

To be taken away from this volume is the versatility and dynamism of Palmyra in adapting to changes over time while ultimately still serving the needs of the elites who governed it. It was a city whose visual culture and administrative organisation were influenced by both Greece and Rome, but that maintained firm ties to local and regional traditions, absorbing influences from the wider Near East and Mesopotamia. Far from viewing Graeco-Roman features as a 'veneer', this work encourages readers to consider them as one integral facet of a complex, unique culture, that researchers have a responsibility to preserve in any form possible.

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ANCIENT ECONOMY AND CHANGE

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The editors of this interesting book start from a sensible point: the debate about the ancient economy between primitivists and modernists has become somewhat stale, because in their opposing interpretative schemes both sides have failed to recognise changes in the ancient economy. The economic life of the ancient world was not static, but changed over time. It is the opinion of the editors that, even when change is accounted for (such as in the *Cambridge Economic History of the Greco-Roman World*), it is always in terms of economic growth, which is something different from change as such.

Another issue the editors highlight in the introduction is that scholarship on the ancient economy is often centred too much on the Roman world (and to a lesser degree on the Greek world), neglecting the economy of other ancient societies. Ancient Greece and Rome are unanimously recognised not as the starting point of our civilisation, but rather as the point at which the first stage of the history of urban societies had arrived (p. 11). The editors reject the view of ancient economic history as a quest for growth and consider change, rather than growth, the best proxy for contesting the primitivistic view of a stagnating ancient world. The outcome of this project is presented in the volume.

The first section deals with cereal production. This choice is meaningful because agricultural production in antiquity has always been the favoured topic for primitivists, who see it as a typical example of economic and technological stagnation. The first paper of this section, 'De l'amidonnié au blé dur: un changement dans la céréaliculture égyptienne dans la seconde moitié du I^{er} millénaire a.C.', by D. Agut-Labordère, C. Bouchaud, F. Lerouxel and C. Newton, offers an overview that combines the tools of archaeobotany and papyrology, explaining the transition from a hulled cereal, emmer wheat, to the cultivation of durum wheat. The traditional explanation of this transition has been to connect it to the arrival of Greek colonisers, after Alexander's conquests. The authors argue that the transition happened well before the creation of Graeco-Egyptian society and that it was triggered by local needs and developments.

In the second chapter, 'Les céréales vêtues dans l'Antiquité: menues observations en hommage à François Sigaut', P. Ouzoulias complains that studies on cereals in antiquity

have focused too much on commerce rather than on production, self-consumption and the evolution of agricultural techniques. He explains how, in fact, the usage, cultivation and consumption of cereals during the Roman age constantly evolved. Ouzoulias analyses a large number of ancient sources, convincingly demonstrating that changes in the use and production of different types of cereals were numerous over time.

In the last paper of this section, 'L'épeautre en France et dans les pays limitrophes: témoignages carpologiques d'un blé devenue "secondaire"', V. Zech-Matterne concedes a general decline in dressed cereals during antiquity, but she also emphasises the increase in the cultivation of spelt wheat, in several regions replacing emmer wheat. Urbanisation seems to have played a decisive role here: transforming agrarian balances, it promoted the development of this bread-making cereal, suitable for marketing, which nevertheless shared with other coated cereals a good resistance to pests and an ease of cultivation similar to emmer wheat.

Section 2 contains three papers and focuses on dates, cotton and salted meats, i.e. the kind of merchandise that is more suitable for trade. In the first paper, 'Les dattes, un exemple de changement agricole dans la Babylonie du VI^e siècle', L. Graslín-Thomé demonstrates that one cannot understand the development of the cultivation of the date palm in Babylon during the sixth century without taking into account agricultural calendars. The development of this commercial culture did not proceed by innovation but by the improvement of practices that were known for a long time. A crucial role is played by structural changes that help improve the harvest. This has an impact on the structure of society, and, in turn, the structure of society shapes the changes and the development of agricultural techniques.

The subsequent chapter, 'L'intégration du coton au sein des économies agraires antiques: un marqueur discret d'innovation', is authored by C. Bouchaud and G. Tallet. In this paper for the first time we encounter a crop not intended for human consumption. The focus is on the production of cotton in the geographical area around the Red Sea from the first to the seventh centuries CE. The authors scrutinise in depth the information available from written sources and archaeobotanical evidence. They put forward the hypothesis of an Indian origin of the plant and the subsequent early African domestication of it. Only later was the plant also grown in Egypt, and from there it spread to become common around the Mediterranean Sea.

