Check for updates

Roman history
After six years, this will be my tenth survey review here – and last. Since these reviews are intended to enable some sense of the state of the evolving field, I thought I might in this swansong try to offer not just the usual smorgasbord of Roman entertainment but an attempt at a synthesis of five key directions in research. A whole host of qualifications immediately raise their heads, of course – anglophone dominance, incomplete representation of presses, and my own not inconsiderable limitations of time, ability, and interest. Still, since opportunities for such overviews over time are sparse, the exercise will hopefully be instructive even so hamstrung.

1. Women. The feminist turn in ancient historiography is not new. But that does not make it any less urgent in contemporary circumstances where the innate gender bias of almost every institution is exposed on what seems a daily basis. Amid the glut of work on ancient women, Anna Tatarkiewicz focuses on the *mater in statu nascendi*, or 'a woman at the moment she becomes a mother' (5).[1] The book is structured by the life cycle of the mother, which she has dubbed the *cursus laborum*.

The first chapter considers marriage, in antiquity an institution focused above all on the production of children, and thus the moment that girls became potential mothers. It considers conception and abortion – and their potential economic and social motivations – as well as Augustus' reproductive legislation. It is perhaps tempting to smile when reading some of the more imaginative contraceptive instructions: 'Cut off the weasel testicles when the moon wanes, and the weasel, release alive. Give the testicle to a person to carry around in a mule hide; it is the best contraceptive measure' (27). But this is no laughing matter, since these home remedies were invariably the responsibility of women, who would thus have disproportionately suffered the consequences. That did not prevent a sadly familiar male sense of ownership over female reproduction. In fact, conception was a greater concern than its prevention, and both were made tricky because Roman understandings of fertility – impregnation considered most likely at the start and end of the menstrual cycle – were entirely backwards. The second chapter thus turns to the range of approaches to infertility, almost all of which again considered it a female issue. The Romans understood that menstruation did not necessarily render pregnancy safe; that did not, unfortunately, filter into widespread sexual restraint, producing a distinct genre of grave for young girls in the liminal state between childhood and female maturity. The third chapter turns to the midwives that specialized in reproductive health, whose expertise was in fact recognized by their male contemporaries – although this was arguably motivated more by shame than intellectual respect, and, in the most serious cases, seeking male attention remained the norm. The fourth chapter considers ancient discussion of the symptoms, length, advice for, and problems with pregnancy – something of a black hole, in fact, in the ancient sources. This holds true too for birth, the subject of the fifth chapter, which nonetheless tries to cover preparations, induction, pain relief, and difficult deliveries. The sixth considers a curious quirk of ancient motherhood – that formally it began not at birth but eight or nine days later, when the umbilical cord fell off, separating

[1] *The 'cursus laborum' of Roman Women. Social and Medical Aspects of the Transition from Puberty to Motherhood*. By Anna Tatarkiewicz, trans. Magdalena Jarczyk. Bloomsbury Classical Studies Monographs. London, Bloomsbury, 2023. Pp. 239, 12 b/w figures. Paperback £85.00, ISBN: 978-1-350-33739-8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

child and mother, on the *dies lustricus*. Tatarkiewicz stresses the importance of this day not just to the child and the family, but the woman, who only at this point fully gained the role around which her entire life had been socially structured.

This is an interesting work, and I learnt a lot. By bringing literary and epigraphic work together with the ancient medical tradition we gain fresh insight on one dimension – but arguably the most important in antiquity – of the ancient female experience. That it is more survey than argument is less problematic than an approach to source selection that damages its utility: 'Christian accounts of women, mothers and motherhood bear the stamp of the teachings of the church, and so diverge from the traditional, pagan Roman sources, so I have decided not to use them' (163; see too 12 and 153). To my mind that would in any circumstances be self-sabotage for a work of this kind, attributable to traditional policing of traditional disciplinary boundaries rather than any innate difference in the nature of the material – why not omit texts on women by adherents of Judaism, or Magna Mater? But in this case it is particularly foolish, since Tatarkiewicz laments on her first page that 'We do not have an extant diary, memoir or life account of a Roman woman penned by herself' (1; see too 3). In fact we have precisely that, a diary account by a third-century martyr, which discusses not just her complex relationship with her family and newborn son, but breastfeeding, weaning, and post-natal anxiety. There could be no better example that classicists ignore early Christian texts at their peril. We will return to this in the final work reviewed below.

A fine study of one of the most famous Christian women demonstrates all too clearly what can be gained from their inclusion in the classical purview. One of the most enjoyable aspects of this reviewing role has been the arrival of new volumes in the 'Women in Antiquity' series. Its latest incarnation – and in my view the best – is Julia Hillner's *Helena Augusta*.[2] This weighty treatment of the mother of the 'first' 'Christian' emperor, Constantine, begins by distancing itself from the two uninterrogated pillars on which most earlier treatments have been based: Helena's intimate relationship with her son, and her personal piety, whose assumed importance have created a kind of biographical teleology.

