BONFIRE OF THE VANITIES

A. M. HARTNEY: *John Chrysostom and the Transformation of the City*. Pp. x + 222. London: Duckworth, 2004. Cased, £45. ISBN: 0-7156-3193-4.

One of the most prolific and influential figures in the late antique east and, alas, also one of the most conservatively studied, John Chrysostom has excited renewed interest in the past decade. The result has been the appearance in the last six years of six books (Brändle, Illert, Mitchell, Leyerle, Tiersch, and now Hartney) and a slew of dissertations on John, his thoughtworld, and writings. While a number of these works follow traditional approaches, others, such as Blake Leyerle in her ground-breaking study of the two treatises on the subintroductae (*Theatrical Shows and Ascetic Lives* [Berkeley, 2001]), have begun to apply newer theoretical approaches derived from areas such as literary critical theory and gender studies. H., who owes much to Leyerle (she was able to use a manuscript of the book prior to its publication), likewise attempts to push the boundaries. Her central thesis is that John, having left the monastic life for life in the city and the priesthood, transferred his frustrated ascetic ambitions to his audience (pp. 28–9). As a result, he sought to remodel the classical polis along Christian lines by reordering household relations, on the assumptions that the household is the basic unit within the polis and that by changing society at the grass roots he could effect change in the larger community (pp. 5–6). The medium for this remodelling was his preaching. How Chrysostom tackled the shift from euergetism to ostentatious wealth that so disturbed not just him but also Libanius and Ammianus Marcellinus was to target the rich, since the poor were unable to effect change because of their circumstances. Arguing that the relationship between the sexes is a fundamental aspect of society, H. sees Chrysostom targeting gender and behaviour as the key mechanism for resolving the disparity between rich and poor in the late antique city (p. 14).

Before arriving at the issues of gender and wealth, H. takes the reader through a number of introductory chapters. Chapter 1 sets the scene by stating the thesis and providing a brief introduction to John's life. Chapter 2 briefly expands on the essential tension in John's life between his calling to the solitary ascetic life and likewise to the urban priesthood, and explains how this underwrote his agenda for the city. Since preaching is considered to be the essential medium for John's ascetic and anti-wealth agenda, time is then taken to examine in greater depth both the issue of preaching and its audience (the effectiveness of the medium: Chapter 3) and John's own preaching style and the mechanisms he used to deliver his message (Chapter 4). It is with Chapter 5 that an investigation of the central thesis of her book begins. Here she outlines the female and male rôle models whom John exploited in his preaching. Chapters 6 and 7, which owe their heaviest debt to Leyerle's study, concentrate on the construction of gender, attempting to counterbalance feminist biases by demonstrating the equal importance of constructions of male gender. As a consequence of these constructions, H. shows how for Chrysostom sins themselves were gendered. Chapter 8 moves on to consider how gender rôles were ordered in the household and city in John's thoughtworld and how this relates to the preceding philosophical tradition. In Chapters 9 and 10 a consideration of gender, sin, and wealth and how these fit into Chrysostom's model of the city beomes the focus. Chapters 11 and 12 move onto the rôle of almsgiving in redeeming the wealthy and reordering the city, and how all of the themes of the book come together.

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https://doi.org/10.1093/clrevj/bni356 Published online by Cambridge University Press

This is in many ways both an important and a frustrating book. In a specialist field where all too few studies attempt to push the boundaries by applying new approaches, H.'s book, following as it does in the footsteps of Leyerle's important study on ascetic 'marriage', further takes up the topic of asceticism and frames it, while ostensibly against Peter Brown's thesis in *The Body and Society* (New York, 1988), albeit unwittingly within the new paradigm put forward by Brown in *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover, NH, 2002). In this respect it makes a significant contribution. Scholars of John Chrysostom and of late antique society alike will find the ideas it raises stimulating. On the other hand, despite the complexity of the issues with which it engages, the book is characterized by a tendency towards oversimplification, and the question remains whether the evidence which H. draws upon and the arguments she puts forward to support her thesis are convincing. While it does contribute to a number of important current debates, H.'s cannot be said to be the definitive study on the topic. If it serves to spark off more intense discussion on these issues, however, it will have fulfilled its purpose.

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doi:10.1093/clrevj/bni356

PAPYRI FROM PETRA

J. Frösén, A. Arjava, M. Lehtinen (edd.): *The Petra Papyri I*. (American Center of Oriental Research Publications 4.). Pp. xx + 144, ills, pls. Amman: American Center of Oriental Research, 2002. Cased, US$80. ISBN: 0-90-95654-3.

Great excitement and expectations greeted the announcement of the discovery of the 'Petra Papyri', late in 1993: some 140 carbonized papyrus rolls found in a room adjacent to a Byzantine church excavated in Petra, the old capital of the Nabataean kingdom, and later in the province of Palaestina Salutaris/Tertia (now in south Jordan). The papyri are written in Greek, date from the sixth century (537–*c.* 593), and are all documentary; most of them relate to property transactions of one Theodoros son of Obodianos, a clergyman (for most of his adult life), and his relatives. Their publication has been undertaken by two teams, one of the University of Helsinki, the other of the University of Michigan. Of the original find, only about three dozen rolls have turned out to be decipherable (in various degrees). This first volume, which offers editions of sixteen texts, is the work of the Helsinki team. Four or five other volumes are to follow (*PPetra* II will be the responsibility of the Michigan group, and will include a very extensive property agreement).

The papyri come from an otherwise poorly documented period in the history of Petra; among other things, it now becomes clear that the city was not destroyed by the earthquake of 551, as had been thought. But their interest is not limited to this. These texts are rarities. All papyrological evidence we previously had from that part of the world in that period chiefly consisted of the papyri from Nessana. There is new information on regional linguistic features, notarial practices, and generally the daily realities of a world until recently veiled by oblivion.

The editions are preceded by discussions of the historical and archaeological context of the find, the conservation of the papyri, the chronological systems attested in them, and a description of the family of Theodoros. Texts **1**–**2** are agreements concerning property, a type of document frequently exampled in this 'archive' (several

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