

BOOK REVIEW

Carmen Angela Cvetković, Peret Gemeinhardt (Eds.), *Episcopal Networks in Late Antiquity. Connection and Communication Across Boundaries*, (Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte vol. 137), De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston, 2019, 365 pages ISBN 978-3-11-055188-4

Among the valuable volumes of the *Arbeiten zur Kirchengeschichte* series last year, the papers of the conference dealing with the topic of “Episcopal Networks in Late Antiquity. Connection and Communication across Boundaries” held in Gottingen (28th-30th September 2016) were published. The contributions of this volume emphasize the important role played by regional or local contexts of the late ancient world and, according to the editors, investigate “a specific aspect of the ‘inter-connectivity’ that characterizes the late ancient Christianity in the Mediterranean area by focusing on the formation and operation of episcopal networks”. As key figures of authority in the late antique city, the bishops played various roles such as patrons, teachers, defenders of faith, managers of economic resources and even as political actors. That is way they were expected to interact with individuals of diverse social background that forms their congregations as well as with secular authorities. (p. 1)

The fourteenth contributions of the volume revolve around the efforts of defining the episcopal networks, searching for their origins, the mechanism behind their development and their role in specific situations. To this main concern, the investigations of episcopal networks enable us to gain new insights about interpersonal connection and social interactions of bishops in Late Antiquity. All these contributions are organised in two main parts, dedicated to the definition of this network and to its context.

In the first study, “Episcopal Nepotism in the Later Roman Empire (c. 350–450)” (p. 19-42), Volker Menze sheds a fresh perspective on episcopal families and Eastern Roman Empire, showing that from the mid fourth to the mid fifth century nepotism was quite spread and did not have a pejorative connotation. On the contrary, by analysing the case of the Cappadocians and the succession of Theophylus-Cyril-Dioscor, the author leads us to the conclusion that these close familial ties could have been seen by their contemporaries as guaranties of the “Orthodoxy” of bishops related to the authoritative figures of the Christian doctrine.

In her study, entitled “A New Approach to Ambrose of Milan’s Kinship” (p. 43-62), Ariane Bodin analyses the geographic background of Ambrose’s family and the kinship terminology used by the Milanese bishop in his correspondence in order to establish if he was truly related to Quintus Aurelius Symmachus.

In the next contribution “Influential Friends? Augustine’s Episcopal Networks” (p. 63-82), Gillian Clark tries to reconstruct Augustine’s social network following his correspondence. But the expectation that Augustine had influential friends is rather a projection of the modern assumptions according to which Augustine was one of the leading theological and political actors in North Africa. Moreover, Gillian Clark underlines the challenges to trace networks of communication from the tiny proportion of material which has survived. At the same time, she points out that “the techniques of network analysis and digital mapping may help to answer questions, but probably they can do no more than redescribe in social-science language, and try to represent in diagrams, the information we already have” (p. 78).

A similar case is approached in the contribution signed by Madalina Toca and Johan Leemans, “The Authority of a ‘Quasi-Bishop:’ Patronage and Networks in the Letters of Isidore of Pelusium” (p. 83-100). They focus on the activity of Isidore reflected in his correspondence, given that “his corpus of 2000 extant letters is a goldmine of information about late antique patronage and networking” (p. 83). The brief and abstract content, the difficulty of dating or identifying the addressees of these letters hinder a more precise contextualisation, but the information is enough to reconstruct some of the networks and the types of patronage Isidore was involved in. The authors explore Isidore’s involvement in the Gigatius-affair and some aspects of his correspondence with emperor Theodosius II, Cyril of Alexandria, and different monks. They conclude that Isidore assumed all kinds of pastoral and patronage duties, intervened for his city and church and was probably more influential than many local bishops.

In the next contribution, “Patronage Networks in the Festal Letters of Athanasius of Alexandria” (p. 101-116), David M. Gwynn investigates the crucial role played by these Festal Letters in Athanasius’ success to strengthen the Alexandrian authority within Egypt and to maintain his authority despite his numerous periods of exile. Even more, these letters bear testimony to the cultivation of patronage networks and the control exercised by Athanasius over the entire Egypt.

