

KRISTINA SESSA: *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy: Roman Bishops and the Domestic Sphere*. Cambridge University Press, New York 2012. ISBN 978-1-107-00106-0. 323 pp. USD 99.

Sessa's work is a truly refreshing view on the rise of papal authority from a mere metropolitan bishopric, based on the republican virtue of the *pater familias* and the running of a household (*oikonomia*) as a microcosm of a whole society.

After the Introduction (pp. 1–34), where the stakes are set and borders defined, Sessa begins in Chapter 1 "The Late Roman Household in Italy" (pp. 35–62) with a general introduction to late antique Roman domestic life. This continues in Chapter 2 "From Dominion to *dispensatio*: Stewardship as an Elite Ideal" (pp. 63–86). In this chapter Sessa portrays the Roman *dispensator* as a model for the Roman bishop's ecclesiastical administration.

In Chapter 3 "*Primus cultor*: Episcopal Householding in Theory and Practice" (pp. 87–126), Sessa compares the *domus dei* to the normal elite *domus*. In Sessa's view, the ethics of the bishop's *oikonomia*, in both their classical and emerging Christian form, framed the real success of the bishop's administration, both in matters ecclesiastic and the stewardship of church real estate.

In Chapter 4 "Overseeing the Overseer: Bishops and Lay Households" (pp. 127–173) and Chapter 5 "Cultivating the Clerical Household: Marriage, Property and Inheritance" (pp. 174–207) matters concerning lay and clerical private lives and the bishop's influence on them are discussed. The early Christian life, in both clerical and lay *domus*, included the same Roman problems of marriage, inheritance (especially, when church and private property ownership was confused) and slave treatment.

In Chapter 6 "Mistrusting the Bishop: Succession, Stewardship, and Sex in the Laurentian Schism" (pp. 208–246) the Laurentian Schism (498–506/507) between Symmachus and Laurentius portrays how seriously the immaculate stewardship of the bishop's *domus* was taken when most of the accusations were about sex and misplacement of church property.

In Chapter 7 "The Household and the Bishop: Authority, Cooperation, and Competition in the *gesta martyrum*" (pp. 247–273), the *gesta*, though mostly pure fantasy, reveal Roman collective attitudes about the significance of the aristocratic *domus* and its administration's ideological impact on early Christian papal administration.

Conclusion (pp. 274–282) sums up the previous discussion very well: "... the adaptation of household management as a model of government by late antique Roman bishops." Sessa ties the Roman administration to the earlier ancient *domus* and to the tensions that followed when the bishop intervened in other domestic affairs. These tensions, however, did not keep bishops and households apart. On the contrary, the tensions brought these two together and gradually, starting from Rome, created the episcopal leadership in the Catholic world.

Kristina Sessa's *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy: Roman Bishops and The Domestic Sphere* is solidly based on sources and research. The portrayal of the shifting dynamics of the Roman church in late antiquity and the efforts of its bishops to establish their authority in the early days is one of the book's valuable contributions. The most valuable one to my mind is the credible argument of the inherited republican *domus* and its *pater familias* as the model of episcopal administration.