invisible elsewhere. The digital prosopography of Trismegistos has enhanced immensely what can be done with this treasure trove, and the nine chapters in this volume reflect the first systematic approaches to process them for historical study. Perhaps unsurprisingly, given the relatively early stage of study, the reader of the volume comes across with more questions than answers. Some chapters explore important phenomena such as the gradual decline of cross-gender names in the course of the Hellenistic and imperial periods, or the strange significance of Greek names with a literary character from Egypt's western oases. Particularly interesting are the two chapters devoted to the onomastics of two groups of Semitic immigrants, Jews and Idumaeans. Both chapters illustrate the diversity of patterns in the onomastic preferences of these groups and the extent to which they retained names from their country of origin, or adapted to the Greek onomastics of immigrants in Egypt; equally important is the finding that such varied patterns often originate in their place of origin outside Egypt.

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doi:10.1017/S0017383526100813

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Roman history

Peter Wiseman – who turned eighty-six early this year – has just produced two major volumes that any student of the Roman Republic should readily take notice of. The first one is a collection of the essays and reviews which he has published on early Rome over the last quarter of a century, with the addition of ten previously unpublished pieces.[1] The three key terms of the title, *Myth, History, and Archaeology,* provide a teachable summary of the main interests of that great scholar and, more importantly, point to the ways in which he has shown how those three areas interrelate and overlap, with the unique blend of philological insight and historical imagination that has made his contribution to Roman studies (broadly understood) so significant and so original. Having such a distinguished body of work collected in one venue is in itself invaluable, and makes this volume a required presence in any Classics library. An *Introduction* and an *Epilogue 2025* give Wiseman the chance to draw attention to the main tenets of his vision of early Rome and of the correct use of the evidence – written and unwritten – for it: the unremitting and enlightening polemic with Andrea Carandini is a leading theme throughout the collection. Another key nodal point is the deep connection that Wiseman establishes between Rome and the Greek world, which he regards as central to the understanding of the origins of the city.

It is perhaps a trope – but nonetheless true – that the studies collected in this volume would by themselves be a worthy outcome of a long period of sustained research.

[1] *Myth, History and Archaeology: Essays and Reviews, 2000–2025.* By T. P. Wiseman. *Mnemosyne* Supplements: History and Archaeology of Classical Antiquity 497. Leiden and Boston, Brill, 2025. Pp. xiv + 354. 28 illustrations. Hardback £95.00, ISBN: 978-90-04-74253-6.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

However, they are just a fraction of what Wiseman has produced over a stretch of time: at the core of his work there is a series of volumes that have marked significant turning points in debates on late-Republican politics, on Catullus, on literature and performance, and again on archaic Rome. At the heart of each of those books there is a strong and divisive thesis, which could be summarized in a paragraph, which is then explored, refined, and complicated through a set of case studies and exercises in close reading.

The intersection between drama and politics has been a longstanding interest of Wiseman since the 1970s. His latest monograph, *The Lost History of Roman Theatre*, powerfully links it up with his wider view of the development of the city of Rome and the role that political and social conflict had in that story.[2] Theatre is not a Greek import: it is part of a matrix of Roman culture that goes back to the archaic period, in which a Greek strand plays a central role from the earliest days of the city. The claim is based on a convergence of a vast body of literary evidence, in which Cicero has a central role, and recently discovered archaeological material: in different ways they both show the weight of the role of Greek culture at Rome, and the pervasive nature of the presence of theatre in the city. The conventional narrative that places the emergence of Roman theatre in the mid-third century BCE is denounced as fundamentally inadequate; we are instead presented with a much richer and much more problematic picture, in which the possibility that Rome should be viewed as a Greek city after all is strongly intimated, and a structural bond is identified between the formation of Rome as a political community and the development of Roman theatre. At its core the book is an exercise in rediscovering layers of history that have long gone unnoticed: the history of *satura* as a literary genre and a type of performance is a case in point. As Wiseman notes in his final paragraph, this study does not quite amount to a '*connected* history of Roman theatre', but seeks to lay the foundations for it; in doing so, it raises a set of problems that are either entirely new or require fresh attention. That in itself is the mark of a great book.

