

role of imperial women remained that of mother and producers of offspring and heirs.

This is a wonderful collection of essays worthy of its honorand. Without doubt it is a valuable contribution to the study of late antiquity and of great interest to all those interested in early Christianity, late-antique literature and culture, gender or Augustine.

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doi:10.1017/S0009640715000633

***Liturgy and Society in Early Medieval Rome.* By John F. Romano.**

Church, Faith and Culture in the Medieval West. Burlington, Vt.:

Ashgate Publishing, 2014. xii + 308 pp. \$119.95 cloth.

Scholarship on early medieval society often focuses on the investigation of a particular source type. This is as true of the liturgy as it is of other kinds of early medieval sources. However, as John Romano rightly notes in this important study, the early medieval liturgy has not so readily been taken up by social historians as some other kinds of sources, for example, hagiography. There are exceptions to this generalization, of course, but Romano seeks to make a strong case in this work for the liturgy to be viewed as a major player in the formation of early medieval society generally, and early medieval Rome in particular. If the liturgy is, as he terms it, a “social glue” (6), then liturgical texts are ripe for socio-historical inquiry.

It should be noted at the outset that Romano’s book focuses on one specific liturgical text, the First Roman Ordo, which was a guide to the papal mass as it was understood to operate in the seventh and eighth centuries in Rome. This focus on the Ordo entirely dictates the timeframe of the study (c.590-c.752), and thus the study is not quite as broadly conceived as the framing of the book would initially suggest. However, it is in asking “social” questions of an important text, and deliberating their complexity, that Romano makes his contribution. For those interested in this text, Romano provides the Latin with an English translation, alongside a discussion of the translation, and a diagrammatic table indicating the primary actors and actions in the mass. The Ordo is a substantial document comprising 126 chapters, that describes in great detail not only the actions that accompany the various elements of the liturgical performance of the mass, but also precious contextual information relating to hierarchy, geography, and other organizational factors.

For a study that asks the reader to view a singular liturgical text in its social context, there are two basic challenges: How does one take the text and extract its full potential as a reflection on the mentality of early medieval society? And, how does one support the notion that this text can be treated as a broadly social document? For reasons which are entirely understandable, the first challenge is better addressed than the second. One may ask whether there is enough information about the way the liturgy functioned in society generally to make a focused examination of a single (albeit rich) document the best approach to understanding the religious life of the Roman populace. Romano is well aware of this challenge and he marshals an array of ancillary documents to help flesh out his picture: hagiographies, prayer books, papal letters, church councils, and the geography and archaeology of the city and its surroundings. This is a resourceful approach—although, because they are used to shed light on a single text, the evidence of these ancillary sources can sometimes seem rather disconnected and it is not always convincing that an “early medieval society” at worship emerges. Having said that, Romano is willing to ask tricky and necessary questions even when the evidence to answer them promises to be thin.

The first chapter sets out some of the unique characteristics of the ecclesiastical organization of Rome with its necessary provisions for being a city with a pope. He explains the geographic and pastoral repercussions of a “stational” system and this provides an important background to the preoccupations of the *Ordo* which opens with a description of “the seven regions of the ecclesiastical order of the city of Rome,” its deacons, subdeacons and acolytes, and the day of the week allotted to services in each region. However, there are many details to be sorted out, even for a document that purports to set a clear ordering of ecclesiastical life, and Romano takes us through the various titles and offices and spatial realities that the authors of the document did not consider necessary to explain.

Subsequent chapters examine themes that arise from the document, and relate directly to its purpose: the orchestration of space and the aural environment in which the mass was presented; the hierarchy negotiated by a text that placed the pope and minor clergy in a pre-eminent position at the expense of monks, elites, and other lay Christians; the power of the liturgy to forge political and religious unity (a major position taken in the book); a consideration of those excluded from the influence of the mass; and finally, the role of the liturgy in sculpting the relationship of the clergy with the laity through prayers and masses that promised hope and means for a clerically-mediated afterlife. Not all chapters are seamlessly integrated into the wider book project, so that ideas, topics, and discussions of terminology are occasionally repeated elsewhere. The chapter that examines the “other” in society becomes so entrenched in histories of Jews, pagans, and

“disobedient” orthodox Christians in regions beyond Rome, that the initial decision to sideline liturgical variation outside Rome appears to present a missed opportunity. The strongest sections are those that focus on the papal court, on Christian worship, and on prayer.

Romano’s study of the *Ordo* allows him to intervene in current debates around sacred gift-giving, prayers and the sacrament, ritual and the use of anthropological models, and he has some interesting and insightful things to say on these issues. Furthermore, there is a wealth of detail on many aspects of the mass, its performance, and its meaning for the development of the papal court, on vestments, architecture, and costs. Less well-explored are questions that would arise from a study more solidly centered on society, namely, the impact of the limited role of women in activities surrounding the mass. A scant few paragraphs indicate that there is probably little to be said. Yet it would have been interesting to know, for example, whether Christian women were thought to be versed in liturgical expressions and gestures. The Roman populace makes an occasional appearance, but Romano’s conclusion that “one cannot evaluate how the Roman congregation would have responded to the Mass” (74) is a judicious recognition of the difficulty in turning a clerical document to broader social commentary. Furthermore, the Roman populace had many other models of orderliness, as Romano relates, making it hard to know if ordinary members of the city’s populace ever referenced liturgical forms independently of a shared respect (or protest) for hierarchy and ceremony that was a part of many other facets of public life at the time. Romano makes a stab at factoring in these variables. In the end, the focus on a single liturgical text from which to observe society seems inevitably to make observations on social context serve as an additional layer of commentary on the text. But this is not a bad thing. This text deserves to be better known and understood by historians of the early middle ages and this study, which is accessible, informative and scholarly, is the study to do it. The social contexts for the *Ordo* provided by Romano is sometimes fascinating, often intensely thought-provoking, and his interventions into scholarly debates are always informative and generously framed.

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