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Roisin Cossar, *Clerical Households in Late Medieval Italy*, I Tatti Studies in Italian Renaissance History (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 2017).

In *Clerical Households in Late Medieval Italy*, Roisin Cossar declares that her "aim is to explain how clergy used written records concerning their households to manage the regulations of their domestic lives by their superiors" (2). Through her close reading of notarial records as negotiations and historical events, rather than as straightforward depictions of reality, Cossar succeeds in affording humanity and agency to historical actors often derided by their superiors and later ecclesiastical historians as immoral and corrupt. She argues that clerics shared many of the conventions of lay life as heads of households, fatherly protectors of and providers for companions, children, and servants, and as honorable members of local communities. She concludes that in these every-day documents "clerics participated in the 'self-fashioning' that was one of the hallmarks of the early Renaissance" (165-6).

The volume is divided into two parts. The first, "Making Records," offers two chapters giving background on notaries and their registers in fourteenth-century northern Italian cities and on the three types of documentation upon which the author relies: testaments, inventories, and visitation records. Throughout these two chapters

Cossar explains, and then explains away, the substantial differences between Venetian notarial records and the others she uses from Bergamo, Como, Ferrara, Padua, Treviso, and Udine on the mainland. Two of the most significant are that Venetian notaries were never granted *publica fides* (independent authority to authenticate their documents) as were notaries on the *terraferma* and that the majority of Venetian notaries were clerics in major orders rather than laymen—both having considerable bearing on how they negotiated depictions of fellow members of the clergy in the documents they redacted. Cossar insists, however, that "the gap between mainland Italian and Venetian notaries has been overstated" (23) because their work cultures (the need to maintain a good reputation in order to attract business) and functions (in adapting the law to the needs of their clients) were similar. Instead of downplaying the significant differences between the legal status of an important body of her evidence and of other documentation employed, a stronger line of argument and methodology would be to compare directly and systematically the representations of clerical households in documents redacted by clerical notaries, both on the mainland and in Venice, to those by lay notaries. Did holy orders and being subject to ecclesiastical discipline yield different strategies of depiction or patterns of accommodation when notaries negotiated written portrayals of households and their intimate relations? The strategy the author adopts, segregating these

source problems in part one from the evidence on clerical households in part two, seems to run counter to her stated, and undoubtedly sincere, commitment to historicizing archives and bringing a humane perspective to documentary analysis. Attending to the forces at play in any notarial encounter warrants giving weight to the ecclesiastical mentalities and pressures possibly informing a clerical notary's practice and to the different authoritative status a Venetian notary brought to any recording of the complex humanity and human experiences of his clients.

Part two, "The Clerical *Familia*," describes three aspects of the clerical household through chapters on priests as patriarchs in their households, on clerics' companions, and on material culture and work in the clerical *domus*. Throughout Cossar argues that clerical households were more similar to lay households than different. Many of these similarities—young clerical apprentices entering the households of established parish priests; enduring relationships between clerics and their natal families; emotional and sexual relations with women— have long been known by ecclesiastical historians but are usefully presented here within the life cycle framework of family history. The author's aim to integrate the clerical *familias* into historiography on the (lay) family is valid and valuable. But throughout her disinterest in and lack of attention to ecclesiastical difference (e.g. ecclesiastical law and requirements [68] without discussing them;

distinctions between property owned by the church and by the cleric personally [147]) raises doubts about Cossar's assertion of greater similarity. At points where differences are undeniable (e.g., in how their women were identified), she still argues that clerics "fashioned their own definition of a clerical *ordo*" (3) and had hybrid identities (148). While many readers will find useful references in Cossar's wide reading on notarial practice and clerical concubinage, the annotation is not as complete as the interested reader would often like and the total lack of a bibliography—shame on both the press and the series!—makes finding initial full references difficult and diminishes accessibility to the fruits of the author's erudition.

Cossar's Clerical Households nonetheless offers an engaging exploration of aspects of clerical domesticity sure to inspire and provoke valuable research on these topics in other Italian cities and areas of Europe.

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