The range of the discussion is characteristically capacious. The focus shifts from bronze *cistae* to Byzantine antiquarians, from Velleius Paterculus' interest in theatre games to the abrasive comments of Pope Gelasius on the Lupercalia, from the topography of the Carinae neighbourhood in Rome to Suetonius's view on the origins of pantomime. As Wiseman recalls (pp. xiv–xv), his project was driven at the outset by the need to address a host of specific problems; the book came into being when he saw that they were linked by an overarching theme that demanded a unified response. A committed and self-defined empiricist, Wiseman often discusses where the burden of proof in the handling of a particular problem might lie. At the end of the cumulative case that he has built with customarily nimble inexorability, it is hard to escape the feeling that any future attempt to write the history of Roman theatre and, more broadly, the history of Roman Republican culture will necessarily have to engage with Wiseman's major claim. Just as importantly, his discussion of matters of detail will be required and illuminating reading for any student of the period, regardless of what they might make of the bigger thesis.

Wiseman wrote his first book on new men in the Roman Republican Senate, but that august body has purposefully been marginal in most of his later work. Those who do take an interest in the Senate, though, will have followed the steady stream of edited volumes

[2] *The Lost History of Roman Theatre*. By T. P. Wiseman. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2025. Pp. xv + 306. Illustrations. Hardback £38.00, ISBN: 978-0-691-27323-5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

and research monographs that have been published over the last decades under the auspices of the *PaRoS* project (*Palingenesie der Römischen Senatsbeschlüsse*) led at Münster by Pierangelo Buongiorno and Sebastian Lohsse.[3] We can now salute the publication of the first instalment of the core item of that project: a seven-volume collection of all the known decrees of the Senate from 509 BCE to 284 CE. Clément Bur and Thibaud Lanfranchi have been entrusted with the first two volumes, and have now produced the first one covering the period from 509 BCE to 367 BCE.[4] It is a book of the greatest interest and significance for at least two reasons. First, it marks the beginning of a major scholarly enterprise, and it enables readers (including those who are mainly interested in later periods) to see how the material is presented and what the key working principles of the collection are. Buongiorno and Lohsse set them out in their introduction to the series, which economically sketches (in Latin: quite a statement) an account of the scholarship on *senatus consulta* and identifies the four key categories of evidence that will be covered in the edition: fragments of texts of Senate decrees; sources that provide a paraphrase of the text; sources that give a general account of the decree; and indirect references to a decree. Routine Senate rulings, such as those on elections and the production of new coinage, are not included. The Senate decrees attested for the regal period – whose historicity raises obvious problems – have already been covered in a lengthy article published by Bur and Lanfranchi in 2019 in one of the early *PaRoS* volumes; the introduction to the latest volume restates the key findings of that project and shows the areas of continuity between regal and early Republican Senate. Bur and Lanfranchi make a point of gathering and discussing all the evidence for senatorial pronouncements in the period under discussion: at the same time, they take a strong critical approach, are very aware of the degree of anachronisms of the later sources, and question the historicity of a large number of the 328 decrees they have included. Such a critical exercise is perhaps the single most significant aspect of this highly impressive work. Rather than imposing a dogmatic approach on their topic, the authors offer a detailed analysis of the evidence and its biases and use it as a gateway towards the discussion and exploration of wider historical issues. This is the second key point of interest of the volume: by looking at the evidence for every single decree of the Senate between the start of the Republic and the opening of the magistrates to the plebeians, Bur and Lanfranchi end up scrutinizing every major junction of the political history of the early Republic.

The 328 entries of their volume are a splendid overview of the key themes in the history of the period, and can reliably be used by anyone who wishes to receive an up-to-date introduction to a specific segment of early Republican history. The structure of the entries reflects the four-tiered structure described in the series preface; the ancient texts that are directly relevant to the Senate decree are quoted in full (untranslated). Each decree is given a Latin title, which, as the authors freely concede, is 'perfectly artificial' (14), but does offer a useful orientation point. The bibliography strikes an excellent

[3] See the review of F. Verrico, *Governare l'emergenza. Sulla gestione senatoria di* interregnum, dictatura *e* prorogatio imperii *(V–III sec. a.C.)*, Stuttgart 2024, in *G&R* 72 (2025) 352–3.