One of the most interesting features of this series has been the different solutions its contributors have found to the shared challenge of writing biographies of women about whom we have limited evidence, and where what we do have tells us more about the men who almost always produced it. Hillner's approach – beyond the usual careful reading practices – is threefold. First, she squeezes the material record for every scrap of insight, with a particular focus on the 'natural and human geography' (7) of Helena's environments. Second, she makes a virtue of a necessity, turning the occasions on which Helena disappears from the record into a feature – an opportunity to discuss the on-again-off-again nature of women's perceived utility to men (as well as the inherent patriarchy of traditional, linear biography). Third – and this is the feature that makes the book – she embeds Helena in her context as a tetrarchic woman, thereby not only enabling her to bring in the evidence for the other female members of that dynasty (twenty-three known between 284 and 324), fleshing out a picture of imperial female

[2] *Helena Augusta. Mother of the Empire*. By Julia Hillner. Women in Antiquity. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 394. 68 figures. Hardback $32.99, ISBN: 978-0-190-87530-5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

life more generally, but in fact painting Helena in a context (and arguably that most significant to her) that has been missing from earlier treatments.

The book is divided into four sections, alternating between periods where Helena is visible and invisible. The first deals with the period 248–289 CE. Beginning from Helena's humble origins on the military roads of the stark north-eastern edges of the empire – possibly born a slave, almost certainly to a life of provincial inn-based drudgery – it traces her liaison with Constantine's father Constantius and their possible different interpretations of their relationship's status and significance, her life at Naissus, where Constantine was born, and then Salona, when Constantius was promoted and where she may have first encountered a highly visible urban Christianity.

The second section, covering 289–317 CE, turns to Helena's disappearance after being set aside by Constantius. It fills the gap with the comparable paths of the other women who dominated the imperial stage in her stead – Theodora and Fausta predominantly, but also Eutropia, Anastasia, Constantia, Minervina, Romula, Valeria, Valeria Maximilla, Prisca, and others whose names are lost. Hillner focuses on the ways in which their male relatives alternatively mobilized or suppressed their public image to their own advantage. Constantine's own use of his female relatives in his imperial iconography emerges as being in dialogue with that of the tetrarchs – with whom he was himself in a dizzying and ever-changing series of relationships – who were themselves one manifestation of changing attitudes going back to the Republican period.

The third section turns to 317–329 CE, when Constantine, after his (initial) defeats of Licinius, brought Helena back into public life at the same time that he sidelined the descendants of his stepmother Theodora. That he did so in Thessalonica, where his tetrarchic rival Galerius had issued coins depicting Valeria, nicely illustrates the patterns that Hillner here consistently exposes. Subsequently styling his mother – who had not been married to an emperor – *Augusta* was only one unprecedented element of her iconography, and points to the drama of the lurch in ideology as Constantine sought to establish his own sole rule, and thus the importance of his particular biological line. Helena took on an ever-increasing public role, first as Constantine's woman in Rome, shoring up his reputation, then – after the dramatic demise of Fausta, Constantine's wife – as the '*genetrix*' of the dynasty, and a representative (of a kind) on a pseudo-Hadrianic 4,000 km inspection tour of the eastern provinces.

In its fourth part, the book considers the non-linear route by which Helena became a model Christian empress. Despite her burial in the Constantinian mausoleum in Rome, Helena was soon once again cut from Constantine's new dynastic imagery, only to be rehabilitated by his sons, mimicked by her granddaughters Constantina and Helena, imagined as the founder of the Christian empire by Ambrose, heroicized by the later Theodosian dynasty, embodied by Galla Placidia, Aelia Eudocia, and Pulcheria, and emulated by Radegund of Poitiers or her biographer Baudonivia. In this gradual reception, the historical Helena morphed into the independent and pious saint that has dominated later imaginations.

This book is fantastic. Hillner hardly puts a historical foot wrong, combining rigorous command of technical material in a range of sub-disciplines with an understanding of the value and limits of the imagination in historical narrative. She analyses the smallest details carefully to add texture and new interpretations to even the most apparently obvious elements of Helena's life. But it is in the big picture that the book really shines. What emerges clearly is the way Helena – and other women with whom she here shares

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

the spotlight – were used by the men around them as dynastic tools in their muscular machinations. This might have been to the women's short-term advantage, but it inevitably made them prominent pawns in a landscape where political fortunes changed rapidly and violence against women was all too easy. Helena's path was not one of gradually increasing influence, but a stop-start promotion attributable to Constantine's own complicated attempts to gradually turn a polyarchy into a monarchy, with himself best – uniquely – positioned for power. We thus learn about Helena, about Constantine, about late antique politics – and about the female experience in the ancient world. Virginia Woolf, in *A Room of One's Own*, once issued a rally cry for – among other things – the production of proper history of women who lived before the eighteenth century.[3] In one of that book's few approving references to the academy, she namechecks 'J– H– herself', the Newnham classicist Jane Harrison.[4] Almost 100 years on, another J. H. has produced a work that, in both methodology and content, is not just a triumph of gender history, but a model for writing ancient biography in general.

2. Labour. The same desire to give voice to those silenced in both antiquity and scholarship has fuelled a parallel investigation into the experiences of the layers of ancient society that propped it up. First and foremost among these was, of course, slavery. In late antiquity in particular, the old orthodoxy of a decline in slavery into medieval serfdom has been comprehensively dismantled. Into the resulting gap, *Slavery in the Late Antique World, 150–700 CE*, edited by Chris L. de Wet, Maijastina Kahlos, and Ville Vuolanto, tries to showcase the cultural and geographical variety of slavery on the ground – dubbed late antique slaver*ies*.[5] To this end its case studies, particularly in its fourth section, extend to the geographical edges of the empire and beyond, employing source materials in languages other than Greek and Latin. The editors are also to be commended for garnering contributions from four continents, thus enacting in deed what many of us preach only in word.

