also to the change to hired mourners in actual funerary practice). The last section, on 'Women in Early Christianity and Byzantium', begins with an analysis of the significance of ascetic fasting to early Christian women, which Helène Whittaker sees in psychological, social, and religious terms. Agneta Ahlqvist surveys the memorial functions of catacomb painting in Syracuse, while Julia Burman looks at the construction of femininity in the account of the death of St Macrina. Finally Jeanette Lindblom reviews some aspects of women and religion during the fourth to seventh centuries, noting some major changes, for example, in female models of sanctity (from 'sexless' ascetics to married women and nuns) and a diminishing rôle for women in congregations.

Given its wide span of subjects and its background as conference proceedings, the book is likely to prove more attractive for its individual contributions than as a whole. That is understandable but a pity, as some interesting themes, particularly to do with women and death, surface across the papers and it would have been useful perhaps to have had some brief editorial comment drawing these together. Inevitably the papers vary in style and approach: some tend towards reviews of current scholarship, while others are more innovative. The book is compactly produced and well illustrated for its size.

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CHRISTIAN FAMILIES

DEMO

D. L. Balch, C. Osiek (edd.): *Early Christian Families in Context. An Interdisciplinary Dialogue*. Pp. xx + 412, ills, colour pls. Grand Rapids, MI and Cambridge: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2003. Paper, US$28, £19.99. ISBN: 0-8028-3986-X.

Although both women and the family in the Roman empire have been popular research topics for three decades now, the study of the Mediterranean family has been curiously divided by the invisible boundaries between different scholarly traditions. Ancient historians, with a background in the classics and/or social history, especially from English-speaking countries, have focused on Italian and other western evidence in the first two centuries of the empire. Biblical scholars, on the other hand, have studied the same period, but mainly through the New Testament and other eastern sources. Common to both these traditions is that their focus has not extended much beyond the second century. The family in the ensuing centuries has, until recently, been left for continental legal historians and patristic scholars, who have always moved more freely between pagan and Christian sources. Unfortunately, their work, too, has remained isolated from the Anglo-Saxon family studies.

This collection of essays by seventeen authors aims to bridge the gap between theologians and ancient historians. It is the product of an interdisciplinary conference held at the Texas Christian University in December 2000, bringing together scholars of ancient Judaism, early Christianity, and the Roman family of the early empire. The topics of individual papers range from houses to women, slaves, and children. The basic assumption behind the book is that the early Christian family was not radically different from the contemporary Greco-Roman family. Or rather, the early Christian or Jewish family was no more different than the other regional and social variants of the

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broad family model that existed in the Roman empire. This assumption is feasible and probably correct, although only a few of the contributions (notably Kraemer and Osiek) make any real effort to prove it. Thus, to put early Christian family dynamics in context, one has to study Mediterranean families in general. On the other hand, as classical scholars have by now nearly depleted the sources for the Italian family, their interest is moving towards the family history of the Roman empire as a whole, that is, towards the lower classes and the provinces. This will inevitably focus attention on the only major literary work which looks at the early imperial society from the point of view of the provincial lower classes: the New Testament. Other important eastern sources include inscriptions from Asia Minor (see here Martin on slave families) and papyri from Egypt (not represented in the present volume).

From all this, it is clear that disciplinary boundaries should be crossed and new scholarly links established. This was clearly effected in the conference. It may nevertheless be asked if the book's subtitle ('An Interdisciplinary Dialogue') is wholly justified. There was certainly ample discussion and fruitful dialogue in the conference, to judge from the credits given in footnotes. However, it still appears to be a rather thin veneer. As far as I can see, most writers refer in their footnotes either to themselves (a venial sin as such) or to other scholars in their own tradition. References to another tradition are not common, and references to the fellow writers who appear in the same book are few and far between (I do not count here the introduction or the concluding essays). For example, the three chapters devoted to the archaeology of houses, by Wallace-Hadrill (*domus* and *insulae* in Rome), Trümper (houses in Delos), and Meyers (Syro-Palestinian domestic architecture), are good pieces of scholarship and potentially linked, but they do not have references to each other. Although all the book's contributors are well-known and productive authorities in their respective fields, either they did not see it worthwhile to check what the others had written on related topics or they checked but did not find it relevant. I do not claim that this would have made the individual contributions any worse. But in this particular context, and bearing in mind the laudable aims of the conference, it might invite some reflection. At any rate, it makes this book a series of informative monologues across a traditional boundary, but not yet a real dialogue.