[4] *Palingenesia senatus consultorum I. Senatus consultorum ab anno 509 ad annum 367 a. Chr. N. factorum fragmenta et testimonia quae supersunt. Cum commentariis ediderunt Clément Bur et Thibaud Lanfranchi*, Acta Senatus A. Palingenesie der römischen Senatsbeschlüsse 1, Stuttgart, Franz Steiner Verlag, 2026. Pp. x + 493. Hardback €110, ISBN: 978-3-515-12616-8. *Nota bene*: while the title of the book is in Latin, the text is in French.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

balance between the need to guide readers to the key contribution on a topic, the coverage of recent work, and the imperative not to provide an unwieldy list (English-speaking readers might feel slightly shortchanged by the lack of engagement with Guy Bradley's *Early Rome to 290 BC,* which has readily become the reference treatment of the period in this language). The rigorous engagement with modern bibliography is apparent in the commentary notes that are the bulk of each entry, from which readers reliably get thoughtful and lucidly presented guidance on the matter at hand: it is not uncommon for a note to end with sobering remarks on the likely unhistorical nature of a given Senate decree. Crucially, though, readers are given all the tools they need to make their minds up for themselves. The outcome is an unparalleled, first-rate research resource, which will change the way we go about studying the early Republic. The statistical analysis with which Bur and Lanfranchi end their introduction is also worth reading as an important historical essay in its own right. With a base of hundreds of cases it is possible to identify some key themes of interest and action, with the control over competition among the *gentes* and the dealings (military or diplomatic) with neighbouring communities being by far the remits that attracted most of the Senate's attention. Strikingly, there is a considerable degree of continuity throughout the period covered in this volume: the magistracies and the voting assemblies were the areas in which change and conflict may be more discernibly identified. The *PaRoS* collection has got off to a very strong start, and the remaining six volumes give us much to look forward to.

The brief that the *PaRoS* team has set itself is largely about giving the best possible account of the known evidence for senatorial decisions: it is about doing justice to an archive that has been there since the study of Roman history began. The latest book project of Harriet Flower seeks to do something quite different: it draws the attention of readers to an archive that has barely been recognized as such.[5] We have all been taught, of course, that educated slaves lived and worked in Rome, and played a part in the making of the Roman social and political elite. Flower takes this well-worn trope seriously by producing a comprehensive account of what is known about a couple of dozen slaves that are known to have lived in Republican Rome, doing important intellectual work, whether on behalf of their masters or on their own account. In doing so, she sheds light on several remarkable human stories for which the evidence is surprisingly abundant and vivid: from Gaius Gracchus' flute-player Licinius to the grammarian Q. Lutatius Catulus Daphnis, who commanded such extraordinary selling prices, to the enslaved war prisoners who went on to acquire considerable intellectual prestige, such as the historian Timagenes of Alexandria (Cicero's Tiro has been left out of the account, perhaps rightly: he really is an exception among the exceptions). At the heart of the book there is a series of meticulously researched and elegantly written biographical studies, in which the connections between individual trajectories and wider historical developments are elicited with typical insight; most of the key political developments of the late-Republican period receive a discussion here from distinctive and unexpected angles. The main reward of this book, though, is arguably in the big-picture point it makes. Flower convincingly argues that these exceptional stories are