The essays in the first section consider late antique thinking on the morality and symbolism of slavery, with Pieter Botha demonstrating Christian reinforcement and Ilaria Ramelli Christian unease. Arkadiy Avdokhin considers the theological motif of Christ as liberator of humanity's (legally legitimate) slavery to Satan in Greek liturgical literature. Maijastina Kahlos looks at both Christian and non-Christian late antique views of those outside the empire that became slaves, and the continuing role of ethnic stereotypes. The second section moves on to culture. Chris de Wet's article uses the *Life of Euphemia and the Goth* to consider the place of slavery in Syriac ascetic literature; Catherine Hezser is similarly interested in Jewish literature. Christine Luckritz Marquis assesses the relative lack of sophistication in discussions of slavery in Egyptian monastic texts, in part the result of Christian theological concepts that blur the historical realities of 'real-life' slavery. Uiran Gebara da Silvan turns to late antique Gallic texts, with a particular focus on the manual life of slaves in the countryside. Section II focuses on papyrological and epigraphical evidence. Marja Vierros demonstrates that in the Petra papyri, even the basic terminology for slavery varies. April Pudsey and Ville

[3] Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*, Modern Classics (London, 2000 [orig. 1928]), 46–47.
[4] *Ibid.*, 19.
[5] *Slavery in the Late Antique World.* Edited by Chris L. de Wet, Maijastina Kahlos and Ville Vuolanto. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2022. Pp. 359. 5 figures. Hardback £26.99, ISBN: 978-1-108-69998-3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

Vuolanto also consider questions of terminology, but in the Oxyrhynchus papyri, which they use to sketch a picture of the experience of enslaved children. Mariana Bodnaruk embarks on an epigraphic study of vast scope, from the third to the sixth centuries. The fourth section takes us beyond the empire, with Noel Lenski on the distinctive form of slavery that evolved in the Visigothic kingdom out of its twin Roman and Germanic roots. Judith Evans Grubbs looks in turn at the writings of Saint Patrick, a denizen of the last days of Roman Britain, taken into slavery in Ireland, from which he also escaped. Ilkka Lindstedt adds a final chapter on the idea of slave boys in paradise as it is found in the Quran and its later commentaries. But while the Introduction seems to envisage such specific, local case studies as a first step to the study of continuities, changes, and comparisons, that synthetic work is not attempted here.

An altogether different demographic, *The Scribes of Rome*, is of interest to Benjamin Hartmann.[6] He here explores the history of a group that (for the most part) quietly kept the Roman world functioning. Scribes were like clerks, experts in texts and numbers who facilitated the administration of the Roman state via their command of the *tabulae publicae*, the large wax tablets that contained public records and accounts. Though there is some chronological tracing of the development of this profession, the book is more concerned with its social and cultural place – how their specialized knowledge impacted the scribes' place in the world. In particular, influenced by Pierre Bourdieu, Hartmann is most interested in the 'embodied cultural capital' garnered via their specialized skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic, which provided opportunities for financial reward and social connections and climbing.

The book is in four main chapters. The first lays out Roman literacy and administration to place the scribes in their proper context. Without formal requirements, recruitment seems to have been more concerned with legal status and moral quality than technical knowledge. Though this must have been a partial prerequisite, much of their expertise was learnt 'on the job'. Most important was their oath, which for a long time served as a (the?) key pillar for the reliability of Roman state records and accounts. On the other hand, the innate 'culture of documentation' (28) of the evolving Roman state means that its technical facilitators acquired inherent importance and opportunities. Scribes were not just copyists but auditors, *de facto* guarantors, and archivists in Rome and in the provinces; put another way, they were the real-world gatekeepers of Roman knowledge and, thus, power. Since the contents with which they worked concerned state legal and financial affairs, the scribes were inevitably drawn into politics.

The second chapter turns to their apparitorial role, as skilled support staff to magistrates both in Rome and in the provinces. In a fairly technical chapter, Hartmann delineates the different types of scribe (*quaestorian*, *aedilician*, and *tribunician*, most importantly, but then countless others we often only encounter once), their *decuriae,* and the *ordo scribarum*, which arguably punched above its weight in significance because of the centrality of the role its members performed. While highly regulated, this structure was also inter-bound with patronage – in particular, entry into a *decuria* – and thus politics. And, in turn, scribes' association with such high symbolic authority enhanced their own standing.

[6] *The Scribes of Rome. A Cultural and Social History of the* Scribae. By Benjamin Hartmann. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 228. 8 figures. Paperback £22.99, ISBN: 978-1-108-71374-0.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The third chapter follows on from this to look at corruption. The close relationship, and often dependencies, between scribes and magistrates, and the centrality to Roman state affairs of the authenticity (or lack thereof) of public documents, meant that the former were necessarily implicated in accusations against the latter. Roman practice seems to have focused less on the regulation of the records and more on that of the individuals charged with them, with the scribal oath carrying great weight (not to be lightly dismissed in a society built on honour). In practice, though, most financial foul play had to go – and thus did go – through these gatekeepers. Scribes could therefore enhance what might already have been substantial wages, and many clearly did, in ways that were simultaneously illegitimate and mainstream.