The articles are generally of good quality and easily accessible, as befits the intended broad audience. Two of them (Lampe and Harrill) seemed to me to be laden with theory which did not really contribute to their conclusions, and one (Sedgwick) could have been much reduced without sacrificing the main point. Finally, I would single out Osiek's paper as an exception to the monologue pattern. Osiek asks how female slaves fared in early Christian communities. She examines her topic in an interdisciplinary spirit, citing widely both classical and biblical scholarship. Her enquiry is enlightening, although she has to concede that the evidence is too thin to answer her question. Besides, the article contains a number of inaccurate or questionable statements on slavery in Roman law and society. None of the inaccuracies is really serious for her investigation as a whole. Nevertheless, I feel duty-bound to list them here, since this is what a reviewer should do. It sounds like an exaggeration to say that female slaves had no gender (p. 256), in view of the long and extremely nuanced discussions of both male and female slaves by Roman jurists. Similarly, it is at the very least a moot question whether slavery meant 'social death' and whether slaves had no family: here Osiek cites only in passing Martin's paper on *de facto* marriages but without modifying her sweeping assertion (p. 258); nor does she discuss the implications of expected manumission for servile experience. Freedwomen with four children were exempted from guardianship, but children born in slavery were not counted, so the rule is not

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relevant in the context where it is cited (p. 259). The *SC Claudianum* did not penalize marriages between freedmen and freeborn women (p. 261). *Stuprum* could certainly be committed with a slave, though mainly by women (p. 263). Having sex with the female slave of another man did not carry a penalty in Roman law (p. 266). Some evidence would be needed for the bold statement that at some point in history 'sufficient sanctions were in place to change the practice [of sexually exploiting one's own female slaves]' (p. 274). In spite of these lapses, Osiek's article is one of the most successful in the collection. It highlights at the same time the promise and dangers of venturing outside one's own narrow competence. The other contributors, though not totally free of slips, may have avoided such pitfalls more easily because they kept on familiar ground.

Ancient historians will profit from the book if they are encouraged to approach the New Testament as a promising source for family history. The three last essays discuss the implications of the conference topic for theological education. It is probably in this field that the book may have the strongest impact. However, the articles included in it, though individually competent, are just a starting point. They should lead to an increased awareness of work done by other scholars and to the routine exchange of ideas between scholarly traditions. If that is achieved, the conference and the book can be considered a major success.

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PAGANS AND CHRISTIANS AT SYRACUSE

DEMO

R. GRECO: *Pagani e Cristiani a Siracusa tra il III e il IV secolo d. C.* (Supplementi a *Kokalos*, 16.) Pp. 145, map. Rome: Giorgio Bretschneider, 1999. Paper. ISBN: 88-7689-157-9.

Rosario Greco's study of the religious dynamics of third- and fourth-century Syracuse starts with a promise to approach the subject free from the Christianizing preconceptions that have often bedevilled such studies in the past (p. 7). His first chapter (on pagan cults in late antique Syracuse) begins in a style that holds true to this intention: a broadside against the use of the monolithic term 'paganism' and the author's preference for an emphasis on plural 'pagan religions' (p. 13). He is similarly scathing of any credence given to legends of the apostolic foundation of Christianity at Syracuse (p. 53 and n. 10). Some readers might see the need to make such points as rather quaint. But pious, Christianizing whimsy (memorably characterized as 'maudlin flapdoodle' by E. A. Thompson in *Who Was St Patrick?* [Woodbridge, 1985], p. 165) can be remarkably tenacious: thus G.'s polemical declarations are worth making.

Nevertheless, there is no escaping the fact that the sources are not always forthcoming on issues that G. would like to discuss. Roger Wilson noted that the evidence for religious activity in Sicily under the principate is problematic, especially in terms of dating, 'which make[s] even an outline account hazardous' (*Sicily under the Roman Empire* [Warminster, 1990], p. 277). For the late Republic, we have Cicero's description of Syracuse's religious sites in the fourth *Verrine*; thereafter the picture becomes hazier. Hence G.'s treatment of 'traditional polytheism' (pp. 14–26) relies heavily on literary sources that are mostly earlier than the third century. He is on more secure ground when it comes to discussing 'mystery cults': it is generally agreed, for instance, that the Syracuse *mithraeum* dates to the third century (pp. 29–30), and that

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