

Daily Life in Late Antiquity

Daily Life in Late Antiquity is the first comprehensive study of lived experience in the Late Roman Empire, from ca. 250 to 600 CE. Each of the six topical chapters highlights historical “everyday” people, along with spaces and objects, whose lives operate as windows into the late ancient economy, social relations, military service, religious systems, cultural habits, and the material environment. However, it is nevertheless grounded in late ancient primary sources – many of which are available in accessible English translations – and the most recent cutting-edge scholarship by specialists in fields such as archaeology, social history, religious studies, and environmental history. From Manichean rituals to military service, gladiatorial combat to garbage collection, patrician households to peasant families, *Daily Life in Late Antiquity* introduces readers to the world of Late Antiquity from the bottom up.

Kristina Sessa is Associate Professor at The Ohio State University and is the author of *The Formation of Papal Authority in Late Antique Italy* (Cambridge University Press, 2012). She is presently writing a book about war, environmental crisis, and the formation of Christian institutions in the late Roman West. Her scholarship has been supported by awards from the American Council of Learned Societies, the American Academy in Rome, and the Italian Academy for Advanced Studies at Columbia University.

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76610-4 — Daily Life in Late Antiquity
Kristina Sessa
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

Daily Life in Late Antiquity

KRISTINA SESSA
The Ohio State University



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
978-0-521-76610-4 — Daily Life in Late Antiquity
Kristina Sessa
Frontmatter
[More Information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS

University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314-321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
New Delhi – 110025, India

79 Anson Road, #06-04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning, and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521148405

DOI: 10.1017/9780511819360

© Kristina Sessa 2018

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements, no reproduction of any part may take place without the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2018

Printed in the United States of America by Sheridan Books, Inc.

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

NAMES: Sessa, Kristina, author.

TITLE: Daily life in late antiquity / Kristina Sessa, The Ohio State University.

DESCRIPTION: New York : Cambridge University Press, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references.

IDENTIFIERS: LCCN 2018001757 | ISBN 9780521766104 (hardback) |

ISBN 9780521148405 (pbk.)

SUBJECTS: LCSH: Rome—History—Empire, 284-476. | Rome—Social life and customs. | Rome—Civilization.

CLASSIFICATION: LCC DG311 .S55 2018 | DDC 937/.06—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2018001757>

ISBN 978-0-521-76610-4 Hardback

ISBN 978-0-521-14840-5 Paperback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication and does not guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	<i>page</i> vi
<i>Acknowledgments</i>	ix
Introduction: Studying Daily Life in the Late Roman Empire	1
1 Rural Life	21
2 Urban Life	47
3 The Household	84
4 The State in Everyday Life	125
5 Body and Mind	159
6 Religion in Daily Life	198
<i>Appendix: Late Roman Time and Money</i>	227
<i>Notes</i>	231
<i>Index</i>	239

Illustrations

0.1	Map of the late Roman Empire, ca. 400 CE.	<i>page 2</i>
1.1	Image of a millstone from a Roman sarcophagus, third century.	35
1.2	Image of a screw press, Church of SS. Lot and Procopius, Nebo (Jordan), sixth century.	37
1.3	Image of laborers treading grapes, Church of St. Costanza (Rome), fourth century.	39
2.1	Ruins on the Cidneo Hill, Brescia (Italy).	49
2.2	Statue of Scholastica, the Baths of Scholastica, Ephesus (Turkey), fourth century.	50
2.3	Embolos, a colonnaded street in Ephesus (Turkey), fifth and sixth centuries.	52
2.4	Byzantine shops at Sardis (Turkey), fifth and sixth centuries.	58
2.5	Baths, Salamis (Cyprus), sixth century.	65
2.6	Classical-era statuary in the former palestra of a bathhouse, Salamis (Cyprus).	67
2.7	Hypocaust system in the late Roman villa of La Olmeda (Spain).	68
2.8	Roman amphitheater, Arles (France), from the first century.	70
2.9	Hippodrome, Gerasa (Jordan), from the second century.	70
2.10	The “Gladiator Mosaic,” fourth century.	71

