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Protecting Peasant Dependants in Sixth-Century Sicily: The Moral Economics of Pope Gregory the Great

Abstract:

The letters of Pope Gregory the Great (590–604) relate several instances in which the pope came to the defence of peasant dependants who were burdened by heavy rents, taxes, and debts. Taken together these cases amount to a deliberate policy by the pope to safeguard certain rights of the dependent peasantry. The paper will ask what moral principles guided the pope's policy and how he integrated them into his role as supreme manager of the papal patrimonies (i.e. papal lands) and their workforce. The discussion will then consider more general question about the meaning of a 'moral economy' and the way in which the pope's policies can help us to shed light on this concept.

Bio:

Roy Flechner lectures on the history of the first millennium AD at University College Dublin. He has held Research Fellowships at the universities of Oxford, Cambridge, and at the Freie Universität in Berlin. His research is concerned with the emergence of church law, conversion to Christianity, and the contribution of churches to shaping the economy of Europe in the first millennium AD.