

Valerio Neri/Beatrice Girotti (eds.): *La famiglia tardoantica*. Società, diritto, religione. Milano: Edizioni Universitarie di Lettere Economia Diritto 2016 (Quaderni di Erga-Logoi 5). 293 pp., 15 ill. € 35.00. ISBN: 978-88-7916-764-2.

Over the last few decades, study and teaching of the ancient family have been served by publication of several companions and edited volumes that have illuminated a plurality of aspects of this important ancient social institution. In such works, the late antique family usually only features in a few chapters at the end.¹ This volume, which focusses exclusively on the period of Late Antiquity, is therefore more than welcome to those working on this time of profound social transformation. The book's blurb promises an "interdisciplinary mosaic" of approaches, methodologies and sources. The fourteen chapters, emerging from a *Giornata di Studio sulla Famiglia Tardoantica* held in Bologna in 2015, certainly present a wide range of topics, from marriage over education to domestic archaeology.

One would have wished for more guidance from the editors on the aims and scope of the volume. The introduction is only four short paragraphs long and points at a dialogue between the "multiplicity of interests" underpinning the contributions (9). It remains silent on what this dialogue may be or even what is understood here as 'Late Antiquity'. The order of the chapter seems somewhat random, as it is neither chronological nor obviously thematic. Many of the abstracts, given in English, are nearly incomprehensible, having seemingly been produced through Google Translate (resulting in amusing mistranslations, such as "homeland power" for "patria potestas" (189)). To be sure, the volume is headed by Francesca Lamberti's very useful historiographical survey that traces changing interpretations of the Roman family, from a focus on the patriarchal and extended household in the 19th century to the nuclear and emotional family unit at present. Oddly, however, the late antique family is only dealt with in a five-line paragraph admitting that, for this aspect, the bibliography is "incomplete" and "indicative" (20, n. 47). Turning to Arnaldo Marcone's concluding thoughts, we learn that the defining feature of the late antique family was its Christianisation. It is difficult to

1 See, e.g., M. Harlow/L. Larsson Loven (eds.): *Families in the Roman and Late Antique World*. London 2011 (*The Family in Antiquity* 2). Despite the title, only four of the twelve chapters deal with Late Antiquity.

argue about the significance of Christianity for late antique society. However, the chapters presented here neither all deal with this theme nor does the volume as a whole explicitly foreground religious change. Instead, the chapters also address, albeit mostly implicitly, other important factors of social change, such as Barbarian settlement, economic decline or separation of east and west. The following discussion will therefore group them thematically to gauge the contribution they make to our understanding of the late antique family.

Three chapters (Salvatore Puliatti, Valerio Neri, Teresa Sardella) grapple with questions around the influence of Christianity on the making of marriage law, and vice-versa. Puliatti investigates imperial prohibitions of marriage between cousins in the late Roman west and links these to Ambrose of Milan's rejection of incest. Neri explores the legal limits of acceptable violence against wives, noting that Constantine's restriction on divorce, itself probably motivated by Christianity, trapped wives in abusive relationships with full consent of many Christian writers. Sardella turns her attention to betrothal, demonstrating how Christian communities increasingly understood this ritual to create a legal obligation to marriage, contrary to Roman civil law. On all three aspects, a look at what happened in 'Barbarian' law may have been useful too, to complicate the position of Christianity as the sole explanator of change, which, as both Puliatti and Neri show, is questioned by diverging attitudes on incest and divorce in the western and eastern empire anyway. For example, betrothal was also considered legally binding in Burgundian law (*Lex Gundobada* 52).

Two chapters (Franca Ela Consolino, Roberto Alciati) discuss the relationship between the family and Christian asceticism, focussing on late antique Gaul. Consolino presents a rather biographical, but very elegantly written survey of married couples who together embraced an ascetic lifestyle, insisting on family values, such as the education of children, as a measure of Christian integrity. Alciati investigates monastic communities in the Jura mountains. He shows through a combination of textual and archaeological analysis that monastic estates resembled aristocratic estates with similar forms of labour and production, suggesting that many originated from monastic founders' reorganization of their patrimony. These two chapters, perhaps the most interesting in the volume, demonstrate clearly the continuing importance of the family as an idea and a reality, even in the face of a supposedly anti-familial movement such as late antique Christian asceticism.

Two revisionist chapters deal with the late Roman imperial family, in this case the Constantinian dynasty. Beatrice Girotti revisits the rumour, put in motion by Ammianus Marcellinus, that the empress Eusebia, unable to have children herself, was responsible for Julian's wife Helena's abortions. Girotti suspects, in a rather speculative way, that Ammianus was in reality obscuring Julian's own complicity in Helena's death. Erica Filippini revisits a Constantinian gold medallion, minted in 324 Trier (RIC VII, Treviri, 442) with a portrait of Constantine's oldest son Crispus on the obverse. She argues that the group of three on the reverse shows Crispus' stepmother Fausta with her own two sons, foreshadowing the dynastic rivalries that may have led to Crispus' tragic death in 326. More could have been made in both of these chapters of the structural features that the Constantinian family shared with other late antique families, albeit with perhaps untypically violent consequences, especially those created by infertility and concubinage.

Questions around succession and inheritance also underly Silvie Joye's chapter on the role of fathers. Conceptually, this chapter can be grouped with those by Marcello Lusvardi, on the family in Vandal North Africa, and by Giovanni Assorati, on the wedding of imperial princess Galla Placidia and Visigothic king Athaulf, as it discusses fatherhood in the post-Roman world. Together, these three chapters highlight a number of aspects where the 'Barbarian' family may have differed from the Roman. Joye points at the rising importance of biological fatherhood instead of the legal concept of *patria potestas*, and at the resulting blurred boundaries between legitimate and illegitimate children. Lusvardi discusses the role of consent in the making of marriage. Forced marriage was something that Romans in Vandal Africa considered a particularly un-Roman custom. While this was used to vilify Vandals, Assorati's chapter argues that Galla Placidia's marriage may also have been marked by the absence of the woman's consent; something that vexed later Roman authors discussing its legitimacy. Yet, as Joye also shows, in the later 'Barbarian' world consent – a corner stone of legal marriage in Roman times – played a much diminished role in the making of marriage, so we may well see the beginnings of a social development here whose relationship to Christianity is at the very least unclear.

The remaining three chapters are less easily classified, but could be grouped together as displaying different approaches to the material culture of the late antique family. Isabella Baldini gives an expert survey of what we know about domestic space and the changes it underwent, from the appearance of

grand architectural features, such as the *aula absidata*, to subdivisions, all the while warning against seeing these changes reflecting religious change. Manuela Mongardi shows how attention to late Roman funerary epigraphy, in this case from third and fourth-century Mutina, allows us to reconstruct both a city's demographic profile and individual family units and their marriage patterns. Finally, Giulia Marsili's study of the work and background of the sixth-century architects and engineers Anthemius of Tralles and Isidore of Miletus demonstrates the importance of families in the training of children, something that imperial law supported by making such specialist professions hereditary.

Overall, there is much to commend this collection as it goes far beyond the usual focus on the difference that Christianity made. Unfortunately, it requires a sympathetic and attentive reader to give it full justice. A stronger editorial hand could have transformed this volume from a set of conference papers into a coherent agenda-setting whole.

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Empfohlene Zitierweise

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