Peter Gemeinhardt investigates in his contribution, “Bishops as Religious Mentors: Spiritual Education and Pastoral Care” (p. 117-148), three types of mentor-mentee relationships: pagans in the course of conversion (including individuals, like Volusianus, to whom Augustine wrote letters, or groups like

the hearers of Zeno of Verona's sermons), virgins (like Olympias, the head of a female ascetic community in Constantinople, to whom John Chrysostom wrote many letters), or monks (like Dracontius whom Athanasius tried to convince not to resign from the bishopric). The author concludes that a) Christian mentorship presupposes hierarchy, but it also bridges hierarchical patterns, b) it involves responsibility for the spiritual welfare of the mentee (and could be considered as a variant of pastoral care), c) mentorship has an educational component, d) it regularly refers to the Scriptures and e) it aims at building networks by creating strong personal ties between mentor and mentee (p. 143).

Sigrid Mratschek points out the relation between Christian pilgrimages and practices of hospitality, in her contribution entitled "Crossing the Boundaries: Networks and Manifestations of Christian Hospitality" (p. 149-178). She claims that many of the pilgrimages increasingly undertaken in the second half of the fourth century, would have been impossible without the hospitality and local knowledge of monks and bishops along the way. "Networks of hospitality and cooperation linking places far apart brought the Christian world of Late Antiquity closer together" (p. 162). The author insists also on a particular form of hospitality, namely the asylum, as a form of support and protection for the victims of persecutions.

In her paper entitled "Niceta of Remesiana's Visits to Nola: Between Sacred Travel and Political Mission" (p. 179-203), Carmen Angela Cvetković deals with the relationship between Paulinus of Nola and Niceta of Remesiana. She explores Niceta's visits to Nola on at least two occasions. These encounters have been recorded by Paulinus in his *Epistula* 27, *Carmen* 17 and *Carmen* 18. The texts enable us to perceive Niceta as a well-connected bishop involved in more mundane issues, like the ecclesiastical business between the Illyrian churches and the church of Rome. She also identifies Niceta as a messenger of ecclesiastical news to his fellow bishops, whom he informs about recent works produced in the regions he visited as well as about the results of important events, such as episcopal elections in Rome.

The second part of the volume "Episcopal Networks in Context" focuses on the behaviour of the bishop(s) involved in that given situation not only through an understanding of the role a bishop was expected to play in the late ancient society, but also in light of the position he occupied in a social network

In the first contribution of this second part, "The Impact of the Laurentian Schism on Ennodius of Pavia's Participation in Episcopal Networks" (p. 207-226), Daniel K. Knox tries to reconstruct the impact of this schism through a quantitative analysis of the interconnectedness of Laurentius. The network of Ennodius' epistolary patterns is realised using a software generated model and "is based on two social actions: the sending of letters and the mentioning the

third parties in letters that they are not the addressee of" (p. 210). According to the network analysis of epistolary actions "the prominence of supporters of Pope Symmachus in Ennodius' preserved correspondence can be seen not only in the volume of epistolary actions that they received but also in their relation to other supporters among Ennodius' correspondents. Supporters of Pope Symmachus were a part of a dense web of correspondents with whom Ennodius corresponded frequently and who were frequently mentioned in his letters to others. As we have seen, there are fewer preserved conversations with supporters of Laurentius" (p. 224).

