

Polissena Messalto Grimaldi: An early Quattrocento female Latinist

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Where:

Seminarraum 6, Ágnes-Heller-Haus, Innrain 52a, 1st Floor



While the names of Isotta Nogarola, Cassandra Fedele and Laura Cereta are increasingly likely to ring a bell beyond the narrow circle of scholars focusing on Neo-Latin writing by women, Polissena Messalto Grimaldi has to this day escaped notice even within this specialism, with her writing remaining a footnote to the output of her more famous female contemporaries. Based on original archival research and the first detailed analysis of her writing, my paper will demonstrate how her identity has been misconstrued and show that she was in fact the author of a small but not insignificant body of Latin texts. Her case, I will argue, may be exceptional, but it nevertheless nuances our understanding of women's writing in Italy in the early years of their emergence as publicly visible secular authors. Specifically, it points to the possibility of a greater social, temporal and geographical, as well as stylistic and thematic, diversity in women's Neo-Latin writing than has usually been perceived as the norm.