

BOOK REVIEW

The Slave in Greece and Rome. By JEAN ANDREAU and RAYMOND DESCAT. Translated by Marion Leopold. Wisconsin Studies in Classics. Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. Pp. vi + 198. Paper, \$26.95/£23.95. ISBN 978-0-299-28374-2.

Originally published in France as *Esclave en Grèce et à Rome* (2006, Hachette Littératures), *The Slave in Greece and Rome* covers slavery from the entire period of classical antiquity, beginning with the Mycenaean Greeks (Chapter 2, “The Earliest Forms of Slavery”) and ending with the late Roman empire (Chapter 7, “Slavery at the End of the Western Empire”). However, the book does not treat the topic in simple chronological fashion; on each of the many topics covered the order is Greek slavery first (Descat’s contribution) followed by Roman refinements (Andreau). One is struck by the continuity of slavery overall: “Greek ideas were adopted and repeated in one way or another throughout the centuries of the Roman Empire” (168). It obviously required much careful editing on the part of both authors to have their respective contributions fit so seamlessly together.

The book begins with the question “What is a Slave?” (Chapter 1). The authors conclude that a slave—in the ancient world, at any rate—was indeed the property of a master (10), but also a human being with an authentic place in society (10–11, cf. 96, 131). Thus, while the authors clearly show an awareness of the modern view that slavery could be conceived of as a form of “social death,”¹ they seem much more attuned to the ambiguity of the institution overall and that in its earlier form slavery was not necessarily racist. That one person was servile and another free was “by virtue of law” (130); thus while slavery could be conceived of as a matter of injustice, violence, or constraint, the law existed so that—in civilized society, at any rate—some were servile and others free. No one questioned slavery as such, and many slaves were quite content with their lot in life (61, 86, 87). Naturally, slaves were always more susceptible to violence, torture, and sexu-

¹ So Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Harvard University Press, 1982) *passim*.

al abuse than free persons were (e.g., 106–8, 113–14, 161–2), and some effort has been made to connect ancient slavery to its modern equivalent in these respects (3–4, 106).

The authors also grapple with whether ancient Greece and Rome were “societies with slaves” or “slave societies” (13). The issue could be resolved by facts and figures, though these vary drastically according to the scholar and specialized study (explored in Chapter 3, “A Slave Population”). Classical antiquity of course contained “societies with slaves” everywhere (say 4–5% of the population), though it was mainly a matter of degree as to whether a city or region should be considered a “slave society” (30% of the population or more). No consensus emerges here, though our authors are aware of problems associated with the debate and report them clearly.

The bulk of the book concerns what slaves actually did in ancient society (Chapter 4, “The Slave and Economic Life”; Chapter 5, “The Slave in the Household and the City”). The wealthy always had more slaves than the poor, and agriculture was the activity that occupied the greatest number of people—free as well as slaves (68–9). Though subject to seizure, *peculium* was a fund masters allowed enterprising slaves to manage to give them hope and incentive, and *praepositiones* authorized slaves to exploit various properties of the master—with profits flowing to the latter (81–2). So slaves were not all “equal” as any evaluation of the evidence shows (105, 112, 118). At the top were *dispensatores* (treasurers), *tabularii* (accountants), *actores* (agents), and scads of secretaries. Elite households (such as Livia’s) contained a large number of actual servants: footmen, masseurs, cooks, clothiers, watchmen, workers in shops, house slaves, etc. (105). It is very difficult to point to slaves on the lower end, though these existed too. Once the authors make a comparison between “servants” in the Roman empire and domestics in France in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries (106). Everywhere else, however, the authors understand that ancient slaves and modern workers constitute two separate categories and analogies are not easily made. Plato and Aristotle’s attempts to justify slavery (130–2) were for the most part carried over by the Romans (133–6).

Chapter 6 (“Escaping Slavery”) focuses upon attempts by the slaves to avoid slavery, whether by suicide, flight, banditry, revolt, or manumission. Freedom was, without a doubt, “the dream of all slaves of Antiquity” (137).

While the book contains endnotes (169–84), a subject index (185–90), and *index locorum* (191–8), there is, regrettably, no bibliography. The secondary literature is predominantly French with only limited contributions in English, Ger-

man, and Italian. My greatest complaint is that the authors sometimes mention an ancient author without giving a precise citation (this happens on pp. 7, 9, 23, 41, 47, 53, 57, 79, etc.) making it difficult for those of us working on slavery to add Andreau and Descat's contributions to our own. Most of the time, however, attestations *are* clear and properly backed up, making available to English-speaking scholars a huge new resource of materials. The translation from the French is for the most part adequate, though I count six split infinitives (51, 58, 127, 131, 139, 164) and a few typographical errors (37, 82, 142, 168).

JOHN G. NORDLING

Concordia Theological Seminary, John.Nordling@ctsfw.edu