<i>List of Illustrations</i>	vii
2.11 Roman public latrines, Ephesus (Turkey).	76
3.1a Silver items from the Esquiline Treasure, Rome, fourth century.	86
3.1b Furniture fittings from the Esquiline Treasure, Rome, fourth century.	86
3.2 Female doll with articulated arms and earrings, Egypt, fourth century.	100
3.3 Slave collar, Rome, fourth century.	107
3.4 <i>Stibadium</i> , Villa di Faragola, Foggia (Italy), fifth or sixth century.	110
3.5 Modern reconstruction of the <i>stibadium</i> , Villa di Faragola.	110
3.6 Plan of the Villa Romana del Casale, Piazza Armerina, Sicily (Italy), fourth century.	113
3.7 Hall of the Great Hunt, Villa Romana del Casale, fourth century.	114
3.8 Ruins from the late Roman city of Serjilla (Syria), fifth and sixth centuries.	116
3.9 The “Hestia Tapestry,” Egypt, sixth century.	117
3.10 Floor mosaic with cut-in <i>dolia</i> , late Roman villa in Torre Llauder (Spain), sixth century.	118
3.11 Ceramic lamp, fifth century.	122
4.1 Reconstruction of the late Roman fortress at Durostorum, Silestra (Bulgaria), fourth century.	134
4.2 Spangenhelm, near Lyon (France), sixth or seventh century.	138
4.3 Section of the <i>Tabula Peutingeriana</i> , a medieval of copy of the (now lost) early fourth-century original map.	156
5.1 Child’s hooded tunic with possible apotropaic designs, Egypt, sixth or seventh century.	173
5.2 Clay token with image of St. Symeon Stylites, Syria, sixth century.	174
5.3 Linen tunic with Dionysian designs, Egypt, fifth century.	188
5.4 Ivory diptych of late Roman official with his wife and child, early fifth century.	189
5.5 Mosaic image of mistress and slaves, Villa Romana del Casale, fourth century.	190

5.6	Crossbow-shaped fibula, bronze, fourth century.	191
5.7	Child's sandals, Egypt, fourth century.	192
5.8	Mosaic of hunting scene from the Villa Romana del Casale, fourth century.	193
5.9	The "bikini girls" mosaic, Villa Romana del Casale, fourth century.	196
6.1	The "Confessio" in the late Roman house beneath SS. Giovanni e Paolo, Rome, fourth century.	204
6.2	Mosaic floor with mythological themes, Lullingstone Villa, Britain, fourth century.	205
6.3a	Silver platter with mythological designs, Mildenhall Treasure, Britain, fifth century.	206
6.3b	Silver spoon with Christian symbols, Mildenhall Treasure, Britain, fifth century.	206
6.4a	Exterior of the church of St. Sabina, Rome, fifth century.	208
6.4b	Interior wall paintings of apse, chapel at the Red Monastery, Egypt, fifth/sixth century.	208
6.5	Synagogue, Sardis (Turkey), late third century.	211
6.6	Zodiac mosaic, Synagogue at Hammat Tiberias (Israel), fourth century.	211
6.7	San Gennaro catacombs, Naples, fourth century.	214
6.8	Metal tourist flask for holy oil depicting St. Sergios, Sergiopolis (Syria), sixth or seventh century.	217
6.9	Clay figurine with bronze needles, Egypt, third or fourth century.	222
6.10	White Monastery, Sohag (Egypt), fifth century.	224

Acknowledgments

A book that attempts to cover so many different areas of late Roman history necessarily involves the help and critical insight of many people. Shane Bjornlie, Kim Bowes, David Brakke, Cam Grey, Lucy Grig, Julia Hillner, Anthony Kaldellis, and Carolina Lopez-Ruiz read individual chapters of this book. All gave me sage, detailed advice on how to improve sections and let me know where I had run afoul of the facts. Needless to say, any remaining errors are my own, and I could not have completed this project without them. I also want to thank my OSU writing group co-members, Theodora Dragostinova, Lilia Fernández (now at Rutgers University), Robin Judd, and Mytheli Sreenivas. They cheerfully read and commented on several chapters, and helped me shape the narrative so that it was more interesting and accessible to non-specialists. Collecting images for this book proved more challenging than I had imagined, and I want to thank Kim Bowes, Dallas Deforest, Richard Hodges, and Caroline T. Schroeder for allowing me to use material from their personal archives and for assisting with the captions. Additionally, I am especially grateful to Giuliano Volpe, who graciously sent me high-quality images of the archaeological remains of the *stibadium* at the Villa di Faragola in Foggia, along with his computer reconstruction of it. As always, Chris Otter offered advice, support, editing, inspiration, and even a drawing of a spoon.

Writing a book for a general audience requires a different voice from the one I normally use in my scholarship. As I was crafting the

manuscript, my imagined reader was my late mother, Alice B. Sessa (1944–2003). While not an historian by training (though she did have a master’s degree in Spanish literature), my mother was deeply fascinated by the past and by many of the questions at the heart of this book. In my case, “write so your mother can understand it” was more than just a clichéd imperative; for me, it was the continuation of a conversation started long ago at the kitchen table, when my mother helped me write an overly ambitious fourth-grade report on the entire history of Japan. I miss you, Mom. This book is for you.