[5] *Intellectual Property: Learned Slaves & Educated Freedmen in Republican Rome*. By Harriet I. Flower. Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2025. Pp. xii + 249. Hardback £35, ISBN: 978-0-691-26616-9.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

representative of a wider pattern: there was a firm and broadly shared realization among the slave-owning elite that literate slaves could perform valuable and distinctive tasks; a range of activities were open to them; and schooling was made accessible to a considerable number of young slaves. That in itself is an important fact; it is all the more remarkable if one factors in the low literacy rate in Roman society. The scale and quality of the phenomenon finds indirect confirmation in the (regrettably lost) work *About Slaves Who Excelled in Learning* that the freedman Hermippus of Berytus wrote in the early second century CE: that author, who actually had quite a lot in common with his subjects, identified a group that warranted interest in its own right. Flower has made a strong statement for its importance: it will be interesting to see whether the model she has sketched for the Republican period, mostly based on the literary evidence, can be productively fleshed out and complicated for the Imperial period, for which we can rely on a different epigraphic habit. As she has done so many times before, Flower has set the terms of her topic of choice with an outstanding degree of cogency and clarity, and has admirably articulated its potential and significance.

Intellectual Property shows in practice how the exploration of a carefully defined topic can yield insights into larger themes. Conversely, Peter Fibinger Bang's *The Roman Empire and World History* takes on an avowedly big topic and gives it a wide-ranging and ambitious discussion. It is easily one of the most provocative and engaging contributions to the debates on the shape and direction of the subject to have appeared over the last quarter of a century.[6] It is helpfully unpreachy and refreshingly jargon-free; it is steeped in careful and wide-ranging reading, which considerably exceeds the remit of the history of the ancient world (Kenneth Pomeranz and Sanjay Subrahmanyam are key interlocutors); and it makes a point of guiding readers through ancient material and modern debates that might be unfamiliar by taking the time to explain and signpost effectively. In a way, the title undersells its range and significance. Of course this book is essential reading for Roman historians, but it is also of pressing interest to anyone who might be working in global or comparative history. This is a discussion of how to go about writing a global history of the ancient world, from the viewpoint and experience of a Roman historian who has long had strong comparative interests, since his groundbreaking 2008 book *The Roman Bazaar*, where he pursued a comparative discussion of the Roman and the Mughal empires, taking taxation and trade as its key focus. This monograph takes an even more capacious and ambitious approach. Its fundamental claim is that the history of the Roman Empire has nothing exceptional, let alone miraculous, about it, but can productively be read as part of a much bigger set of developments. It is an integral part of world history, and its key themes can be seen at play in the history of other geographical and cultural settings. The development of the Roman Republic and her Mediterranean Empire is part of a process leading to the formation of large state structures that came to dominate sedentarized societies across the Afro-Eurasian context: the Roman, Parthian, Kushan, and Han empires. The same approach can be extended to the study of the success of monotheism and the spread of transregional languages such as Greek, Latin, and Sanskrit. While it is held together by a clear overarching argument, this book could just as fruitfully be read as a series of interconnected essays on some major historical themes (and this could be one of its key uses in a teaching setting): chapters on state

[6] *The Roman Empire and World History*. By Peter Fibiger Bang. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xvi + 233. Illustrations. Paperback £25, ISBN: 978-1-009-01372-7.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

formation, imperial structures, elite formation and culture, long-distance trade, and resistance and rebellion help Bang flesh out and probe his general claim. The conclusions open with an insightful comparative discussion of the role of impostor stories, starting with that of the False Nero in the mid-first century CE.

Bang builds on some of the most exciting work in early modern history to show that positing connections and pursuing comparisons are fundamentally germane pursuits. He is relatively less interested in describing the rise of imperial Rome as a case of early globalization; he resorts at times to the notion of 'archaic' globalization, perhaps not as analytically sharp a tool as other aspects of his discussion, but helpful enough in marking out an important degree of distance and affinity between premodern and modern contexts.

Bang is interested in establishing the order of magnitude of the processes he discusses, but refrains from facile quantitative exercises (I have not been able to find a single table in a book that is otherwise amply illustrated, and includes a number of valuable maps); he also has the most welcome habit of basing his claims on actual evidence, rather than on secondary literature. His big-picture account does not deny the importance of small-scale detailed studies, nor is it oblivious to what the application of specific technical expertise (linguistic and otherwise) can offer to the study of ancient societies. In a way, in fact, establishing more clearly some major long-term patterns can in turn sharpen the study of specific problems, and raise new questions.

