

BOOK REVIEW

The Extramercantile Economies of Greek and Roman Cities. Edited by DAVID B. HOLLANDER, THOMAS R. BLANTON IV AND JOHN. T. FITZGERALD. London, UK and New York, NY: Routledge, 2019. Pp. 162. Hardback. \$140.00. ISBN 978-1-138-54425-3.

This book represents a novelty in the context of scholarly studies on the ancient economy: while most works on the recent economy focus on market exchange, this book explores the dynamics of nonmarket transfers of value. The contributors have different scholarly backgrounds and expertise, ranging from ancient history, new testament history and new institutional economy. The result is a volume with a rich variety in methodological approach but tied together by a very well-defined general subject.

The book counts seven chapters, preceded by an Introduction written by the three editors and followed by an Epilogue, written by Hollander and Blanton.

In the Introduction, the editors explain that the contributors to the volume are all scholars associated with the research project Early Christianity and the Ancient Economy, and that this book is the first to be published within the activities of the project.

Chapter 1, written by Blanton and Hollander, explains the concept of extramercantile economy in the theoretical framework of the New Institutional Economics paradigm (NIE). The chapter starts with a discussion of how studies in “economics” were progressively associated only with market economy, continuing with a second tendency connected to the first: “to describe economic activity in mathematical terms (...) to establish economics as a science” (10). The article goes on to describe the impact of NIE in ancient history and the more recent developments of Behavioral Economy and *Régulation* theory. This solid theoretical background allows Blanton and Hollander to put forward their idea that “the study of ancient economies requires interdisciplinary collaboration and realistic objective” (22), from which their project arises, trying to compensate for the overemphasis on the market economy that is typical of previous studies.

In Chapter 2, J. T. Fitzgerald offers an overview of the subject “Early Greek Economic Thought,” starting from Homer and Hesiod. A characteristic of the

Greek authors is that they do not write on economy, but it is still possible to infer something about their economic behaviour from their texts. The analysis carries on with an examination of two texts of Xenophon: the *Oeconomicus* (obviously) and the *Poroi*, then Pseudo-Aristotle's *Oeconomica*, Philodemus' *On Property*, and Bryson's *Oikonomikos Logos*. All these treatises focus on the household, the core of economic life. Economic independence of the household is the goal they all long for.

Chapter 3, by A. Zuiderhoek, is on "Benefactors, Markets, and Trust in the Roman East." This essay deals with civic munificence as extramercantile exchange. According to Zuiderhoek, the public exchange of gifts between elites and people (euergetism) was an important form of extramercantile exchange, the implication of which was not only economic, but also social and political, for euergetism facilitated the creation of personal bonds between the giver and the receiver.

In Chapter 4, M. D. Gyax writes about "Euergetism and the Embedded Economy of the Greek Polis," an essay which goes along very well with Zuiderhoek's. Gyax starts from the classical work of de Ste. Croix to arrive at a definition of gift giving - a complex social practice that implies obligation on both giver and receiver, with downsides for both parties. This would imply a more problematic reality beyond the process of gifting than had previously been thought.

Chapter 5, by R. Meyers, is about "The Economic and Cognitive Impacts of Personal benefaction in Hispania Tarraconensis," another essay that fits very well into the discussion opened by Chapters 3 and 4. As stated in the title, the essay focuses on the acts of euergetism in the province of Hispania Tarraconensis. After a well-documented survey of available evidence, Meyers points out some contradictions in the behavior of the donors, most notably the habit of donating after their own death, for which Meyers hypothesises that modesty, rather than competition, was the driving force.

In Chapter 6, J. S. Kloppenborg, writes about "New Institutional Economics, euergetism, and Associations." His essay puts together two of the main themes explored in this volume: euergetism (Chapters 3 to 5) and NIE (Chapters 1 and 2). Against the *communis opinio* that *collegia* and other private associations had only a social and cultic role, Kloppenborg argues that they generated social capital and esteem for their members. What Kloppenborg leaves unanswered is whether the NIE tools can be useful for understanding these dynamics.

Chapter 7, written by N. Tran, is on "The Economics of Solidarity." This essay explores the world of skilled workers, the *artifices*, who, by definition, would be

salariated workers and who would normally fall outside the scope of a volume on extramercantile economy. However, these *artifices* were inserted in a world of social relationships that impacted the structure of their work. Among workers, solidarity arose: sharing of resources, financial aid and work solidarity all formed part of their routine.

The volume ends with an Epilogue by Hollander and Blanton that ties the book together, draws some conclusions and sets the future objective for the research project from which the volume arises, Early Christianity and the Ancient Economy.

In conclusion, the volume represents a very innovative and stimulating attempt at approaching the economy of the ancient world. The methodology is clear and the overall quality of the contributions is high. The volume will be of great interest for students of ancient economy, especially for those looking for new paths of research.

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