

*Roman Social History: A Sourcebook*. By TIM G. PARKIN and ARTHUR J. POMEROY. Routledge Sourcebooks for the Ancient World. London and New York: Routledge, 2007. Pp. xvii + 388. Paper, \$37.95. ISBN 978-0-415-42675-6.

This book gathers together an interesting, diverse and suggestive selection of Greek and Latin sources regarding Roman social history, mainly intended for the undergraduate student. The period in question comprises the best part of the Principate, i.e. the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> centuries AD. The wide selection of very different texts ranges from literary sources and legal texts to papyri and inscriptions, in addition to outlines by the authors concerning regions of Rome and their buildings (p. 51), census data (p. 64) and age-rounding (p. 66). [[1]] The authors in their introduction highlight that in the attitude towards the ancient world of recent scholarship, there is “no monolithic ‘Roman’ society.” Coherent with this tendency, they include subjects in a way neglected by traditional sourcebooks: peasantry, freedmen or slaves. As a conceptual framework, the authors have chosen the already classic handbook by P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (London, 1987), which explains Roman society by insisting on all these aspects and taking account of “power structures” (p. 2). [[2]] The sources included are structured around nine topics: social classes (3–42), demography (43–71), family and household (72–135), education (136–53), slavery (154–204), poverty (205–43), the economy (244–91), the legal system and courts (292–327), and leisure and games (328–56). Each chapter has a brief but sufficient introduction, and each entry a short informative note.

The first chapter is entitled “Social Classes,” and in the introduction the authors use terminology of this type (“The Roman world shows both untrammelled capitalism and remarkable state intervention in the economy...”). The authors’ use of these terms is, of course, merely pedagogical use of these terms. But it might have been useful to outline the difference between the technical value of modern terms such as “social class” or “capitalism” and their meaning in the Roman world to help students to be accurate with these concepts. [[3]] The main subject in this chapter is the hierarchical structure of Roman society, ranging from the superior *ordines*, probably less than 0.1 per cent of the population (senators and equestrians and their provincial equivalents, i.e. “town councillors or even tribal chiefs”) to the common people. The starting point of the political framework, the so-called “mixed constitution” is rightly exemplified not through Polybius, as typically, but through a contemporary text, Cicero *Rep.* 1.43, 67. The part played by the emperor in the new regime is characterized via Pliny the Younger (not only the epistles, but especially

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the panegyric) and some carefully chosen inscriptions, such as *ILS* 8781 (“an oath of allegiance to the emperor”) and *ILS* 8794 (“Nero’s benefaction to the Greeks”). The new configuration of the senatorial status is profusely explained, as well as the equestrian order (regulation on the wearing of rings...) and the decurions (*Tab. Her.* 89–97). As for the lower orders, the examples are extracted from Patristic sources or inscriptions. In my view, the text by Artemidorus (*Oneir.* 1.35)—presumably selected by Pomeroy [[4]]—on the significance of the dream of losing one’s head is extremely telling, as the prediction is adapted to the status of the dreamer, and the image of the *capitis deminutio* is clearly implied.

“Demography,” the next chapter, is mainly based on Parkin’s work on the subject, the main conclusions of which are clearly stated in the Introduction (pp. 43–6). [[5]] Extremely varied material is used to exemplify the author’s conclusions, including the *Res gestae divi Augusti*, data excerpted from the Egyptian census, literary sources about plagues, disease and natural disasters, fragments of patristic sources and epitaphs.

“Family and household” is the title of the next chapter. This is a key matter in Roman society, since the *familia* also involved a status issue. Marriage and *patria potestas* are rightly explained within this framework. Among the documents included are some related to the family in Egypt, including epitaphs (to examine family patterns outside the aristocratic sphere we know through literary sources) and census papyri. A glossary of key legal terms is provided at the beginning of this chapter. This glossary is extremely useful, but can also be confusing. For example, *paterfamilias* is rightly defined as “the male head of the *familia*” with reference to the *ius vitae necisque*, but the definition does not point to the fact that a *sui iuris* boy could also be considered such in the sense that he had the three statuses, *libertatis*, *civitatis* and *familiae*. When the authors tackle the legal definition of marriage, they include among its requirements the dowry, but rightly underline that it was not mandatory.

“Slavery,” the fifth chapter, deals with a economic and social reality without which the ancient world is difficult to understand. The sources employed range from the slave as a way to display wealth to more picturesque stories such as the slave used as a talking book (*Sen. Epist.* 27 5–8). The authors also tackle imperial slaves and freedmen (the “*Familia Caesaris*”), along with less fortunate farming workers (*Columella* 1.16). Some examples of manumission as recorded in inscriptions or papyri are offered (e.g. *AE* 1995 665; *PSI* IX

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1040). *AE* 1971 88 offers significant evidence of slaves' living conditions, since it involves a service for the punishment of slaves. Some less common epigraphic materials such as slave collars (*ILS* 9454, 9455...) are also quoted. The *Senatus consultum Silanianum* is exemplified—perhaps too profusely—through a quotation of D. 29.5. Juristic texts are also quoted in reference to the rules of manumission (Gai I 9–54), some aspects of the *operae* and the rights of a slave to use his *peculium* (cf. D. 33.8.19; D. 40.1.4–5), and the *actio quanti minoris* and the *actio redhibitoria* (D. 11.3; D. 21.1), both related to defects to be declared in the sale of slaves.

