

BOOK REVIEW

The Economy of Pompeii. By MIKO FLOHR & ANDREW WILSON, eds. Oxford, U.K.: Oxford University Press, 2017. Pp. 433. Hardcover, £95,00. ISBN 978-0-19-878657-3.

This volume is based on a conference held by the Oxford Roman Economy Project in 2012. It investigated how recent developments in the study of the Roman economy, as well as new insights from archaeological studies, have changed the views on the economy of Pompeii. This subject was first analyzed in 1988 by Willem Jongman, who adopted a primitivist view of the town's economy; this considered ancient economies as being radically different from early modern ones, in the sense that they were not capitalist societies and their economic performance was limited. Pompeii was seen as consumer city which did not contribute to the local and regional economy.¹ Jongman's work is still seen as a standard work on the economy of Pompeii and Roman cities in general. However, research in the last thirty years has significantly altered his views presented. Moreover, it has become clear that findings for Pompeii cannot be generalized to other towns in the Roman Empire, as is often assumed. The current volume rightly starts from a multidisciplinary approach; it also makes full use of digital methods to analyze large amounts of data.

This volume discusses four main themes. The first part contains a general analysis of the basic parameters underlying Pompeii's economy and an overview of Pompeii's position in its regional context. The first paper, by Girolamo De Simone, focuses on the agricultural environment of Pompeii. He argues that staple crops like grain could easily be imported, which facilitated the specialization of the Vesuvian area on commercial crops. The region was highly compartmentalized, so that each micro-region depended on others for survival. Next, Miko Flohr investigates the level of wealth among the Pompeian population, as well as its distribution. He concludes that the interconnectedness of Pompeii's economy enabled many inhabitants to live above subsistence level.

The second theme is the quality of life of Pompeii's inhabitants. In the first paper in this section, Nick Ray applies consumer theory to the town. He points to

¹ *The economy and society of Pompeii*, by WIM JONGMAN. Amsterdam: J.C. Gieben, 1988.

the great variety of metal, glass and pottery objects found in many households, which indicates that many inhabitants had the means to buy luxury goods. What determined the choice made by each individual is difficult to determine, as he rightly points out. As Erica Rowan demonstrates, the evidence from Pompeii's sewers shows that Pompeians, including the middle and lower classes, consumed a great variety of foods. In connection to the varied diet, Estelle Lazer argues, based on the skeletal evidence, that the people of Pompeii enjoyed a reasonably robust health and that many lived to old age.

The third theme is economic life in the city; this part focuses on the locations in which manufacturing and retail took place and the strategic choices behind this use of space. Eric Poehler uses a digital model of the doors in each street and the connectivity of streets and gates to determine the amount of economic traffic on any street. Indeed, retail was always located on the busiest streets. However, non-economic reasons to move around the city are not discussed, which makes this model feel slightly unrealistic. Next, Nicolas Monteix gives a welcome warning about the documentation of finds from Pompeii for reconstructing manufacturing activities in the town. Indeed, the haphazard way in which finds were collected and published is a warning against drawing overly optimistic conclusions—a fact which is not sufficiently acknowledged in some of the papers. Damian Robinson investigates one area of the town, insula VI, 1. The owners of the Casa delle Vestali in this area continually aimed to increase their wealth and social standing by developing their property in various socially and economically advantageous ways. This was most likely the case with many Pompeians. Domenico Esposito focuses on one trade: the painting of houses. He concludes that this business was highly specialized, with some workshops concentrating on standardized schemes and others on figurative panels.

The fourth section discusses money and trade. Firstly, Steven Ellis points out that many coins from Pompeii were recovered from construction fills, rather than 'natural' find spots, which means they cannot be used to date the contexts in which they were found. Next, Richard Hobbs illustrates links between Pompeii and the Mediterranean by investigating coins from Ebusus and Massalia found in Pompeii and their local imitations. Curiously, he does not engage with Ellis' warnings about the dating of coinage, so that his conclusions seem more positive than the evidence warrants. Koenraad Verboven argues that the Pompeian economy was monetized to a high degree. Furthermore, as the Sulpicii archive from Puteoli shows, credit transactions also played an important role in the local econ-

omy. Finally, Wim Broekaert demonstrates that reputational control was important in trade: businessmen preferred building long-term relationships by gaining an honourable reputation, even if there was no legal requirement for them to act honourably.

In the final chapter, Jongman responds to these papers. He admits that pre-industrial economies were capable of gaining impressive wealth; at the same time, he rightly points out that more research should be done to explain this wealth, as well as the limits to economic growth in this period.

The volume highlights the interconnectedness of Pompeii: at least from the second century BCE, Pompeii and its hinterland were connected to Mediterranean trade networks. This made Pompeii very rich: not only the elite, but large sections of the population enjoyed reasonable health, a wide variety of foods, and luxury consumer goods. This shows that under the right circumstances, inhabitants of Roman towns could reach a high level of wealth. Thus, urban economies served as a vehicle of social advancement. Who these upwardly mobile individuals were, however, is not yet clear—greater integration between economic and social studies on Roman urban life would be a welcome addition to scholarship. It is important to emphasize, however, that not all Roman towns enjoyed these favourable circumstances, so that Pompeii cannot be considered a model for all urban economies in the Roman Empire.

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