Bang is very keen to stress that his project is by no means the last word, and that the work he has pursued can be extended to other themes and other geographical remits. There is little doubt, though, that this book marks a before-and-after moment in the ways in which we seek to connect Roman history to world history, both because of the clarity and rigour with which it tackles previous debates and because of the importance of the claims it makes. It also offers invaluable insights into how to place the teaching of Greek and Roman history within larger History programmes in ways that can be widely appealing, intellectually robust, and politically responsible. Bang does plenty of big and bold thinking, but his discussion has a consistently pragmatic focus, which strongly contributes to making it so attractive and consequential.

An important angle of Bang's book is the interplay between different contexts and different scales; regional history is by no means dismissed as an irrelevance in his project. The privileged position of Italy in the Empire, for example, is a classic theme in Roman history, which remains central to the understanding of the dynamics of exploitation and integration on the Mediterranean scale, and is significant for the study of the longer-term historical trajectory of the peninsula beyond antiquity. It is also a theme of political history, feeding into the problem of the selection, renewal, and decline of the imperial governing class. Bart Danon has offered a new study of this topic in which he takes up the methodological proposal of the quantitative studies of Walter Scheidel and Steven Friesen on income inequality in Roman Italy, and refines their conclusions by using a wider evidentiary base and changing some statistical parameters.[7] Its fundamental question is the connection between wealth and office-holding, and its key contention is that there was no structural link between economic prominence and socio-political rank.

[7] *Wealth, Office and Rank in Roman Italy*. By Bart Danon. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2025. Pp. xvi + 288. 37 illustrations, 14 tables. Hardback £90, ISBN: 978-1-009-49694-0 (Open Access).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The pool of individuals that met the census criteria for senatorial and equestrian rank was in fact much wider than that of those who got involved in public office, whether at municipal level or in the Senate. The quantitative dimension of the argument is based on the use of proxy data, such as the size of Pompeian properties, and on the production of synchronic estimates: there is no real attempt to get a sense of how things developed or varied during the three centuries or so that are discussed here. The whole book is predicated on the reader's willingness to accept some abstractions and generalizations, not least on how the notion of elite should be defined; the use of quantitative arguments is qualified by the use of probabilistic calculations: an approach for which Banon, Daniel Jew, and Myles Lavan made an important call a few years ago.[8] A significant aspect of the discussion is the claim that the elite has a strong degree of internal differentiation: there is a top echelon of the elite that has considerably higher means than the rest of the group. In this view, there is strong competition for admission to the senatorial order, in which there is a steady stream of interest, but local councils attract a far less robust uptake, and are eventually caught up in a recruitment crisis that is apparent by the early third century: there were lower reserves from which the system could resolve its conjunctural difficulties, especially in smaller centres. Danon tends to keep the discussion on the big picture, but is aware of the crucial importance of the local dimension in the history of Roman Italy, and insists on the importance of differentiating between the predicaments of larger and smaller centres. The importance of this point is duly recognized, but not really explored: there is no discernible engagement with the rich tradition of local and regional historiography that has been the bulk of much of the modern scholarship on Roman Italy.

At one point (205) Danon appears to voice the concern that this reading might be regarded as Marxist; I see no such risk. What we are presented with is a well-documented restatement of the exceptional wealth and influence of the Italian elites, in which their widespread lack of interest in political engagement is identified as a major historical theme: the propertied classes of Roman Italy are largely non-political. This is an important thesis: it is not new, to be sure, but it has never been argued on the basis of such a strong set of quantitative data. The interpretative grid that Danon has provided should now be put to the test of a detailed analysis of the actions of the political and economic elites of Roman Italy, across a wider chronological focus and through specific local and regional studies. The implications of their widespread reluctance to get involved in politics, especially at the municipal level, will warrant careful discussion. Towards the end of the book Danon quickly points readers to some comparative literature on how oligarchies operate for their success and preservation, which is also of obvious contemporary interest. The early Empire is an age that retains a strong political culture; it is important to discuss further why an influential segment of its socio-economic elite did not fully buy into it.