Consideration of such gains, ill-gotten or not, turns in chapter four to a spotlight on the considerable social mobility they enabled. The *ordo scribarum* were a clear status-group in society; while some members, despite coming from humble origins, made it all the way to the senate (and even, perhaps, ever so briefly, the role of *dictator*), access to the equestrian order, the one immediately above them, was for the most the prime ambition. Hartmann also considers their post-scribal roles, often as local big-wigs in the towns of their birth or eventual residence.

A brief envoi follows the faint traces of the *scribae* through late antiquity to the antiquarian interest of Cassiodorus in the sixth century. A useful appendix documents all 386 scribes known by name (as well as six false claimants). This is a well-written study, with an enjoyably dry humour – see e.g. 'There are few things more prone to catch fire than debts recorded on waxed wood' (6) – though the frequent untranslated Latin will limit its audience. If it represents only an incremental development on existing scholarship, its synthetic quality and cultural focus will make it a useful point of reference.

3. Geography. Amid the exciting wranglings over the future of Classics of recent years, the number of studies trying to engage with ancient cultures beyond Greece and Rome has become reliably steady (food for thought, perhaps, for the title of this journal!). It is appropriate, then, to feature the latest here, *Imperial Cults*, which showcases what is best and worst about what is fast becoming a sub-genre of its own.[7] Rebecca Robinson here compares the reforms made to religious practice by the emperors Augustus of the Roman and Wu of the Early Han empires. It argues that they both used religion to shore up their political power and advertise it to their empires at large.

After a methodological introduction, the first two chapters sketch current scholarly consensus on the political and religious worlds of the imperial Roman and Chinese states. This includes an important difference in our source material. Where the Roman sources' overarching interest in elite male competition means that in the religious sphere we are particularly well-informed about the priestly colleges and the (ever-present) interconnection of religion and power, the Chinese sources are ostensibly more interested in cultural history. It is impressive to have mastered two separate bodies of source material and scholarly historiographies, and the bibliography here is suitably expansive. Robinson seems in general a good guide to both worlds (of which most of her readers

[7] *Imperial Cults. Religion and Politics in the Early Han and Roman Empires*. By Rebecca Robinson. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 191. 1 figure. Hardback $83.00, ISBN: 978-0-197-66604-3.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

will have knowledge of only one), though the odd generalized assertion about Rome had me frowning; cf. 'prior to Augustus, active involvement in the state's religious institutions was not a pressing concern for the city's leading men' (49).

It is only really in Chapter 4 that we get to the argument proper. Here Robinson looks at how both Augustus and Wu made themselves central to state religion by simultaneously restricting institutions and facilitating an influx of 'new men' loyal to themselves. So where in China Wu gave increasing credence to the *Fangshi* at court, heeding their advice to establish new/rehabilitate old cults, Augustus joined all four priestly colleges, and increasingly filled them – the *quindecemviri* especially – with men loyal to himself, who also then had an increasingly prominent role in contemporary politics. Chapter 5 looks at how this enabled both rulers to increase their visibility and thus authority. Wu, on the one hand, embarked on a series of sacrificial tours, and enacted new sacrifices – the *feng* and *shan* in particular – that enabled him to showily lay claim to historically fragmented territory, since his entire court travelled with him, and some were left behind in each location. Augustus, on other hand, by side-lining the traditional pontifical college of which he was not yet in full control and elevating the *quindecemviri* stuffed with his loyalists, came to practically dominate state religion – and thus almost everything else. Chapter 6 turns to how the two emperors used state religion to shore up their power with the people. For Augustus this covers well-trodden ground concerning the renovation and construction of temples and divine statues – particularly minor ones, and the *lares* in particular. For Wu, it considers the amnesties and gifts – five days of 'universal drinking', anyone? – he bestowed on his far-flung tours, during which local lords were also pressured to travel, thus making evident hierarchical relationships that otherwise remained largely implicit. Chapter 7 turns to how these rulers 'revived' certain sacrifices and ceremonies, with a particular focus on the landmark festivals – Augustus' *ludi saeculares* and Wu's *feng* and *shan* sacrifices to Great Unity – that sought to elevate these rulers above their predecessors.

Robinson takes great care to establish the boundaries, limitations, and value of the inter-state comparison; one can almost hear the doctoral supervisions that sought to protect the student from suspicious specialists. She is well-aware of the risks of trite comparison. Instead, she aims to reveal similar processes in human behaviour in relatively similar historical conditions, and thus to 'destabilize' (5) what we think we know of both. This is in part because the different historiographical concerns of the respective sources enables 'using one society to "make visible" elements of the other that may be hidden or occluded in the historical record' (8). This seems largely sound, but ultimately only partially successful. The conclusion is worth quoting here at length:

