

BOOK REVIEW FORUM

***Der Klerus des spätantiken Italiens im Spiegel epigraphischer Zeugnisse. Eine Soziohistorische Studie* (KLIO 36). By Isabelle Mossong. Berlin/Boston: De Gruyter, 2022. vii–viii + 1–696 pp.**

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Isabelle Mossong's voluminous work consists of two parts: seven initial chapters, in which the information obtained from the epigraphic survey is used to answer a number of still open questions about the clergy (1–221), and an extensive epigraphic Catalogue of the clergy of late antique Italy, in which 871 inscriptions are examined (222–620). The latter is the most useful part for a researcher; for a reader, who wants to know the results of the research, it is the former. Obviously, they are closely related. I would, however, examine the Catalogue first. It is introduced by a few pages of explanatory notes (222–229) on the procedures used to collect the epigraphic material, the ways in which the inscriptions of ecclesiastical personnel were transmitted and edited, and the organization the author chose to give to the collected material. The lucidity of the choices and the clarity in communicating them to the reader are noteworthy. The Catalogue is divided into three sections: A. Inscriptions with clerical titulatures; B. Inscriptions without clerical titling; C. Dubious inscriptions and fragments. In each section, the epigraphs are collected by geographical provenance, and within each area (Rome; the eleven *regiones* of the Italic peninsula; Sardinia; and Sicily) according to the offices held, from bishop to ostiary. Of each inscription, the original text, translation, and commentary (usually contained, sometimes extensive) are offered; for each one, the epigraphic collections that preserve it (e.g., *ICUR*, *ILCV*), or that prosopographically study the cleric mentioned therein (*PChBE Italie*) are also indicated. The reference to *PChBE Italie* is all the more useful since, in the commentary on individual inscriptions, prosopographical data are only examined if they require further discussion. This part of the volume is the result of valuable research and cataloguing work. Conducted systematically, it is accurate and precise. The Catalogue is also accompanied by twelve tables (621–652) that I find useful to list; the first six, in particular, are interesting for the data they offer: Table 1. *The earliest epigraphic evidence of the various attested ecclesiastical offices* (Ostiary, Lector, exorcist, acolyte, subdeacon, deacon, presbyter, bishop are considered in reverse order to that followed in Section A of the Catalogue). From this filing, we learn that the first attested office is that of Lucius Petronius Dexter, bishop of Chiusi in 322 AD, remembered with his *tria nomina* and buried together with his father by his five sons, who took care to write an epitaph around which we recognize the remains of a *tabula ansata*. The last chronologically is an *ostiarius* of Dertona, Veneriosus, who died in 446: more than a century therefore passed before even a simple *ostiarius* was considered worthy of being celebrated for

his office. Table 2. *Clerics not attested in the PChBE*. It enriches the well-known prosopographical collection (but which has now been published for a quarter of a century) with 187 members of the clergy, of whom only fifty-four have recognizable names. Table 3. *Clerics in Greek inscriptions*. Interestingly, of sixty epigraphs in Greek, about half comes from Rome and the other half from Sicily. Table 4. *Clerics with multiple names*. It will not be missed that only one bishop, the oldest, bears the *tria nomina* and of the twenty-eight recorded, the others have only two names. Table 5. *Age of lectors in epitaphs*. The lectors mentioned in the inscriptions are young, mostly between 13 and 25 years old. Table 6. *The cleric as husband and father*. Title, wife, and children are indicated next to date, origin of inscription, and reference collections. Table 7. *Inscriptions found in Rome for bishops with an extra-urban seat*; Table 8. *Clerical families*; Table 9. *Metric inscriptions with direct self-representation*; Table 10. *Roman building inscriptions with clerics of different ranks*; Table 11. *Preserved or transmitted Bishop's epitaphs of the city of Rome*; Table 12. *Preserved or transmitted Bishop's epitaphs from Italy (outside Rome)*.

The first six chapters confirm that inscriptions are an excellent source of information and can offer answers to a number of questions for which literary sources alone are not always sufficient. After the *Introduction* (1–30), which is not only of a methodological scope, in chapter II (31–67) what peculiar elements characterize an ecclesiastical inscription, compared to other epigraphic testimonies, are indicated. Innovations emerge from a survey in which inscriptions are considered by genre, author, reader, language used. The concluding survey of changes in nomenclature over some three centuries gives a sense of evolution in an originally very heterogeneous group. The self-representation of the clergy is the focus of chapter III (68–139). With a scientific approach, the topic is addressed by considering which messages were preferably conveyed in relation to the ecclesiastical office held. The examination extends to all offices in the hierarchy. Through the testimonies in which several offices are mentioned, moreover, the formation of a specific *cursus* is reconstructed. Chapter IV indicates what results the epigraphic investigation leads to when questioned about the social background of the clergy (140–175). It offers no new results – the group was and remained socially heterogeneous – but in the way they are deduced from various levels of analysis: mobility of the clergy (geographical and social), social ties (with the family of origin, with other ministers, with members of the Christian community), cultural formation, participation in historical events, references to the persecution of Christians, internal conflicts, and political current affairs. Chapter V (176–200) examines the areas in which church personnel played an active role. While involvement in the charitable sector is always explicit, the liturgical functions performed by the various ranks of the ecclesiastical hierarchy are hardly ever mentioned in the inscriptions. This is not surprising, given the spread of the rhetoric of the bishop “lover of the poor,” and the wealth of the church as the “wealth of the poor” in the literature of the second half of the fourth-century AD. What messages the epitaphs of the clerics wanted to communicate to those attending the cemeteries is the subject of chapter VI (201–217). It deals, therefore, with the function of clerical inscriptions in funerary contexts, detected by investigating to whom the epigraphic message was addressed, what relationship with the afterlife was expressed there through allusion to Christian concepts of the afterlife, the memory of the deceased, and the role of the martyrs and their veneration. Chapter VII (218–221) summarizes the results obtained and the investigation perspectives opened by the research. The same carefulness with which the research is

conducted in the first part of the volume, as well as in the Catalogue of Inscriptions, is reflected in the final *Apparatus*, in which the abbreviations used for epigraphic and literary sources are listed before the very rich *Bibliography* (656–673), followed by the list of cited literary and epigraphic passages (675–696).

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