In the course of a distinguished career Kim Bowes has made an exceptional contribution to recalibrating the focus of Roman history towards the lived experience of those who were not part of the political and economic elites. Her leadership of the Roman Peasant Project has been central to that undertaking, and has stimulated new alliances between archaeologists and historians in the pursuit of questions that require

[8] M. P. Lavan, D. Jew, B. Danon (eds.), *The Uncertain Past. Probability in Ancient History* (Cambridge, 2022).

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

renewed and energetic attention. Her thoughtful and refreshingly polemical critique of the overreliance on quantitative approaches in the field ('the GDP boys', to use a catchy formula she once deployed) has gained attention among historians of later periods. The major monograph that she has now devoted to the lives of the 'ninety per cent' takes the conversation to a different level of ambition and detail, and is a most important contribution to the field.[9] It not just a call for a new methodological approach: it is a highly impressive overview of what can be known about the lives of 'ordinary' Romans, bringing together material from a host of different contexts and engaging with a set of sub-fields and historiographical traditions that typically operate in isolation from one another. At the core of this book there is a big idea. Perhaps inevitably, some themes and some opportunities get missed in the process. Speaking of a 'ninety per cent' is an operation that is obviously tinged with contemporary resonances; it also entails a degree of generalization and a risk of flattening out a much more diverse set of experiences, as Bowes herself acknowledges. The way out of the analytical limitations of the categories she has used is to zoom in on a number of specific cases in her discussion: once a broad perimeter of non-elite people has been identified, the focus can shift to a range of different instances. There is arguably a more powerful and productive unifying concept underpinning the discussion: grit, which Bowes pointedly uses instead of agency (see especially p. 19). The world that is depicted in her book is full of challenges and risks, to which people respond with management strategies that are always context specific. In this key respect, Bowes identifies a major topic of long-term continuity: the resourcefulness that the poor in today's Mumbai or Nairobi deploy to make ends meet, devising creative triangulations between credit, debt, and the real threat of destitution, finds precise analogies in antiquity. The analogy with modern and contemporary contexts is not simply a rhetorical device. Bowes puts forward an interpretation of the Roman economy in which the volume of production and exchange is much higher than usually assumed; there is evidence for high calorie intake, which can be explained by large volumes of work; and there is intense competition for land, which made renting very widespread.

At its core Bowes' book is an account of economic history, but its remit is in fact considerably wider. A key aspect of its argument is that numeracy was much more widespread than literacy in antiquity, and had strong implications for the day-to-day living of people: it was a crucial skill in a world in which a great number of households ran on 'deficit financing', i.e. relying on a low and volatile income to support a high consumption rate. In this view, the role of the individual and the specific set of circumstances in which they live and to which they seek to respond takes a central role, and their social bonds are conversely less weighty – hence the scepticism that Bowes tactfully shows in a couple of notes on Sarah Bond's recent argument on organized labour (reviewed in the previous issue of this journal). The model put forward by Bowes has profound intellectual coherence, and does have the potential to assert itself as a central contribution to the study of the Roman economy. Her frequent and critical engagement with Finley's *The Ancient Economy* is driven by the need to set up a neat opposition to the argument she seeks to develop, but is also a reflection of the ambition to present a

[9] Kim Bowes, *Surviving Rome. The Economic Lives of the Ninety Percent*, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2025. Pp. xv + 490. 72 figures, 4 maps, 16 tables. Hardback $39.95/£35.00, ISBN: 978-0-691-27333-4.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

methodological contribution of comparable significance. One of the aspects that Bowes views as distinctive about her approach is the ability to escape the viewpoint and the bias of elite authors. Her dossier has an archaeological focus, and takes stock of recent developments in the study of a wide range of themes: musculoskeletal stresses, isotopes in bones, rotational strategies in the agriculture of Gaul and Britain, or the distribution of grain dryers.