The 'revival' of religion in Rome has long been considered an important part of the changes made by Augustus during the transition to empire, yet the changes made by Emperor Wu in the Han have largely been dismissed as the foolish quest of an emperor who was motivated only by his own desire for immortality. Confrontation with the Roman materials has forced us to take his pursuit of immortality and expansion of cult seriously, and to consider it within the larger context of ideas about empire and emperorship from early China. While the Roman historiographical tradition has taken the Augustan reforms much more seriously, debate exists for his motivations: were these reforms due to his extreme piety, or were they merely calculated political

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

moves? As the Chinese tradition contains much more substantial discussion over ideologies of rulership, it is easy to see how Emperor Wu situated his expansion within the context of sage rulers of the past; less easy is to see that Augustus' reforms, rather than being based solely on religion or politics, served to articulate his own vision of Rome and the place of religion, and the princeps, within it. (116)

If Robinson's characterization of the scholarly consensus on Emperor Wu is correct – and I am no position to doubt it – then it is clear that her explication of the strategies underpinning his actions represents a clear step forward. I am less clear what we gain in understanding Augustus, the sophistication of whose political, cultural, and social strategies have been revealed in the finest of fine-grained detail in almost all spheres of life, including religion. That is arguably a problem for a book derived from a doctorate in a Department of History and Classical Studies, published via the Classical Studies portfolio of Oxford University Press. Then again, a 50 per cent return on an ambitious project is not bad.

I have three more substantial concerns. First, despite the title, there is no treatment of the cult of the emperors itself. This is explicitly laid on one side (though there is in fact a very brief discussion at 81–2) on the basis that 'emperor worship was, at the period under discussion, less important to each emperor's immediate goals of centralizing authority' (20). But it is hard to take seriously a work on this topic that omits such a fundamental aspect of Augustus' religious innovations, particularly because its significance – via, for example, the prominence of local provincial priests – is so clearly pertinent for this book's central thesis. Moreover, his own divinization was arguably not an unimportant concern to Emperor Wu too. Given that the book only comes in at 124 pages, this seems not just a missed opportunity but a central sinkhole.

The second and third concerns are more particular to the comparative aspect. The admirable care to avoid shallow comparison, and the need to situate readers in two entirely different scholarly, historical, and cultural worlds, at times means that much of the work feels more descriptive than analytical. At the same time, there are some odd lurches in the argumentative logic, as when we are told that 'acceptance of a regime can be inferred from the lack of coordinated protest' (88). More important, we saw above that consideration of imperial cult was dismissed as irrelevant in the period discussed. But in fact Emperors Wu and Augustus were men of different eras, living from 147–87 BCE and 63 BCE–CE 14 respectively. That is no inherent barrier to comparison, of course, but it is strange to then limit the inclusion of material by chronology. A less restrictive approach would have enriched the book, which is after all interested in comparison of processes. To give just two examples, it seemed to me that Wu's wanderings inspecting his empire would bear interesting comparison with those of Hadrian, while his interest in elevating Great Unity and thus himself, linked with putative territorial expansion, could be productively juxtaposed with Constantine's complicated engagements with Christianity. If the point of the comparison is predominantly to defamiliarize and thus catalyse fresh thinking, then surely a broader canvas would be more productive? That would enable more focus on processes – and I wonder if the value of comparative history is actually in teasing these out, and using diverse case studies to explore their degree of universality.

The other geographical impetus in Roman history over recent years has been a flood of geographical micro-histories triggered by Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Holden's

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

seminal *The Corrupting Sea*.[8] As I write, eight such studies sit on my desk demanding attention I cannot give them. Instead, I focus here on a more unusual twist, namely an attempt to consider the nodes that enabled the concrete connections between areas in which Purcell and Holden were so interested, via a new edited collection, *Roman Port Societies*.[9] The aforementioned rise in local studies, plus geo-archaeological advancements enabling coring campaigns, and geo-physical surveys means that an overview of 'port-culture' becomes increasingly possible. The Portus Lumen project attempts this, with a particular focus on commercial aspects, since ports were the locus for customs dues, storage, shipping, and assorted transactions. The project has four foci, the layout of Roman ports, the organization of their commercial activity at the state, civic, and private levels, the hierarchies between Rome, entrepôts, lesser ports, and anchorages (the blurring of which distinctions leads to the concept of 'port-systems'), and commercial links between different ports. One key underlying theme here is the social dimension of ports – the human interactions they enabled – and *Roman Port Societies* aims to complement this aspect of the project.

Fourteen essays on port epigraphy are preceded by one from the editors, Pascal Arnaud and Simon Keay, on the interpretative issues particular to port epigraphy, and an epilogue from Purcell himself. Some essays focus on particular roles – Nicolas Tran, for example, on *collegia* of boatmen, Catherine Virlouvet on warehouse-workers, Pascal Arnaud on shippers – or layers of society, as in Sabine Panzram on municipal elites. Others consider the relationship between them, like Dirk Steuernagel on traders at Delos and merchants at Puteoli, Hélène Rougier on the social hierarchies revealed by the imbalance of occupations at six port cities, or Pascal Arnaud on the layers of administration, euergetism, and investment in Ephesus. Still others consider institutions that impinged on the activities of these individuals, as in Taco Terpstra's paper on the imperial cult as a shared ideological space enhancing trust between traders, or Jean-Jacques Aubert's on the relationship between ports and Roman law. There are a series of local case studies – Michel Christol on Narbonne, Marc Mayer on Narona – as well as essays interested in connection itself – Koenraad Verboven questioning the role of mercantile associations in trade networks. Dorothea Rohde's paper considers the source material, offering a warning about Ostian exceptionalism (here in comparison with Ephesus).

