

conclusions or not, this book has the great merit of raising important questions and encourages us to reassess well-known or neglected sources with a fresh eye.

The breadth and diversity of the bibliography are impressive and allow A. to engage with many topics and particularities within the Graeco-Roman Near East. However, this makes the discussion rather difficult to follow for readers who are not already familiar with the region and period. Another shortcoming resides in the numerous repetitions throughout the book. While the reiteration of the same source or concept between chapters, or between sections in a chapter contributes to the unity (and development) of the argument, regular repetitions of the same idea a few lines apart and recurring announcement effects weigh the progression down and often give the impression of a flawed, unfinished reasoning.

Proofreading has been meticulous, with very rare typos or inversions in the text content (*contra*: notes 42 and 43 on p. 46 are clearly inverted). It is unfortunate that the illustrations did not benefit from the same care. The photographs and plans are poorly contrasted (see especially fig. 1 p. 76, 4 p. 140, 11 p. 181; in the plan of Dura-Europos, fig. 17 p. 213, all the streets have disappeared). More damagingly, the eastern frontier of Roman Syria is mislocated in the introductory maps 6 and 7: Dura should be in Syria, not in Parthia/Persia.

Despite these few formal and inherent weaknesses, A.'s book is a worthy addition to Cambridge University Press' important series on 'Greek culture in the Roman world'. By challenging several scholarly assumptions on Greek and Easterner identity in Roman Syria, it constitutes a thought-provoking marking-stone in the study of identity, ethnicity and culture in Graeco-Roman Syria.

Institut de recherche sur l'architecture antique

GAËLLE COQUEUGNIOT
gaille.coqueugniot@mom.fr

THE FAMILY IN THE BYZANTINE WORLD

BRUBAKER (L.), TOUGHER (S.) (edd.) *Approaches to the Byzantine Family*. (Birmingham Byzantine and Ottoman Studies 14.) Pp. xxvi + 417, figs, ills, map. Farnham, Surrey and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2013. Cased, £70. ISBN: 978-1-4094-1158-1.
 doi:10.1017/S0009840X14002959

The present volume presents nineteen essays on various aspects of the family in the Byzantine world and nearby. These were culled from a larger set of papers presented in sessions at the International Medieval Congress at Leeds between 2007 and 2010. They are truly essays, in that they sketch out one facet of the question briefly, suggesting new ways forward rather than synthesising past work. Indeed, as the preface by B. points out, the statement made by the late Angeliki Laiou in 1989 still holds true today: 'The study of the Byzantine family is still in its infancy' (p. xx, quoting Laiou, 'Symposium on the Byzantine Family and Household: Introduction', *DOP* 44 [1990], 97–8).

The collection covers a wide range of Byzantine places and times, as well as offering some comparative studies. It proceeds in roughly chronological order. In Chapter 1, M. Harlow and T. Parkin summarise the Greek and Roman background. Chapters 2–5 cover late antiquity. J. Hillner considers the place of violence in the late Roman family, V. Vuolanto elicits evidence for relations within the family and the socialisation of children from autobiographical narratives, F. Vasileiou investigates the phenomenon of the absence of fathers in Christian literature, and N. Howard reads the *Life of Macrina* as an implicit

theological polemic demonstrating the ethical superiority of the family of Gregory of Nyssa over the parvenu logic-chopper Eunomius.

Chapter 6 and 7 pause to offer some comparative views. The first, a collaboration by E. Southon, M. Harlow and C. Callow, is a historiographical review of the family in the late antique west, A.D. 400–700. The second is an overview of the family in medieval Islamic societies by J. Bray. With Chapter 8 we sail again to Byzantium, as E. Davies applies the methodology of Life Course Studies to the abundance of Byzantine saints' lives produced between the sixth and twelfth centuries and suggests some general patterns that may reflect rhetorical tropes as well as literal chronology. In Chapter 9 B. also focuses on a restricted body of evidence by examining the representation of families in Byzantine portraits, broadly defined to include images on coinage as well as those found in biblical or donor images on church walls and in manuscripts. The art-historical perspective continues in Chapter 10, as C. Hennessy discusses the portrayal of Byzantine children and their relations to other members of the family, using a similar range of sources as B.

In Chapter 11, C. Ludwig draws on her work as co-editor of the *Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit* to map social ties that were previously hard to discern, namely the fortunes of the great aristocratic families of the late Byzantine period before they rose to the pinnacles of power. S. Ellis, in Chapter 12, also touches on aristocracy, but in the context of the archaeology of the Byzantine house, focusing on the Cappadocian rock settlements and comparative evidence from the Ottoman period.