There are two potential blind spots in this approach. There is very little room for politics: the focus is on the survival strategies of the 'ninety per cent', rather than on attempts to create forms of collective organization, and bringing their concerns and interests to bear on the preoccupations and actions of those in power. There is also little sense of the diachronic development of the problem. The discussion that is developed here refers generically to a period that goes from the second century BCE to the second century CE, but no attention is given to processes such as the imperial integration of the Mediterranean, the rise of monarchy, the crisis of the third century CE, or population movements in late antiquity. What we are presented with is a powerful ideal type, which has an essentially synchronic dimension, and is corroborated by the dazzling set of case studies that Bowes engages with: Central and Southern Italy, Britain, and Egypt have the lion's share in the discussion (the lamentable choice to print endnotes rather than footnotes fundamentally undermines the possibility for readers to engage critically with this material, and badly lets down the book as a whole: it is simply not fit for a serious research monograph). Bowes has charted a way in which the Roman economy can be conceptualized and discussed, and established a new set of priorities for its study. Her approach now awaits to be tested and discussed further across a number of different contexts, and it is a safe bet that it will prompt a steady and timely stream of work in the same vein. A project to which Bowes points in her conclusion seems especially attractive: a study of consumption patterns that gives a better sense of the diversity of the neighbourhoods within a city, using Pompeii as its key focus.

Peasants take centre stage in another recent book, which shares Bowes' interest in history 'from below', but independently takes a rather different direction. Paolo Tedesco has written a study of rural North Africa between late antiquity and the rise of Islam that explodes one of the most consolidated chronological divides – that between ancient and medieval history – and produces a strongly integrative and impressively well-documented history of a regional setting.[10] His general aim is cognate to the concerns pursued by Bowes: providing an account of how peasant households 'organised their labor and secured their reproduction' from one generation to another (19). The focus is mainly placed on a single community, the *Fundus Toletianos* in Southern Numidia, for which a substantial body of documentary evidence survives (most notably the dossier of the Albertini Tablets, which record a set of legal transactions on the estate, compiled right at the end of the fifth century) and for which a serious attempt at a microhistorical reconstruction can be made: one that Tedesco maintains can be representative of wider developments across the region. The introduction is testimony to the breadth and sophistication of this study and its theoretical underpinning: there is a robust discussion of the concept of the peasant itself and the debate that has been taking shape around it.

[10] Paolo Tedesco, *Living at the Margins. African Peasants in an Age of Extremes 300–900 CE*, Monographien zur Geschichte des Mittelalters 73, Stuttgart, Hiersemann, 2025. Pp. 361. 60 tables, 6 maps, 2 illustrations. Hardback €164, ISBN: 978-3-7772-2513-5.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

The fundamental claim of the book is about the composition of the labour force in rural North Africa. Rather than envisaging a neat division of tasks between slaves, tenants, and free peasants, Tedesco argues for a much more varied picture, in which different local conditions brought about different set-ups. In fleshing out this argument, he turns to examples drawn from across a considerable number of sites, and through an integration of literary, epigraphical, and archaeological evidence that will in itself make this book a significant reference point. Peasants are central to the discussion, but the interest is in how they operate within the structures that are put in place to manage their work: the role of the landowning elites is explored just as keenly, and is part of a wider ambition to achieve an understanding of late-antique Africa that does better justice to its internal differentiation. Another fundamental difference from Bowes' approach is the weighty role that periodization plays in this project: unsurprisingly, the situation after the Vandalic invasion is sharply different from what one encounters in the Byzantine period or after the Arab invasion. It does not just affect the agrarian and social set-up of the region (notably with the undoing and departure of senatorial landowners), but – more importantly – reshapes the relationship between Africa and Italy, and the interplay between trade and taxation that was fundamental to it. Coming to terms with the consequences of major political crises does not amount to denying important levels of continuity. The diverse mix of the workforce and the sheer volume of production remain unchanged in the long transition from late-Roman to Arab hegemony; a decisive shift intervened in the eight century, when many features of the ancient system of Mediterranean exchange came to an end, and a new economic cycle set in. The focus of Tedesco's discussion is firmly on the macroeconomic picture, with a keen eye for the political implications of the process. The fabric of his account, though, is densely populated by a staggering amount of case studies, or indeed microhistories: a glance at the index of names is revealing of the scale of the research that has gone into this project, and of its potential as a teaching resource. At one point Tedesco notes – riffing on J. C. Scott – that '[t]he job of peasants is to stay out of the archives' (29). He has done at magnificent job at disrupting that *fait accompli*. The implications of his argument are far reaching; the methodological lessons to be drawn from his research are inspiring.