4. Science. The study of Roman ports via new technologies and scholarly collaboration is one manifestation of a broader trend towards the increasing incorporation of scientific methodologies in the study of Roman history. It is no coincidence that Pascal Arnaud and Simon Keay are particularly interested in the commercial role of ports, since this broad approach has been embraced above all in studies of the Roman economy. Central here has been the extraordinarily productive series Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy, which has contributed more volumes to my survey articles than any other. That the majority of its roster are edited collections is in itself demonstrative, since collaboration is arguably the single biggest inheritance from scientific academia.

[8] Peregrine Horden and Nicholas Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea. A Study of Mediterranean History* (Oxford, 2000).

[9] *Roman Port Societies. The Evidence of Inscriptions*. Edited by Pascal Arnaud and Simon Keay. British School at Rome Studies. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2020. Pp. 455. 42 figures. Hardback £29.99, ISBN: 978-1-108-73194-2.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

We can consider here two new additions. The first, *Simulating Roman Economies*, co-edited by Tom Brughmans and Andrew Wilson (the latter the indefatigable engine behind the Oxford Roman Economy Project and this series, its published legacy), illustrates much that makes the series distinctive.[10] It represents a careful but insistent call to arms. Roman history is hamstrung, the editors suggest, by its relative failure to properly incorporate formal modelling and computational simulation. And it is framed by two mission statements, one by each editor, one theoretical, one practical; one treading softly, one shaking the cage – a classic(al) good cop, bad cop.

Brughmans' introduction makes its case by a series of logically dependent claims. Beginning from the prevalence of conceptual models in Roman history, Brughmans points out that our expression of these in straightforward prose means much is implicit. That is perhaps innate to a humanities discipline that has traditionally placed so much value on rhetoric, but it is fundamentally unscientific. Formal modelling – using 'mathematical equations and formal logic or computer code (where code can also be represented mathematically) to represent our theory' (5) – means the latter becomes explicit, which means it is universally clear (to those who also understand the code), reproduceable, and thus testable. This encompasses equation-based simulations, discrete-event simulations, cellular automata, and agent-based modelling. The last of these, derived from the behavioural economic paradigm, its core concept of 'bounded rationality', and the more recent spin-off complexity economics, is pinpointed as particularly well-suited because it sees economies as systems in process. The Roman economy, because 'it consisted of multiple entities that interacted with each other and their environments in a way that could give rise to emergent properties' (12), was a complex system, and our theories about it are necessarily complicated. It can thus only be adequately explained by complex system simulations techniques. Put another way, most studies of the Roman economy are theorizing without the only extant tools truly capable of adequately testing, let alone demonstrating, those theories. Brughmans advocates the need for cumulative, highly abstract, tightly focused models, which can then be progressively honed, pointing to further questions and experiments, all of which can ultimately be combined by the community as a whole to enable the kind of complicated models discussed above. The benefits of such simulation are clearly separating observation, explanation, and prediction, demonstrating where further data collection is or is not needed (i.e. providing robust justifications of future research pathways), differentiating which are the core dynamics of the system and which more peripheral, suggesting analogies from disparate disciplines where simulation models have already been applied, raising fresh questions, generating plausible ranges within existing theoretical models, increasing the rigour of the scientific process via falsification and accountability, and thereby enhancing – not replacing – current practice. Wilson – after an enjoyable broadside aimed at much work in ancient history employing social network analysis – looks forward to the practicalities of how simulation modelling can find its place in the study of Classics,

[10] *Simulating Roman Economies*. Edited by Tom Brughmans and Andrew Wilson. Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2022. Pp. 332. Multiple figures/illustrations. Hardback $125.00, ISBN: 978-0-192-85782-8.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

from the areas it has most to contribute – agriculture, transport/distribution/connectivity/trade, demography, and epidemiology – to the ways the field needs to change to enable it, first and foremost a change in our conception of the currency of academic productivity. Perhaps most usefully, he includes a table of fifteen existing partial geographical, climactic, and historical datasets that can jump-start future simulation efforts (317) and suggestions of the most urgent needs for future improvements and additions.

Brughmans suggests that 'the perception of computational simulation, education, open data and code, cross-specialism collaboration, and convincing examples' (27) are needed to bring simulation approaches into the classical mainstream. The essays that make up the volume aim to provide the latter. They are united only by their use of formal modelling and computational simulation; as an economic tasting menu designed to tempt, this variety is a strength, ranging across the areas of development sketched by Wilson. They all, ironically, provide traditional narrative accounts of their more technical work published elsewhere: Pascal Warnking on sailing times and shipping routes; Marek Vlach on two contrasting models for the spread of the Antonine plague; J. W. Hanson and Tom Brughmans on the relationship between settlement scale and networks of traders; Simon Carrington, Tom Brughmans, and Iza Romanowska on the degree of shared knowledge between traders of tableware between regions, and its impact on their strategic decision-making; Xavier Rubio-Campillo and María Coto-Sarmiento on the Dressel 20 production process and its dissemination; Brian J. Dermody, Alexander Chiu-Smit, and Rens (L. P. H.) van Beek on the environmental constraints on grain production and trade; Pau de Soto and Cèsar Carreras on the design of Iberian transport infrastructure; and two papers on the lower Rhine frontier, Mark R. Groenhuijzen on its local transport systems and Philip Verhagen on the relationship between military recruitment pressure and population size. A further overview by Shawn Graham considers simulation's useful valorization of the error, ignorance, and stupidity that traditional approaches often seek to avoid or elide.

