

## BOOK REVIEW

*The Religious Worlds of the Laity in Late Antique Gaul*. By LISA KAAREN BAILEY. Bloomsbury Classical Studies Monographs. London and New York: Bloomsbury, 2016. Pp. viii + 247. Hardcover, \$120. ISBN 978-1-4725-1903-0.

In *Christianity's Quiet Success*, published in 2010, Lisa Kaaren Bailey convincingly shows that the Eusebius Gallicanus collection of sermons can be used as a document for the history of Christianity, despite the problem of its authorship, and she overcomes what has only been considered a limitation of the evidence by viewing it as an interesting characteristic: because the collection is anonymous, made for the average Gallic preacher, it provides a picture of late antique Christianity that significantly differs from the one we receive through figures like Augustine and Caesarius. In her new book, *The Religious Worlds of the Laity in Late Antique Gaul*, Bailey takes up a similar challenge and again surpasses the limitations of the evidence to offer a clear and new picture of the religious experience of the laity in Gaul between c.400 and 700.

The challenge is that evidence is nearly all of ecclesiastical origin, which makes the laity essentially a construct of clergy and monks. This does not stop Bailey, who after a careful review of the different types of evidence in her introduction, starts with an analysis of the category of laity in religious thought (chapter 1). This reveals what she describes as a large “grey zone” of people who do not fit in the categories constructed by clergy and monks: this haziness is what makes room for the agency of the laity that Bailey explores through a series of snapshots and vignettes in the following five chapters.

In chapter 2, she considers religious spaces. Lay people not only used religious spaces for secular business—a use condemned, of course, by ecclesiastical authorities—but they could access spaces beyond the control of the bishops such as villa-churches, oratories, or tombs of saints. In chapter 3, she explores the religious landscape of four cities (Arles, Lyon, Trier, and Tours) and reveals the diversity of the religious experience of the laity in these cities. Indeed, multiplicity is a keyword in this and the following chapters for describing this experience. At the end of chapter 4, Bailey suggests, for instance, that the many and sometimes contradictory clerical interpretations of the ritual of the Rogations strongly invites us to assume diversity in the lay experience as well.

Chapter 5 looks at evidence about behaviors and misbehaviors of the laity. Epitaphs, in this case, reveal that lay people interpret in the context of their own expectations clerical expectations about them: religiosity, for instance, is rarely a topic in epitaphs and when it is, it is clearly only one element among many that define a good person. Misbehaviors as denounced in clerical sources, whether sermons or conciliar canons, are interpreted as signs of a mismatch between the expectations of clergy and that of the laity.

Chapter 6 courageously deals with knowledge and belief of lay people. Bailey rightly emphasizes that belief has too often been considered as impossible to reach behind the screen of clerical sources. However, as in the preceding chapters, she tackles the evidence head-on and arrives at interesting results. First, she shows that dispensing knowledge and inculcating the laity with belief was an important goal of the clergy as attested in many sermons. Second, she scouts for areas of lay theological concern by examining what sermons present as doubts or irreligiosity. Third, she shows how some contradictions in the miracle stories of Gregory of Tours reveal a lay belief in reciprocity that bishops deem incompatible with the Christian divine economy. Finally, epitaphs, which give a more direct access to lay beliefs, reveal that views about afterlife taught by the clergy are largely shared by the laity. In this chapter, Bailey definitively makes the case that knowledge and belief matter to the laity.

Overall, Bailey reaches her goal in this very clearly written book: it is possible to positively assess the religious experience of the laity despite the limitations of the evidence. What is somewhat lacking is a sense of how much of what Bailey describes is specific to Gaul between c.400 and c.700. More than a limitation of the present book, however, it is an invitation to undertake comparable studies for other areas and periods.

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