



Jean Andraeu, Raymond Descat. *The Slave in Greece and Rome*. Translated by Marion Leopold. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011. 198 pp. \$26.95, paper, ISBN 978-0-299-28374-2.



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Jean Andraeu and Raymond Descat's *The Slave in Greece and Rome* is an English translation of their 2006 *Esclave en Grèce et à Rome*. Marion Leopold's translation is clear, accurate, and faithful to the rhythms as well as the words of the original; Loeb translations are used for most of the primary sources. Two themes dominate the discussion: the daily life of slaves, and their place in ancient economic and social structures. Three questions are deemed critical to understanding these themes: how should we define the slave in an ancient context? Were Greece and Rome "slave societies"? And how can we understand slaves' roles in the ancient economy? The desire to treat of both Greece and Rome together, which had not been done in French historiography since the late nineteenth century, led to the teamwork that produced the book. The argument for treating them together is that Greece's influence on Rome brought continuity in slave-holding practice and theory that lasted into the fourth century AD, by which time other influences that had been shifting the emphasis became more dominant.

After the introduction, definition of the subject properly precedes the rest of the book. The many and various Greek and Latin terms applied to slaves and other dependents, and developments in their usage and application over time, are discussed concisely. When it comes to differentiating the slave from all other types of people, Andraeu and Descat prefer the traditional benchmark of ownership as the key component in their definition, over say, Orlando Patterson's emphasis on natal alienation and generalized dishonor. The slave was owned by someone, and could be treated as property, an object. Indeed, the slave was usually bought, giving rise to the property rights of the master/owner. The slave was also of foreign origin, and generally speaking was an outsider, even if born in the house of the master. Slaves could be and were assigned a huge variety of functions in Greek and Roman societies, leading to their dispersal across all sectors and levels of ancient economies. These traits distinguish slaves from people enduring other forms of exploitation and inferior status, such as serfs, who also existed

in antiquity alongside slaves. Andraeu and Descat prefer a numerical criterion for the distinction between “a slave society” and “a society with slaves,” without committing to a numerical threshold either relative or absolute, but suggesting that around 5 percent slaves in a population would constitute a society with slaves while around 30 percent would constitute a slave society (pp. 13-14). On this basis, the core Greek and Roman societies qualify as slave societies.

The slave population is the subject of chapter 3. For dealing with quantities, Andraeu and Descat focus on the reasons why slave numbers would have been counted in the first place in antiquity, and on the means available for implementing such a count or estimate. Censuses were taken periodically in both Greek poleis and Rome and her territories to assess the size of the recruitment pool for military forces and for taxation purposes. Ktesikles’ report that a census revealed 400,000 *oiketai* in Athens is consequently argued to represent not just slaves, as Athenaios, who preserves this rare piece of quantitative information, wrongly interpreted it hundreds of years later, but to all the other people in the household besides the adult males, who were separately categorized. Allowing for likely family demographics of the time, this gives an approximate figure of 200,000 to 250,000 slaves in Athens in 317 BC, which is “in keeping” with Hypereides’ proposal of 338 BC to free “more than 150,000 slaves” in the aftermath of the defeat at the battle of Khaironeia (pp. 42-44). By contrast the high ancient figures given for the number of slaves in Korinth and Aigina are explained as probably based on sales taxes rather than the resident slave population (p. 46).

The multiple difficulties encountered when dealing with the scattered and indirect evidence concerning the number of slaves in Rome, and the various approaches that have been adopted to deal with them, are well summarized, and most of the arguments that have been deployed previous-

ly are ultimately labeled largely useless (p. 49). Andraeu and Descat prefer a figure of 30-40 percent of the population of Italy being slaves in the late republic/early empire period, against Walter Scheidel and Ello Lo Cascio, who prefer 10-15 percent; they do not give a figure for the total population so it remains a relative figure, not an absolute. This qualifies it as a slave society on their terms. Outside Italy, and at other times in Roman history, the evidence is even more patchy and the amount of guesswork even higher of course.

