was structured by a 'spectrum of statuses' and applies this insight to the position of women, primarily that of widows, in three historical periods: Greek and Roman antiquity, late medieval and early modern Europe, and the late nineteenth and early twentieth century West. In all these cultures widows comprise a problematic category of adult women who are notionally independent of males. Their status and role become a focus for concern about gender relations, and a particular source of anxiety because they are sexually experienced. This book examines the rights at private law, especially those regarding property and succession, economic privilege and its absence, freedom of movement in general, including the question of bodily integrity and fear of physical interference, and, finally, the entitlement to decide whether to remarry and to whom. Since antiquity, widows (along with orphans) have been a byword for the weak and oppressed. This book analyses the surviving evidence to assess the value of this generalization and, more broadly, to evaluate the position of widows in the societies under examination.

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