“Poverty” is dealt with in detail in the sixth chapter, where the way the Roman society was stratified is highlighted, starting with the text Artemidorus *Oneir.* 2.9, in which dreams are differently interpreted for the rich and poor. The title “poor” embraced many different people: *pauper* was not exactly the same as *egenus*, as the epigrams of Martial show. Christian authors interpreted the interrelation between rich and poor in a very different way, with many sociological novelties. The authors rightly point out that—despite the official rhetoric—the alimentary foundations by the Antonines are far from a charitable work, in the sense that they were open—at least primarily—to the poor but also and especially served the privileged orders of society. “A Roman Robin Hood” is an entry on Bulla, the chief of a robber band under the Severans, according to Dio Cassius.

The chapter “Economy” is concerned mainly with agriculture, but also with mining and trade. In reference to the latter, the authors quote the polemic between Finley (significantly conservative in his interpretation) and the historians who evaluate trade as an indicator of substantial economic growth. [[6]] In a pedagogical context, this controversy—which provides a framework to comment on the sources included in this chapter—might easily have received more stress. It is important to avoid simplistic equations between Rome and nowadays, especially in matters such as coinage and manufactured and traded goods, but on the other hand it is obvious that these realities were important in some areas. In any case, the relatively advanced aspects of the Roman economy existed side by side with subsistence farming, and it is not always easy to identify economic rationalism (maximization of income, benefit analysis...) in the ancient mentality.

“The Legal System and Courts” offers interesting insights into law and its social repercussions, but the chapter lacks some consistency, since no outline of the legal system is included. The average under-

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graduate reader is likely to need a complete explanation of how Roman procedures worked; what the relevant sources of law were at that moment; what the role of local practice was; and what part the emperor and his chancery played in the unification and creation of law. On the other hand, the social impact of law is perfectly expressed, for example in the case of wills. As Champlin has shown, [[7]] their function was not limited to patrimonial matters, but also offers access to social realities by e.g. mentioning the emperor as patron (8.14) or even praising and blaming the other (8.15). Papyri are quoted to illustrate trials and official complaints. *SEG XVII 755* is a significant inscription that reproduces a *mandatum* by Domitian on the privileges of the cities. Some literary (*Ap. Met.* IX. 12; *Luc. Tox.* 29) and legal (*C. Th.* IX. 3; *C. I.* IX. 5. 1) sources exemplify the state of prisons.

“Leisure and Games” closes the compilation. The chapter is mainly focused on gladiatorial games and the authors use profuse literary (Juvenal, Martial, Suetonius, Seneca, Tertullian...) and epigraphic sources (*graffiti pompeiani* about entertainments) to complete the panorama offered by archaeological evidence.

To sum up, Parkin and Pomeroy have succeeded admirably in their task of providing an introductory resource for students and the general reader, based on a rich spectrum of sources acceptably translated and focused on different topics, all of them significant to the comprehensive study of Roman social history.

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[[1]] Three outlines with commentaries are added as Appendix A (“Life Expectancy” 354–6), Appendix B (“The Roman Status Hierarchy”) and Appendix C (“Greek and Roman Weights, Measures, and Coinage”). Demography is one of Parkin’s areas of expertise, and the outline of Appendix A is mainly based on his *Demography and Roman Society* (Baltimore and London, 1992).

[[2]] “It is our belief that Roman society is best explained in terms of its power structure.”

[[3]] “Capitalism” in this context presumably means only the existence of trade and an oriented exchange market. In the context of the Roman world, the use of this term is common (apart from the Marx-

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ists) in the Max Weber tradition, although he eventually became more critical to it; see e.g. J.R. Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism* (London and New York, 1991).

[[4]] J. Pomeroy, "Status Anxiety in the Greco-Roman World," *Ancient Society* 22 (1991) 51–74.

[[5]] For a slightly different point of view regarding the utility of the available data, see R.S. Bagnall and B.W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt*<sup>2</sup> (Cambridge, MA, 2006).

[[6]] For a good outline of the so-called "Finley-Jones model" and the controversy with Rostovtzeff, see K. Greene, *Archaeology of the Roman Economy* (London, 1986) 14–18; P. Garnsey and R. Saller, *The Roman Empire: Economy, Society and Culture* (London, 1987) 46–51; J.R. Love, *Antiquity and Capitalism* (London and New York, 1991). As A. Carandini states in his study on one of the most advanced estates of the Roman upper-class farms, we are dealing with a "bi-sectoral economy," with a monetary sector (products for the major markets) and a natural sector (polyculture); see A. Carandini, "Columella's Vineyard and the Rationality of the Roman Economy," *Opus* 2 (1983) 177–204.

[[7]] Cf. E. Champlin, *Final Judgments* (Berkeley, 1991).