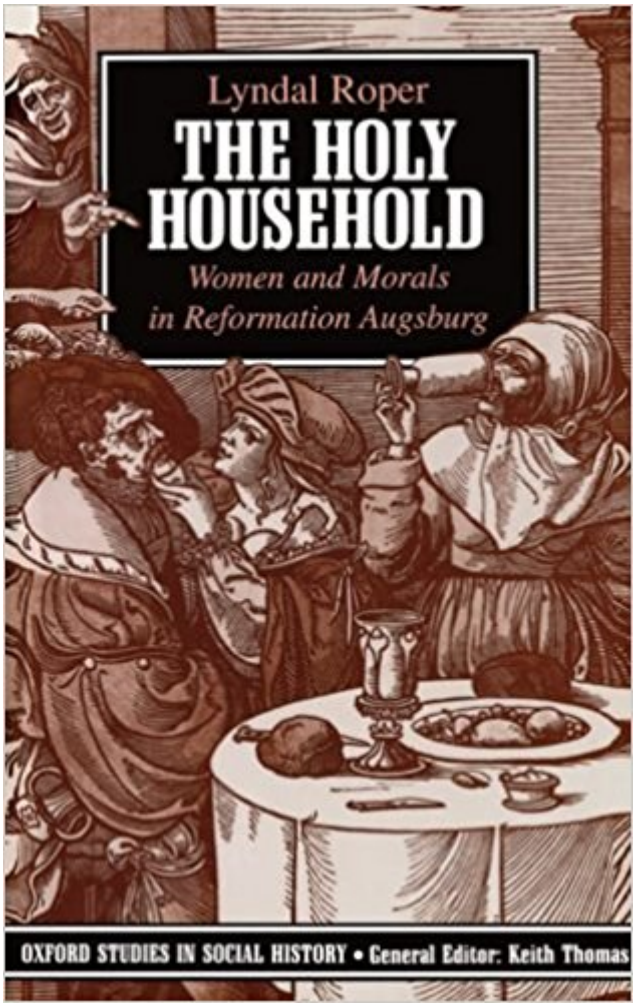
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The Holy Household: Women And Morals In Reformation Augsburg (Oxford Studies In Social History)



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Synopsis

This is a fascinating study of the impact of the Reformation idea of "civic righteousness" on the position of women in Augsburg. Roper argues that its development, both as a religious credo and as a social movement, must be understood in terms of gender. Until now the effects of the Reformation on women have been viewed as largely beneficial--Protestantism being linked with the forces of progressivism, individualism, and modernization. Roper here argues that such a view of the Reformation’s legacy is a profound misreading, and that the status of women was, in fact, worsened by the Reformation. A number of themes are explored: the economic position of women in the household economy; the nature of "civic righteousness" and how it applied a "reform moralism" to the role of marriage and the household; the efforts of civic authority to reform sexual deviance; the attempts to control marriage and the breakdown of marriage; and the role of convents and nuns. The Holy Household is the first scholarly account of how the Reformation affected half of society. It combines sound application of feminist theory with careful, open-ended archival research to advance our understanding of the Reformation, of feminist history, and of the place of women in modern European society.

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Customer Reviews

"Offers a fascinating and convincing history of patriarchy and Protestantism."--Journal of Social History"One of the most enlightening studies of the role of gender in the reformation era I have ever read. It sheds much light on marriage as a social institution. But most of all, it shows particularly how

women became a focus and target of the social discipline protestants were so well known for."--Mack P. Holt, George Mason University"A major contribution to Reformation studies and a landmark in gender studies of early modern Europe....Represents the outcome of a very demanding and (unobtrusively) theoretically sophisticated rethinking of the meanings of political communalism and the urban Reformation....It is her union, I think, of theoretical clarity, scholarly learning, and broadly humane attitude, which makes Holy Household an exciting book to read."--Sixteenth Century Journal"My students and I were very pleased with Holy Household....Provocative, scholarly, and well written."--J.W. Zophy, University of Houston-Clear Lake

Lyndal Roper is at University of London.