The last paper of this section, 'Aperçu de l'économie des conserves de poissons en Méditerranée antique', by E. Botte, is a short article, an overview as stated in the title ('aperçu'), but very interesting. Botte addresses specific issues regarding the process of fish salting and the making of sauces. The author's question is how one can identify archaeological traces of the process of transforming fish into a processed product. Botte argues that the information provided by amphorae is not reliable enough to reconstruct this phenomenon and that barrels, almost impossible to trace in archaeology, must have played an important role as containers of such products.

Section 3 has two papers on luxury products, both imported from the Indian Ocean into the Mediterranean area. F. De Romanis, P. Schneider and J. Trinquier, in 'La circulation du poivre noir de l'Inde méridionale jusqu'en Méditerranée: quels changements?', focus on the importation of black pepper from Southern India to the Mediterranean region. The inclusion of pepper in the luxury product section is slightly problematic; in fact the authors acknowledge that pepper was indeed a widespread commodity in Roman society.

In 'Les perles de la mer Érythré', after a short introduction on how pearls are formed, P. Schneider describes the two areas from where the Romans could import them: the Persian Gulf and the Palk Straits between India and Sri Lanka. The latter seems to have been the larger producer and exporter, and the organisation of wide scale export there reached a high level of evolution. Schneider describes how pearls became a status symbol

for the women of affluent families of the Roman Empire, particularly from the age of Augustus. According to Schneider, the annexation of Egypt to the Empire played a decisive role in increasing interest in pearls amongst wealthy Roman families.

The fourth and final section contains only one paper, dealing with mills, a classic subject in the history of ancient technology: 'L'évolution des moulins dans la problématique de la production, de la commercialisation et de la consommation', by O. Buchsenschutz, C. Chaigneau and S. Lepareux-Couturier. The paper is based on quantitative analyses carried out by the authors and presents their research programme, which led to the creation of a list of all the grinding stones discovered during excavations at every site of Roman Gaul. This research has allowed the clarification of an important and debated point, the existence of water mills during the Roman age, which can no longer be disputed. The authors' detailed description also shows how the change to water mills in the Gallic region was slow and inhomogeneous, confirming the picture that technological developments did not spread simultaneously over the whole Empire.

The last chapter, 'Conclusion: peut-on faire une analyse économique du changement dans les économies antiques?' is written by an economist, J. Bourdieu, and a historian, L. Graslin-Thomé. The first words of this conclusion summarise the central principle of the book: 'cet ouvrage s'inscrit dans la longue opposition entre primitivistes et modernistes. Mais il s'y inscrit en refusant en quelque sorte les termes même du débat'. This is probably the first merit of the volume, recognising the existence of a century-old and unavoidable debate on the nature of the ancient economy, but at the same time looking for a different, innovative way to address it. We can agree with the authors that this achievement is accomplished. The conclusions move forward further, based on the methodology used in the volume with particular attention paid to the handling of the different types of ancient sources. The last part of the chapter is of particular interest, summing up the main results of the endeavour. Here, the authors clearly demonstrate how economic change in the ancient world is somehow different from the same in the contemporary world. Firstly, it is almost impossible to apply the supply and demand model or to verify the existence of one economic change fostered by a central policy. The authors also call into question the role of the entrepreneur in the ancient world as a trigger for economic development. Instead, what emerges clearly from the book is primarily the crucial and long-neglected role of agriculture in the peripheral regions of the Empire in determining economic changes. This also affects the speed of the change and the way in which it spreads out, both elements that are determined by the characteristics of the economic item and by the region in which the change originally took place. Calling into question the usual assumptions of economists linking innovation and the figure of the entrepreneur, these results, underlined in the conclusion, will be of interest to ancient economic historians, by showing that the management of risks and the challenges of survival that arose for ancient peasantries could have been engines of change just as powerful as the search for individual enrichment.

The book will certainly give rise to a fresh and useful debate, both on the conclusions and on the methodological choices made; but there is no doubt that the debate will be of interest to the whole academic community. Despite the complexities and the technicalities connected to specific subjects in the volume, the result is accessible to both students of the ancient economy and students of the ancient world as a whole, and it will prove to be a milestone in the promotion of a new and more fruitful approach to the knowledge of ancient societies.

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