The editors write at times as if they are treading on eggshells. They constantly reiterate that formal modelling should not be seen as antagonistic towards traditional approaches, repeating the complementary value of traditional natural language representation (for disseminating results to broader audiences, if nothing else), but frustration and scepticism seep through at times, as in the 'praise' of traditional approaches as enabling one 'to convince or confuse with a narrative' (5). In particular, Brughmans points out that this approach, and our disciplinary obsession with advocating for our own theories over those of others, leads to the hyperbolic construction of false theoretical polarities – such as that between 'primitivist' and 'modernist' work on the ancient economy – and a subsequent poverty of debate. Simulation, on the other hand, can reveal the true extremes within which our theories are usually positioned, demonstrate their common ground, and by breaking down theories into their many, testable constituent parts enable the exploration of the 'grey zone' between them – enhancing 'constructive multivocality' (26).

The editors are quite right that simulation needs to be embedded in our curricula like any of the other specialisms that have enhanced our discipline, even if only so that the next generation of scholars can adequately assess the quality of contributions based on such approaches (otherwise computational work will become another kind of appeal to authority). What they do not say – but I will – is that our curricula cannot continue to expand to encompass more and more content in the same (or increasingly

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

shorter) pedagogical programmes, while still insisting on the absolute centrality of full competence in certain skills. Put another way, if we continue to insist that expertise in Greek and Latin are the *sine qua non* of being a professional classicist, our discipline will remain methodologically impoverished.

The second offering, *The Economy of Roman Religion*, represents the intersection of the economy with the other topic that has dominated recent publications of Roman history more than another other.[11] Perhaps surprisingly – with a few recent exceptions, some of which have featured in these pages – the economy has remained almost the only silo of ancient life untouched by Romanists' almost ubiquitous interest in religion (in contrast to equivalent studies of both the earlier and later periods). Here Andrew Wilson, Nick Ray, and Angela Trentacoste assemble an eclectic consortium of papers to shed light on 'the overall economic significance and role of religious institutions, or of the costs of religion to the economy – or conversely, the potentially productive and economically beneficial aspects of religion' (3). Problematizing the simplistic distinction between 'private' religions funded by fees for services and 'collective' religions reliant on contributions and membership fees, the Introduction surveys how religion was funded, considering the financials – both cost and profit – of temple construction, donations, offerings, and revenues (via oracles, healing, fines, retail, or land management), priesthoods, and sacrifices. But it is also interested in the contribution of religion to the ancient economy as a whole, for example, via divine guarantors in markets, both literally in the statues that gazed down upon them and practically via their stewardship of standards for weights and measures. Similar were the markets associated with festivals, and temples' roles as benefactors and banks.

The essays that follow explore some but not all of these suggestions. Jörg Rüpke updates a pioneering lecture from nearly thirty years ago that used the pontifical college as a case study to explore the cost of priesthoods – money went out above all on bread and circuses, and came in predominantly from leased land. Charlotte Potts traces the predominant economic features of Roman religion right back to the Archaic period. Javier Domingo estimates the cost of building four early third-century North African temples by means of Diocletian's price edict and mid-nineteenth century Italian labour rates. David Wigg-Wolf explores religious imagery on Roman coinage and its evolution, touching on both the roles of temples as banks and the development of collection boxes. Marietta Horster looks at how new cults like that of Roma or the emperors impacted the economic landscape of eastern cities. Marie-Pierre Chaufray mobilizes an extraordinarily rich body of source material for the Temple of Soknopaios in Dime to focus similarly on how conquest shaped Egyptian temple economies. Michael MacKinnon and Tony King taken together demonstrate regional variety in animal sacrifice, with the former finding private sacrifice dominating over sacred herds in the Mediterranean, but the latter arguing for an inverse pattern in Roman-Celtic shrines. Marta García Morcillo covers religious gifts and donations and their reuse; Koen Verboven the religious dimensions to occupational guilds. In conclusion, Greg Woolf echoes the Introduction in sketching past progress and expressing hopes for its continuation, delineating areas of religion

[11] *The Economy of Roman Religion*. Edited by Andrew Wilson, Nick Ray and Angela Trentacoste. Oxford Studies on the Roman Economy. Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2023. Pp. 354. 34 b/ figures. Hardback £83.00, ISBN: 978-0-192-88353-7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

with consistent economic importance, and those in flux – here tying the discussion into the wider arguments about the economic impact of imperialism amply witnessed in my past reviews.

5. Christianity. We close, predictably, with early Christianity. I have made a conscious effort in my reviews to increase the visibility of works on early Christianity. While late antiquity, including its Christian dimensions, is now an uncontroversial part of Classics, early Christian literature and history still often remain the preserve of theology and religious studies. But, as we saw above, classicists ignore such a unique body of testimony from denizens of the Roman empire at their intellectual peril.