University of Oxford professor, Dr. Lyndal Roper, paints a contrarian view of the Protestant Reformation in her work The Holy Household: Women and Morals in Reformation Augsburg. In it, she suggests that far from being the "priesthood of all believers" that early Reformers idealized and sold as a liberation movement, the Protestant Reformation actually worsened conditions for the female half of the population. She argues this point on many social fronts of 16th century Augsburg: in marriage, sexuality, the practice of prostitution and the elimination of convents. While Roper's case clearly holds in regard to nuns, who lost all freedom to operate their convents and the status that came with being a "bride of Christ" under the Catholic regime, the rest of her argument is not as strong. In terms of the financially dependent condition women were confined to under both Protestantism and Catholicism, where the average woman's security was tied to either her marital status or the wealth of her male relatives, women fared better under Protestant encouragement of strong marriage and, according to Roper's own findings, enjoyed greater legal protections in terms of stabilization of marriage, verdicts in their favor through the Marriage Court, and finally through the abolition of brothels that really served to weaken existing marriages and exploit women rather than provide them financial opportunity.Although the thesis is weak, Roper does an admirable job bringing post-Reformation Augsburg to life.

In a brief but lucid introduction to her monograph, Lyndal Roper states her argument plainly for the reader. The last sentence of the section reads, "The conservative rewriting of the Reformation movement's message around a politics of women's role in marriage and household was the key to its successful implementation and establishment." Roper's thesis is that evangelical Protestant doctrine conquered Augsburg not because it offered radical social change, but rather because it

became a spiritual buttress for traditional gender roles in marriage. This is a departure from the more conventional view of the Reformation, when it was portrayed a more liberating social order for the average woman, at least when compared to the traditional Christianity practiced prior to the sixteenth century. The Holy Household has a straight-forward structure; Roper devotes chapters to analysis of sin, prostitution, wedding rites, expectations of marital relations, and the treatment of Catholic nuns. Roper's analysis of daily life in Augsburg, from the early sixteenth century to about 1550 (the period of the Catholic restoration), is certainly masterful.A staggering list of works cited, both printed and unprinted sources, takes up over twenty pages of the book. The majority of footnotes for particular arguments refer the reader to the mass of primary local and municipal archives Roper sifted through to find support for her thesis. When secondary works are cited, the footnote is usually a brief aside about parallel works, potential counter-arguments, or points of dissension between Roper's case and the traditional study of the Reformation. By making such obvious use of primary sources, Roper lends a great amount of credibility to her research, and at a few points in the book even delves into literary analysis of the use of certain German words during the period. For instance, there is a discussion of the various terms used by the Augsburg Council to describe sin and discipline to citizens. This meticulous investigation into period archives provides an accessible portrait of life in Reformation Augsburg and proves Roper's ability as a researcher.However, does this scholarship prove Roper's thesis? Ultimately, her argument puts the cart before the horse. Copious examples throughout the book illustrate that gender roles and marriage relations became increasingly calcified throughout the period due to the policies of the Protestant government of Augsburg. They founded these beliefs on Biblical tenets, but also on cultural mores extant at the time. The Protestant Reformation hardly liberated women from habitual gender roles and in fact became more patriarchal and sexually repressive as it advanced. This much Roper exhaustively proves. Ignored are other attributes of early modern Augsburg that found vindication in the Reformation, which may do more to explain the movement's success than the power offered to men over women. For example, the erasure of Catholic stigma attached to commerce and trade surely appealed to the predominately artisan city. While Roper articulates the sexual deviancy associated with Catholic clergy, and particularly emphasizes the (real or imagined) connection of women's sexual misbehavior with priests, she ignores other jealousies the laity harbored towards their clerics. Privileges of treatment under the law, taxation, and other perquisites rankled with potential Protestants. All of these were contributing factors to the dominance and domestication of the Reformation. While the benefits to be enjoyed from using the movement to solidify male power and strengthen traditional patriarchal authority were certainly enticing, they

could not have been the only reasons for the whole-hearted success of the Protestant reforms in Augsburg.

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