

**Mulder-Bakker**, Anneke B. and Jocelyn Wogan-Browne, eds, *Household, Women and Christianities in Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages* (Medieval Women: Texts & Contexts, 14), Turnhout, Brepols, 2005; hardback; pp. 260; R.R.P. €60.00; ISBN 2503517781.

This book claims, on its cover, to consider ‘the impact of women’s householding on the history of the church’. Most of the nine papers struggle to live up to this claim, which should probably be taken as a criticism of the claim, rather than of the papers. They range broadly in time and space, from late antique to late medieval, from Byzantium to Scandinavia, and while most are based in the study of literature, there is some interesting discussion of material culture.

The editors provide an introduction in two parts, dividing the collection into two sections. There is no discernible reason for this, since the sections are not separated by period, geography, theme or approach. The introductions raise some interesting threads which can be pursued through the papers. Seven propositions are advanced concerning women, household and Christianity in the late antique and medieval periods, including that the medieval family was more egalitarian and the antique household more patriarchal, that household structures contributed to the shape of church activities, and that the difference between canon and civil law had a significant impact on women’s roles and freedoms. Much is made of the ‘conclusion’ that European Christianity cannot be seen as a ‘single monolithic entity or process’, a concept which is hardly new to anyone familiar with the early medieval period. This idea gives rise to the unnecessary pluralising of ‘Christianity’ in the book’s title, leaving one to ponder the use of ‘household’ in the singular.

Kate Cooper contributes two papers. The first is an interesting analysis of the contrast between biological and monastic families in the *Lives* of Melania the Younger, discussing the legalities and practicalities of family duties in the aristocratic Roman milieu alongside the political concerns of the young monastic foundation. Her second paper compares the *Handbook for Gregoria*, a sixth-century Latin conduct manual, to its contemporary, Ferrandus’s *Letter to Reginus*, with a focus on the image of the *miles Christi* and its application in household and province as spheres of authority. The conclusion that ‘the lay household should hold a central place ... as the elusive but indispensable institution within which the fate of province and empire took shape’ (p. 105) is important, but seems to be insufficiently argued in the paper, where household and province are compared, but not considered as in active relationship.

Eva M. Synek's paper on "'*Oikos*-Ecclesiology' and 'Church Order' in Eastern Christianity" discusses the nature of the early church as household with God as *pater familias*, and the gradual erosion of this structure as earthly father-figures, specifically bishops, were established. Else Marie Wiberg Pedersen's paper gives an interesting analysis of two monastic texts from Helfta, showing that the monastic community and indeed the wider church were conceived in terms of the household, with Christ as the kitchen and the focus on spiritual nourishment for household members and visitors.

In 'The Icon Corner in Medieval Byzantium', Judith Herrin makes a case for women's control of domestic devotion through their roles as first maintainers of the space dedicated to household gods and then commissioners and maintainers of Christian icons and the space they occupied in the household. Her admirable analysis of the literary and sparse archaeological evidence for the use of icons is perhaps not quite sufficient to uphold her suggestion that women were virtually forced to turn to devotion to icons because they were excluded from any other role in the Byzantine church than that of nun.

Birgit Sawyer's discussion of women and conversion in Scandinavia draws on the evidence of rune-stones and literature to suggest that Christianity encouraged women to espouse chastity in the face of existing reverence for procreation, and to depart from traditional kin-based arrangements for land-ownership and donate property to the church. This, she suggests, gave rise to misogynistic tendencies in literature.

In her analysis of theology and the Anglo-Norman household, Jocelyn Wogan-Browne considers relationships between learned Latinate clerics and household ladies and examines texts in which the hierarchies of the angels are compared to posts within the household, to conclude that the 'internalized household' as a template for spiritual aspiration was widespread. In a similar vein, two Dutch household books containing works by Jan van Boendale are surveyed by Anneke B. Mulder-Bakker, who concludes that the books were an important tool for all members of a household to shape their thoughts and actions, in which the mistress of the house would play a significant role.

Sarah Rees Jones and Felicity Riddy conclude the collection with a survey of the 'Bolton Hours', a late medieval Book of Hours from York. Based on research of impressive breadth and depth, they situate the manuscript within a complex social group in a small quarter of York, which is constructed largely on friendships between women. They highlight the importance of the bourgeois nuclear family in book and community.

The papers in this collection all have interesting things to say. The shoe-horning of them into a single book which seems to have a single point to make is not altogether successful. There seems occasionally to have been a conscious but unnecessary effort to draw conclusions which match the thematic requirements of the book rather than the evidence and analysis that are presented. That effort would have been better spent proofreading and tidying expression. Despite this, the book is an interesting and important collection of research and thinking about medieval women and Christianity.

*Pamela O'Neill*  
*School of Historical Studies*  
*University of Melbourne*

**Nevile, Jennifer, *The Eloquent Body: Dance and Humanistic Culture in Fifteenth-Century Italy*, Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 2005; cloth; pp. 262, 18 b/w illustrations; R.R.P. US\$39.95; ISBN 0253344530.**

*The Eloquent Body* is a welcome and valuable contribution to Renaissance studies. While a specialist text, it is written in an engaging style and its readability is aided by a clear layout and ample sub-headings. It is also supported by extensive endnotes and a thorough index and bibliography. These features make the text accessible to scholars in a range of fields as well as dance theorists. The potential widespread appeal of the book is significant, as one of the primary aims of its author, musicologist Jennifer Nevile, is to inculcate the history and theory of dance into the broader historical picture.

Nevile begins by pointing out that not only is dance a neglected area of scholarship, it is a subject that has been ignored in studies that have duly recognized other aspects of Renaissance humanism and courtly culture. As she states, 'dance has never been a part of this picture'. Nevile's subsequent elucidation of the role of dance in Renaissance culture is so detailed and evocative that I found myself marvelling that this area has been practically ignored within Renaissance studies for so long.

Nevile argues for the significant place of dance within the social, philosophical and intellectual milieu of courtly and humanistic culture. The study is limited to Italy as, not only was this a major centre of dance culture in the Renaissance, it is from here that we have the earliest and most extensive treatises dealing with both the choreography and philosophical theory of dance in the work of Domenico da Piacenza, Guglielmo Ebreo da Pesaro and Antonio Cornazano.