The contribution of Jamie Wood, entitled "Building and Breaking Episcopal Networks in Late Antique Hispania" (p. 227-248), examines the cultivation and operation of networks of groups of bishops within Hispania, rather than the networks of an individual bishop. "As key figures within their cities and members of regional aristocracies, bishops have often been seen as playing a pivotal role in managing the transition from Roman to post-Roman Hispania" (p. 227). This may explain why the episcopal vacancies were regarded as moments of conflict and the conflicts over episcopal position encouraged the formation of yet further networks in efforts to solve problems, especially during church councils. The author points out that "Analysis of the contested episcopal elections of late antique Hispania demonstrates that the neat networks of bishops described by the normative sources were rather more ephemeral in practice. The rhetoric of the bishops and their focus on consensus decision making at councils masks the insecurity of their position on a local level and in relation to other sources of power" (p. 244).

In the next paper, "Macedonius, Constantius and the Changing Dynamics of Power" (p. 249-266), Erika Manders focuses on the relationship between emperor Constantius and Macedonius, one of the first bishops of the newly established capital in the East. She highlights the practical and conceptual challenges which were posed by the rise of a new religious authority which would eventually replace the emperor's role in religious affairs. By exploring the episode of removal of Constantine's tomb from the Church of the Holy Apostles that broke the ties between Constantius and Macedonius, she concludes that this act must be seen in the broader context of the power struggle between emperor and bishop, who "wanted to cut the 'imperial cult' that was developing there in order to strengthen the episcopal preeminence". This action revealed that "the bishop no longer considered the emperor's authority as self-evident" (p. 263), and the emperor reacted by deposing his rival.

In the contribution of Jakob Engberg, entitled "Caring for African Confessors in Exile: The Ministry of Numeria and Candida during the Decian Persecution (Cyprian, *Epistulae* 21 -22)" (p. 267-294) it can be observed an

epistolary network between different regions of the Church as well as the strife for spiritual and material support of refugees, provided by the confessor Celerinus and his sisters Numeria and Candida who had previously apostatized (or sacrificed, respectively, following the emperor Decius' decree of 250) but now were respected, even leading figures in the community of refugees. This episode also sheds light on Cyprian's communication during these difficult times: the episcopal network in North Africa served as means of transmission of letters and thus helped to uphold Christian ideals of confessorship.

The paper of Daniëlle Sloom, "The Impact of Geographical and Administrative Boundaries on Late Antique Bishops" (p. 295-312), present an examination of the way in which existing civic structures and institutions might have had an impact on the way in which late antique bishops were able to exercise their position of power and influence within their Christian communities. She underlines that the expectation of "stable, life-long and regional appointments of bishops" had no parallel in imperial offices, but it was the basis on which bishops could create local and regional networks (and thus gain lasting prominence in a city and/or province); in the course of time, and even taking over some duties of urban or imperial officials. She also makes a first step towards a reconsideration of our perception of the meaning of dioceses, both as civic and ecclesiastical organizations. "It has become clear that civic dioceses were not units that were simply taken over by the church for its own purposes, but we should be much more careful in our analyses of the instances in which dioceses are mentioned in the late antique ancient Christian sources" (p. 308). Thus, we should not infer from medieval regulations how the late antique church was structured and how such structures were instrumental in shaping the limits of episcopal networks.

In the closing contribution, "Bishops and Mission Beyond the Frontiers: From Gothia to Nubia" (p. 313-337), Andrea Sterk investigates the missionary networks and highlights the role of bishops in such endeavours. Gothia and Nubia serve as case studies of the diverse roles that bishops played in the spread of Christianity on the eastern frontiers. She concludes that "within the process, 'episcopal networks' included not only bishops, but a diverse cast of characters too easily dismissed as 'accidental' evangelists. The reality of unofficial missionaries working both with and without episcopal oversight helps explain the rapid spread of Christianity in Late Antiquity, even when emperors showed little interest in mission to barbarians and bishops were preoccupied with doctrinal disputes" (p. 333).

Overall, the volume reflects the particularities of the episcopal networks and helps us understand their effects on the collective and individual destiny of Christians in Late Antiquity. The editors underline also that the contributors

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“seek to understand how Christian ideals of doctrinal normativity, ecclesiastical unity and spiritual perfection governed, shaped and affected interpersonal relationships leading towards cooperation or conflict” (p. 15).

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