

BOOK REVIEW

Freed Slaves and Roman Imperial Culture. Social Integration and the Transformation of Values. By ROSE MACLEAN. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 208. Hardback, \$99.99. ISBN: 978-1-107-14292-3.

Not long ago it was argued that upward social mobility was relatively rare in antiquity, and that manumission (in particular) served as a kind of goad inciting all slaves—including those who had no realistic hope of freedom or advancement—to work harder and so solidify masters' control over their slaves.¹ Rose MacLean stands this argument on its head by demonstrating repeatedly not only that manumission was more frequent than once thought, but that in certain critical respects the elite of Roman society appropriated strategies from freed slaves to negotiate relationships to the *princeps* and redefine measures of individual progress (i). To be sure, the persons who made the transition successfully from slavery to freed status were truly exceptional—as were, of course, the free elite who were compelled sometimes to act slavishly to play the game with Caesar and the imperial apparatus (for “aristocratic *obsequium*,” see 59). Nevertheless, the large number of inscriptions, funerary commemorations and literary texts this study engages inspires the idea that “upward social mobility” (for want of a better term) could have been more common than earlier scholars supposed.

Five chapters drive the argument: 1) Freed Slaves and the Roman Elite; 2) Achieving Immortality under the Principate; 3) Cultural Exchange in Roman Society; 4) Imperial Freedmen and Imperial Power; and 5) Telling Life Stories. No one chapter stands out that I can see. In the first, MacLean “revisits” the tomb of Eurysaces the baker which likely plots Eurysaces' evolution “from baker, to contractor, to (perhaps) [a] public servant” (13). The scenes depicted on the monument's façade likely showed Eurysaces himself during his ascent from compliant servitude to freed status; thus, Eurysaces made good in life and so served as an example for others (for “life-course transitions” in the Greco-Roman world, see chapter 5, especially 132-136). The entire book is loaded with *exempla* of this type

¹ E.g., “Roman society was not marked by altruism” (Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves: Sociological Studies in Roman History I* [Cambridge, 1978] 117), in K.R. Bradley, *Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control* (Oxford, 1987) 83 n. 6.

(e.g., Trimalchio's life story, 14-15, 25, 54, 74, 122, 136, 144, 154, 168, 173; Iucundus, 22-24; Abascantus, 31-32, etc). Some Roman authors objected strenuously to funerary and civic monuments that were considered to be excessive or incongruous with a servile background (31). One's distinct impression, however, is that the servile "ascent to success" (12) was part and parcel of imperial Roman times and that through the process former slaves exerted a huge influence upon the transformation of aristocratic values. Senators who resorted to flattery were regularly castigated for servile and effeminate behaviors (75). On the other hand, *ingenui* are known to have sold themselves into slavery for economic reasons (107 n. 16). Stoicism taught that all human persons—slave and free—derived from a common origin (92, 95), and popular fables were pitched not only at elite audiences but also a servile culture (97). Pauline Christianity taught, moreover, that a human being exists in a perpetual state of servility—if not to the devil through the forces of sin and death, then through the gospel to Christ, to legitimate authorities, to fellow Christians and in fact to all others (36-37, 61-72, 114-115, 163-64, 166-68, 171-72). Indeed, the argument can be made that ancient (especially biblical) slavery is paradigmatic for being a Christian in concrete situations still today.²

I am skimming the surface. My sense, however, is that this particular study—which began as a doctoral thesis (ix)—demonstrates an admirable command of the primary source documents (including inscriptions, papyri and other non-literary material), plus an awareness of the secondary literature in English as well as other modern languages (see the Bibliography, 175-204; and the Index, 205-08). The book does, to be sure, read something like a dissertation—in that it is quite dense and contains items that could be unpacked; this fact only suggests, however, that there is plenty of material here to make a powerful contribution to the constantly evolving modern understandings of ancient slavery, and that MacLean is poised to become a major player in the debate. Mistakes are almost impossible to detect: Lendon is out of alphabetical order with Leppin in the Bibliography (191), as are the dates of the two contributions by R. Syme (201).

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² See e.g., John G. Nordling *Philemon* (Concordia Commentary Series; St. Louis: Concordia, 2004) 116-28, 137-39; idem, "Slavery and Vocation," *Lutheran Forum* 42.2 (Summer 2008) 12-17; idem, "A More Positive View of Slavery: Establishing Servile Identity in the Christian Assemblies," *Bulletin for Biblical Research* 19.1 (2009) 63-84, especially 81-84; idem, "Slaves to God, Slaves to One Another: Testing an Idea Biblically," *Concordia Theological Quarterly* 80.3-4 (2016) 231-250, especially 240-247.