Jennifer Barry's book takes readers to another section of the archive: the lived experience of women in late antiquity, and the oppression they faced in a male-dominated society.[11] Its main contention is a polemical one, steeped in intensive engagement with feminist and womanist scholarship: early Christian texts, especially hagiography, are implicated in a worldview that normalizes gender violence and indeed in a tradition of male fantasies that revolve around violence against women; this take has in turn had a profound legacy beyond antiquity, and has played a key role in normalizing gender violence. Barry regards *Judges* as a seminal book in this connection. The exegetical tradition that took shape around the stories of the daughter of Jephtah, the death of the wives of Samson, and notably the dismemberment of the Levite's concubine has been highly influential. Athanasius of Alexandria is a most significant figure in this story, with the analogy he drew between the Levite woman and the community of Alexandria: a comparison in which the fleeing bishop's suffering is defined as greater than that of the

[11] Jennifer Barry, *Gender Violence in Late Antiquity. Male Fantasies and the Christian Imagination*, Oakland, University of California Press, 2025. Pp. xiii + 227. Hardback £80, ISBN: 978-0-520-42351-0.

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press

dismembered woman. Barry sees this as the aspect of an intellectual tradition which devalues and erases women's experiences of violence and is central to the development of early Christianity. Augustine has a central role in that trajectory, in which suspicion of female sexuality, a link between marriage and servitude, and the tendency to blame women for whatever evil occurs in the world are major operating principles. In this reading Barry sees the start of a 'dismissive approach to sexual assault' (79) that is a fundamental feature of late-antique culture and has deep and troubling ramifications. The hagiographical tradition constructs a contained and disciplined image of the female body, which is ultimately the product of male oneiric strategies. That is the most relevant and pressing aspect of the problem, in Barry's view, because it retains a role in shaping the horizons and expectations of modern Christians. This thesis is as radical as it is likely to prove controversial – to put it neutrally. It is built on the close reading of some key texts (the original Greek or Latin is never given, alas) and on a clear-eyed vision of the disciplinary stakes of the project and the citational politics that should underpin it (the approach she takes to William Harris' work at p. 16, n. 42, is driven by an altogether important concern, but is quite fundamentally unhelpful to her readers and to the overall quality of her discussion). It posits a strategy of engagement with strands of scholarly practice and reflection that rarely intersect with debates in ancient history. This is a book that takes sides. It is led by an intellectual and political commitment to a society in which the oppressed and the silenced might stand a better chance to find their voices and have them heard. It deserves attention, perhaps especially from those who might take a very different view on its subject matter.

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doi:10.1017/S0017383526100825

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Reception

In preparing for this review, I spent a little bit of time on *Eidolon* journal, the groundbreaking exercise in socially-conscious public scholarship that wound up its activities in December 2020, in the midst of Covid and shortly before Joe Biden's inauguration.[1] In many ways, the publication encapsulated a moment when many classicists, at least in Anglophone (especially North-American) communities, appeared to be reconsidering the discipline's relationship to axes of power, most notably those along lines of gender and race, envisaging more equitable and restorative modalities for studying the ancient world, and asking what contribution Classics makes to a more just world. It also, more controversially perhaps, repeatedly asked the question 'Burn it all down?' While many classicists have no doubt been inspired to incorporate practices

[1] https://eidolon.pub/ On the demise of *Eidolon*, see Donna Zuckerberg, 'As *Eidolon* Lay Dying', *Public Humanities*, 2025; 1:e25. doi:10.1017/pub.2024.35

https://doi.org/10.1017/S0017383526100825 Published online by Cambridge University Press