The origins of slaves and the process of enslavement are discussed in the rest of chapter 3. Capture and birth, as the principal processes of enslavement, lead into a discussion of the role of slave breeding in the maintenance of the slave population. Scheidel’s work on demographics is re-engaged here, because the reproduction rate that would have been biologically necessary to maintain the slave population, over the period that it was, is what inclined Scheidel against the notion that 30 percent of the population or more were slaves. Andraeu and Descat argue for a larger proportion of female slaves, breeding more or less constantly through their fecund lifetimes, in order to reconcile the numbers. They suggest that 200,000 to 250,000 slave children could have been born annually within the empire (p. 60), exceeded by exposed newborns, which they think the principal source of female slaves, and the single most important source of new slaves in the empire (p. 62). This reviewer is unpersuaded by the last idea, not least because it presumes an equally large number of wet-nurses distributed as required and willing and able to feed the abandoned babies. Some discussion of how else the foundlings might have been sustained, at least through the first months of life, is required.

Slaves’ work and its economic impact follow in chapter 4. The ubiquity of slave labor in the ancient workplace, and the historical oddity of finding slaves working at all levels, along with freemen and freedmen, in what we now call the

service sector, as well as in the primary (raw materials) and secondary (manufacturing), is stressed (p. 67). A variety of well-documented examples are offered, including the extraordinary story of Callistus, whose social and economic status yo-yo'd between being a slave banker (for an imperial VIP) and becoming pope, via a spell working in Sardinian mines (p. 80). *Peculium* and other motivators are discussed clearheadedly, though the role of *operae* is missed in this assessment of the economic impact of slavery (and there is no index entry for it either). The right of an ex-master to call on the services of his or her liberated slaves for a given number of days' work per annum could have had a significant economic impact on both parties, especially if those ex-slaves had high-quality skills.

Slaves' daily lives in their households and states, in peacetime and in war, are portrayed in a lively way in chapter 5, including an interesting comparison between rations attested in ancient evidence and modern UN minima (p. 98). Slaves' contribution to the functioning of the house in all its activities is sketched well on the whole, but generalizations can go too far. It is illegitimate, for example, to assume on the basis of a single apprenticeship contract dating from Hellenistic Egypt, that apprenticeships for slaves "probably existed" in classical Greece (p. 100): all other surviving contracts are from Egypt, from the end of the C1 BC or later, and concerned freeborn more than slaves.[1] Slaves' status in law, as attested in various ancient times and places, is explained, and some common threads drawn out: their presumed unreliability and irresponsibility; their subjection to corporal punishment, especially the whip; their torture in private and in public. A careful discussion of ancient philosophical reflection on slavery and its legacy concludes this chapter.

Escape from slavery is the focus of the relatively short chapter 6. This includes not just manumission but also suicide, flight, and revolt. The

received wisdom that in the Greek world revolt was more or less confined to non-slave dependents rather than purchased slaves is disputed (pp. 143-144), but the contrast with the uprisings and slave wars of the Roman world is nevertheless emphasized. Varieties of manumission and a variety of lives that freedmen and women are known to have experienced round out the discussion. Finally, the even shorter chapter 7 tells of slavery in the late Roman western empire, and explores the transition to medieval forms of servitude that no longer qualify society for the label "slave society." Andraeu and Descat argue for a gradual change over the period between the fourth and the ninth centuries AD (p. 158). Sources of slaves remained more or less the same. Besides wars on the margins, endemic raiding and kidnapping of free people in the provinces, perhaps with covert protection from elites who gained from it and especially in periods when central control was weak, created new slaves illegally within the empire. The work they did continued much as before, though slaves became less visible in commerce and industry, and imperial slaves and freedmen stopped participating in the administration in the third century AD. They still ran away, and the surviving runaways' collars appear to date to this period, and they were still manumitted, with the church superseding the temple for one method of enactment. Notes, a short bibliography, a general index, and an index locorum complete the volume.

This book may be confidently recommended for reading by undergraduates taking a course on ancient slavery. Coming from a Francophone stable, it offers Anglophone students an insight into continental thinking and historiography on the topic that they might not otherwise encounter, while the main arguments are well supported with references to primary sources.

Note

[1]. Marco Bergamasco, "*Le ασκαλικάί nella ricerca attuale*," *Aegyptus* 75 (1995): 95-167.

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