

Review

MIRIAM J. GROEN-VALLINGA, *WORK AND LABOUR IN THE CITIES OF ROMAN ITALY*. (Liverpool Studies in Ancient History 1). Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2022. Pp. vii + 356, illus. ISBN 9781802077599. £100.00.

In the past three decades, despite Moses Finley's rejection of the use of modern economic theory in his influential *The Ancient Economy* (1973), the adaptation of comparative and quantitative models developed within social scientific fields has greatly assisted our understanding of the function, impact and limitations of ancient economies. Whether the ecological model adopted by Horden and Purcell's *The Corrupting Sea* (2000) or the influential use of New Institutional Economics (NIE) in Scheidel, Morris and Saller's groundbreaking *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World* (2007), modern social-scientific models have offered new tools for interrogating the market forces at play in the ancient Mediterranean. Miriam J. Groen-Vallinga's *Work and Labour in the Cities of Roman Italy* adds to this important conversation by providing an innovative study of the types of work and labour in Roman Italy during the early Roman imperial period.

The book is a revised version of the author's doctoral thesis, completed at Leiden in 2017. This notation is not meant to diminish the work in any way, but rather to underscore that it is the product of many years of careful study and deep research that aims to move beyond specialist studies of workers or trades to see a fuller picture of urban labour in Roman Italy. At the same time, G.-V. addresses the crucial points of debate in current studies of the ancient economy, particularly the 'precise nature' of the market forces at play (3). She takes a composite approach, applying NIE in conjunction with other socio-economic models such as simple price theory, human capital theory and family economics. The result is a multifarious conceptual framework that allows her to grapple with the inherent diversity of the Roman urban workforce in early imperial Italy. Within this developed framework, G.-V. centres the institution of the Roman family alongside considerable issues of gender, status and skill levels. The structural centrality of the *familia* — a unit much broader than today's cognate term of 'family' — in a Roman urban worker's life, liberty and ability to pursue economic prosperity is reiterated throughout. To G.-V., the role of collectives such as *collegia*, often dubbed voluntary associations, comes second to the role of the family unit.

After a straightforward introduction explicating the aims, methods and sources, the second chapter looks at free and unfree labour markets in Roman Italy and the constraints therein. G.-V. notes that these were most often local or regional markets, as were the social networks that influenced the opportunities available to a worker. She characterises the labour pool for unskilled wage work in Roman imperial Italy as large. There was a relatively small group of highly skilled workers within this labour market, which is over-represented in the extant epigraphic evidence. G.-V. then turns to the qualities of non-elite families in ch. 3, defining these households as 'family units in which family members contributed their labour power for the well-being of the collective' (81). Based on Scheidel and Friesen (2009), 98.5 per cent of the total population of Italy were non-elite, as opposed to the 1.5 per cent of elites constituted by senators, equestrians and decurions. It should be more emphasised by G.-V. here that Scheidel and Friesen also concluded that 6–12 per cent were of a middling but non-elite group that still lived comfortably. As such, I am not sure G.-V.'s self-defined elite and non-elite categories are nuanced enough.

The elite *domus* forms the focus of ch. 4. This '*domus* economy' (149) was led by wealthy families with the means to have business and manual labour largely carried out by subordinates, often relying heavily on enslaved persons and freedpersons. More than half of the enslaved people living within towns or cities worked for elite families (216). In these chapters, the author considers evidence that has gone unused or under-appreciated. She draws on the Greek inscriptions for the working population of Roman Italy to flesh out bilingualism and worker experiences beyond just the Latin epigraphic evidence. The life-cycles of Roman workers and issues of seasonal labour are probed alongside lesser-known aspects such as the evident job-hopping engaged in by enslaved urban workers.

Turning to the roles of non-familial labour collectives, G.-V. uses Roman associations as a lens through which to view urban interconnectedness, the clustering of occupations and crafts within

cities and social networks. *Collegia* and family units are viewed as two intersecting axes through which to understand society and economy; however, there is a conspicuous absence of investigation into the impact of burgeoning religious associations in various economic markets and their change over time. To delve truly into the early imperial economy in Italy and the centrality of the family and the association, there needs to be much more consideration of the economic roles of Christ followers, Judaism and traditional Roman religion in shaping labour markets in this period. Likewise, although the army is dismissed as largely outside the purview of the study (8), the military as institution and source of labour within cities with garrisons (e.g. Rome from Augustus onward) needs to be more deeply considered and integrated. In her concluding discussion, G.-V. encourages future historians to include Roman history within more global histories of work and labour and to embrace the potential in comparative models. Throughout, G.-V. demonstrates the immense potential of using the modern to elucidate the ancient and of recognising the power inherent in the family. But her most powerful lesson is perhaps in encouraging historians of every historical era and place to work together as a mutually beneficial collective.

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