Chapters 13 and 14 turn back to hagiography. S. Constantinou argues that, in the *Life of Alexios the Man of God*, despite the saint's dramatic renunciation of his family on his marriage night, the dynamic of the family members and their responses to Alexios' disappearance and reappearance is in fact the central plot of the story. In the next chapter (in French and hence the only non-English contribution), M. Kaplan applies himself to the more historical *Life of Theodora of Thessaloniki*, emphasising how much it, and the cult of Theodora itself, were instruments in the hands of a major Thessalonican family as it sought to rehabilitate itself from past adherence to iconoclasm.

T.'s Chapter 15 is the only one to examine Byzantine dynastic history in detail. He looks at one of the longest-lived of the Byzantine dynasties, that of the Macedonians (867–1056), focusing on the relations between three sets of siblings (Leo VI and Alexander, Basil II and Constantine VIII, and Zoe and Theodora) and inquiring as to how these were shaped by both personality and office. Chapter 16 is another comparative chapter, as N.M. El Cheikh examines the Abbasid caliphal family through the lens of the reign of al-Muqtadir (908–932), for which we have more evidence than most.

Turning to other foci of Byzantine life, in Chapter 17 D. Krausmüller sheds light on the way that monastic communities (particularly men's monasteries in the tenth and eleventh centuries) did and did not form alternative families, suggesting parallels with the way relations of alliance and advancement were made in lay society, as young men formed relationships with powerful patrons. Aristocracy is illuminated further by L. Neville in Chapter 18, as she looks at how Nicephorus Bryennius portrays family politics in his early twelfth-century history and argues that in his attempt to redeem the behaviour of the squabbling families (including his own), he cast their struggles in the mould of Republican Roman competition, rather than of western chivalry as has been hitherto supposed. Lastly, in Chapter 19 F. Kondyli brings us from the high society of the twelfth century to the peasantry of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries on the island of Lemnos, using her own archaeological survey work in conjunction with the rich archives of Mt Athos to delineate demographic and economic family patterns in the period around the Black Death.

T. provides a brief afterword to summarise the essays and note some key themes: problems of evidence, the focus on hagiography, the effect of Christianisation on the

Byzantine family, the role of class, the definition of family and the need for gender studies of men as well as women. The last pages are taken up by a relatively complete index, particularly useful given the fragmented nature of the presentation in such an edited volume. There is no general bibliography; instead each chapter has its own, leading inevitably to much overlap.

Overall the volume is of high quality and will reward readers, whether they choose to read it straight through or selectively. Each essay stands well on its own, yet there is enough overlap of concerns, and in several cases of contents, that individual chapters can usefully complement each other. Of particular interest were the essays that offered new interpretations of long-studied elements of Byzantine family life, for example Ludwig on the rise of the great Byzantine aristocratic families and Krausmüller on monastic family as taking over not just ideas of blood kinship from lay society but also larger patterns of patronage and friendship.

There are two minor drawbacks in the volume. First, although given the nature of collections blind spots are inevitable, the late Byzantine period is conspicuously absent, with only Kondyli addressing it in detail. The second is that the comparative essays, while interesting and useful in themselves, do not for the most part attempt to connect to Byzantium explicitly. From their tenor, this seems to have been a conscious decision by the authors and editors, perhaps to avoid forcing the comparanda into a protean Byzantine mould, but some more reflection on their actual significance for Byzantinists would have been useful. Related to this is the fact that, although 'Islamic' society is problematised, the fact that there remained large numbers of Christians within it, with their own relation to and adaptation of Byzantine norms, is never discussed. Nor, apart from some fleeting references, do Jews figure in the discussion, whether inside or outside Byzantium.

Yet these gaps themselves are useful in serving to suggest where scholars might direct their future efforts. In addition to containing much excellent scholarship, this volume will be a valuable addition to the bookshelves of Byzantinists and those in related disciplines, including Classics.

University of Basel

NICHOLAS MARINIDES
nicholas.marinides@unibas.ch

AN INTRODUCTION TO ROMAN SOCIETY

GIBBS (M.), NIKOLIC (M.), RIPAT (P.) (edd.) *Themes in Roman Society and Culture. An Introduction to Ancient Rome*. Pp. xxxii + 464, ills, maps. Ontario, Canada: Oxford University Press, 2014. Paper, £35, US\$85. ISBN: 978-0-19-544519-0.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X14001644

In principle, one may think that this volume is another textbook among hundreds of others on the history of the ancient Romans. Indeed, authors and publishing houses (including the world-renowned Oxford University Press) share a common expectation – to publish best-selling and widely-distributed books – and surveys on Roman history have proved to be an unlimited source of sales success. This book certainly satisfies such expectations, but it goes beyond that. It presents a very didactic narrative on historical issues from sexuality and gender, through crime, law and order, to ancient technology and engineering. It is interesting in at least two ways: (1) it represents a national effort of Canadian scholars 'to provide students of Roman society with readings well suited to the introductory