Our final work here is thus Christoph Heilig's *The Apostle and the Empire.*[12] This is the latest contribution to a debate as old as scholarship – was Paul critical of the Roman empire? This tussle has in recent years centred on a hypothesized hidden subversive subtext in Paul's letters. The most recent argument against has been built on the premise that there was no need for Paul to hide any critique, because Rome was no police state and persecution via Roman officials was not yet a likely concern. But Heilig here responds by using my own argument – that the Pliny–Trajan correspondence on the Christians reflects simply Pliny's own ad hoc procedure to deal with an escalating local problem – in a way I had not anticipated.[13] Since Christians suffered in this case not because of any law, but simply because a local governor was willing to pay credence to local animosity and had enough suspicion of an unknown collective to shoot first and ask questions later, there was no reason they could not have suffered in the same way in Paul's own day. Heilig therefore considers the road clear for a fresh look at possible criticism of Rome in Paul's letters. But he does so with a new appreciation that binary all-or-nothing positions are of limited help for understanding the complexity of living under a colonial regime, and thus that we should think of Paul's letters as providing not a clear and final mission statement, but a window into a 'constantly negotiated compromise' (36), both conscious and unconscious, dependent on circumstance, geography, and correspondent, requiring 'a detailed and diachronic analysis of the sociopolitical circumstances of Paul's letter-writing activity' (43).

Heilig then focuses on *2 Corinthians* 2:14, where Paul says: 'But thanks be to God, who in Christ always leads us in triumphal procession.'[14] He sees this as tapping into a cultural script obvious to readers at the time but less so to modern commentators, namely that θριαμβεύω invokes the Roman triumphal procession. Moreover, despite the obfuscatory exegesis of generations of biblical scholars, it imagines Paul and his co-workers specifically as prisoners in the procession. Triumphs in this period could only be celebrated by members of the imperial family, and the most recent – indeed the only one in Paul's lifetime – was that of Claudius in 44 CE, to which Paul would have had access via the epigraphic record of a dedicated cult in Corinth, as well as via Priscilla and Aquila, who he met there after their recent departure from Rome. The distance between Paul's account and the official presentation of that triumph

[12] *The Apostle and the Empire. Paul's Implicit and Explicit Criticism of Rome*. By Christoph Heilig. Grand Rapids, MI, William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2022. Pp. 170. 15 figures. Hardback £23.99, ISBN: 978-0-802-8822-33.

[13] James Corke-Webster, 'Trouble in Pontus: The Pliny–Trajan Correspondence on the Christians Reconsidered', *TAPhA* 147.2 (2017), 371–411.

[14] New Revised Standard Version translation.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press

tapped into the ambivalence towards Claudius and his bombastic triumph in contemporary elite commentary. Indeed, that triumph's relative paucity of captives seems to have been one element that sparked such scorn. Early Roman literature testifies to parallel imaginative attempts to put oneself in the position of such a captive; imagining the Jewish God as triumphator was deeply subversive. Paul thus tested the boundaries of acceptable public discourse. Paul's view on Rome here, Heilig asserts, is thus not encoded at all, just less visible to us because of our failure to properly appreciate the historical and local geographical context of Paul's comment – overlooked unease, rather than hidden criticism. That in turn prompts an extended reflection on the limits of traditional New Testament hermeneutics.

This is a provocative book. The subject-matter is probably better suited to an article than a monograph – indeed much of it has been published before – and its framing around a major question but focus on a particular passage feels curiously uneven. It amounts, in sum, to a methodological rant shored up by a single example. In tone it recalls the raw early albums of great bands – moments of brilliant insight juxtaposed with an occasionally naïve writing style and scattergun broadsides against entire genres or disciplines. And intellectually it would be significantly enriched by engagement with the explosion in work on Greek authors under the empire of the last twenty years, which has eschewed simplistic categorization in favour of recognition of multi-layered multi-valency.[15] But it is fundamentally correct in its call for attention to the specific local contexts of early Christian documents. In turn, we might add, those documents read as such provide us with fresh material for judging provincial reaction to Rome's appearance on the local stage. Right or wrong, then, it certainly demonstrates the Janus-faced rewards from bringing what remain substantially different disciplines closer together.

JAMES CORKE-WEBSTER

Kings College London, UK

james.corke-webster@kcl.ac.uk

doi:10.1017/S0017383523000293

This is an Open Access article, distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution licence (https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/), which permits unrestricted re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.

Art and archaeology

We start this review in the sanctuaries of archaic and classical Greece. The book *Between Deity and Dedicator* is the PhD thesis of Sanne Hoffmann.[1] Hoffmann's aim is to examine terracotta votive figurines through their entire lifecycle, following their journey from production to dedication to deposition within the sanctuary (fifteen of

[15] Still best exemplified by Tim Whitmarsh, *Greek Literature and the Roman Empire. The Politics of Imitation* (Oxford, 2001).

[1] *Between Deity and Dictator. The Life and Agency of Greek Votive Terracotta Figurines*. By Sanne Hoffmann. Berlin, De Gruyter, 2023. Pp. xi + 347. 85 illustrations. Hardback £109.00, ISBN: 978-3-110-76887-9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383523000293 Published online by Cambridge University Press