

## ROMAN PUBLIC SLAVERY

LUCIANI (F.) *Slaves of the People. A Political and Social History of Roman Public Slavery*. (Potsdamer altertumswissenschaftliche Beiträge 79.) Pp. 489, ill. Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2022. Paper, €80. ISBN: 978-3-515-13140-7.

doi:10.1017/S0009840X23002020

Although Roman public slavery was an important institution, it has not received as much attention as other aspects of the Roman slave system. The historiographical essay in the introductory chapter of this monograph makes it clear that more work in this area is needed. L. seeks to give a holistic view of Roman public slavery, following on the works of L. Halkin (1897), W. Eder (1980) and A. Weiß (2004). L.'s volume contributes to the field in a major way. The main subject is tackled in the first 266 pages. One of the most useful aspects of the work is the collection of all literary and epigraphical evidence that mentions public slaves. This is split between six appendices, which fill 171 pages. The appendices alone will serve as a useful source not only for historians of public slavery, but also for those interested in Roman slavery and epigraphy more broadly.

In the first chapter L. sets out to define a public slave, arguing that public slaves are those that belonged to the *populus Romanus* and the slaves that were 'collectively owned by the townsfolk of a self-governing city' (p. 26). He establishes three essential characteristics for defining Roman public slaves: (1) having a plural entity as an owner; (2) being employed for common use by the public; (3) facing the prospect of being manumitted through an official procedure. One of the important revelations from this chapter is that slaves of gods were not considered public slaves and were not used as such. In Chapter 2 L. provides a historical sketch of Roman public slavery from the sixth century BCE well into the imperial period. Chapter 3, the longest of the monograph, provides an analysis of the roles of Roman public slaves at Rome across time. Here L.'s impressive command of the epigraphic and literary material shines brightest. Chapter 4 focuses on the roles of Roman public slaves in the rest of Italy and other western provinces. These two chapters show the important difference between the work public slaves did in the city of Rome and work they did in the rest of Italy and the western provinces. Although public slaves throughout the Roman state occupied similar roles, their use in and impact on the religious and administrative structure of a given city varied. Chapter 5 details the prospects and procedures for manumitting Roman public slaves. This chapter also discusses the lives of public freedmen, concluding that, like other Roman freedmen, they continued to perform the same kind of labour they did as when they were enslaved. Finally, in Chapter 6 and the conclusion, L. provides an analysis of the social position of the Roman public slave.

Perhaps one of the most important claims developed over these last two chapters is that the prospects of freedom for Roman public slaves were low. This is crucial for one of L.'s main goals, which is to show that Roman public slaves as a status group did not occupy a more privileged position than private slaves (see also L., 'Public Slaves in Rome: "Privileged" or Not?', *CQ* 70 [2020]), contrary to previous scholarship (Weiß, G. Alföldy, J. Scheid). But L. also argues that public slaves clearly occupied a distinctive social position and that historians should not 'subscribe to the general paradigm of slavery as social death' (p. 266) in explaining it. For L., acceptance of this paradigm prevents one from being able to explore the distinctions inherent in the Roman slave system – though it should be noted that the social death paradigm is more complex than his conclusions would

suggest (but cf. V. Brown, 'Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery', *AHR* 114 [2009]).

Perhaps one of the most impactful aspects of the volume is the 171 pages of appendices. Here, L. gathers every mention of Roman public slaves attested in both the literary and the epigraphic material. They are organised as follows: Appendix 1: Rome, Appendix 2: Italian towns, Appendix 3: Western provinces, Appendix 4: *incerti*, Appendix 5: Eastern provinces, Appendix 6: Associations and Guilds.

Building on the scholarship of Halkin, Eder and Weiß, L.'s volume sheds light on areas of public slavery that were previously understudied. For example, his analysis of the function and role of Roman public slaves in the rest of Italy and the western provinces provides much more detailed information about the administrative and religious roles that public slaves held in different cities. L.'s volume also engages with work done on ancient Mediterranean public slavery by scholars such as P. Ismard and N. Lenski, placing the political role of Roman public slavery at the forefront of his analysis.

With all the material that L. brings to bear, there are some things that are left to be desired in his treatment. While he shows an impressive command of all the evidence gathered, the last two chapters seem to scratch the surface about the actual lives of public slaves and public freedmen, which seems surprising given how well he knows the material. While he engages with scholarship considerably in the introductory chapters, much of the volume has rather sparse direct engagement with the secondary literature (most of which happens in the footnotes). There is also not much take-up of Roman public slavery in the East, though here evidentiary issues present challenges; a more thoughtful account of Roman public slavery in the Greek East remains very much a *desideratum*. There are instances in which L. lists evidence that is not subsequently digested through discussion: Chapter 4, 'Serving the Cities', contains several examples. However, this decision might reflect L.'s warranted sense of caution concerning some of the evidence amassed. His chapter on manumission sheds light on a previously understudied aspect of Roman public slavery, and much more concentrated engagement with this topic is sorely needed. Although L. is perhaps right to imagine a lower potential for manumission for public slaves, we should be careful in assuming too much from the lack of epigraphic evidence, since we know that certainly not all freedmen (whether public or private) would have their name recorded.

L.'s argument is convincing, and his account provides a much-needed correction and addition to previous scholarship on Roman public slavery. The evidence used and the collection of information in the appendices will make the volume necessary to consult for any future research being undertaken on Roman public slavery. Once considered an understudied topic (it still is in comparison to other aspects of Roman slavery), *Slaves of the People* shows why much more engagement with Roman public slavery is needed. This reader certainly looks forward to where the conversation of Roman public slavery goes from here.

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