P. enjoys of not having to write fifth-century political history is richer when dealing with Plutarch or Thucydides, and no one could confuse Thucydides with Andocides or Lysias.

P.'s implicit view of drama is that an author selects hard issues and contrives a close enough balance of positive and negative to engage the spectator's interest, keep him undecided for as long as possible, and ensure other spectators form other views. This is surely right, even obvious. Plays are ideally not partisan. Tragedy shows what Athenian culture found problematic (and may seek common ground: cf. *Eumenides*). Comedy contains something for every prejudice, challenges but also reinforces hierarchies, and fosters a reflective society. In both, the rôle of women—as loci of *oikos*-values and instruments for males to inspect the world from a new direction ('what would a Martian make of . . .')—is potentially significant, though not always realized (the *Thesmophoriazousai* are less 'good to think with' than Lysistrata or Praxilla) or intended to upset the *status quo*. *Oeconomicus* illustrates a similar area, with an extra difficulty: extratextual facts about Ischomachus' wife pose an elusive ironic challenge to the surface content. 'Perhaps we can simply find his a thought-provoking and multivalent text, with no single interpretation imposed on the reader. Xenophon can be subtle too.' An excellent note to end on, proof positive of P.'s shrewd judgement.

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ANCIENT PRICES

J. Andreau, P. Briant, R. Descat (edd.): *Économie antique. Prix et formation des prix dans les économies antiques.* (Entretiens d'archéologie et d'histoire Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges, 3.) Pp. 415. Saint-Bertrand-de-Comminges: Musée archéologique départmental, 1997. Cased. ISBN: 2-9502446-9-6.

In ancient economic history, what does it mean to talk about 'prices'? How reliable, representative, or meaningful are surviving references to the exchange value of certain commodities or services? Was price formation governed by the laws of supply and demand or by political fiat, or by both? What, if anything, can prices tell us about the nature of economic processes and institutions in the ancient world? These are important questions, and the contributors to this substantial volume struggle hard to make sense of disparate and often decontextualized data. The net has been cast wider than usual, from Pharaonic Egypt to France under the *Ancien Régime*: while the first six papers deal with Greece and the next five with Rome up to the early Byzantine period, the following seven chapters take a step back in time to the main Near Eastern societies of the first millennium B.C. This chronological inversion remains unexplained but hardly matters: after all, there is no discernible interaction between 'oriental' and 'classical', no dialogue between individual authors except within their own field of specialization, and often not even that. Grenier's final paper, innovatively comparing price formation and exchange mechanisms in the Greco-Roman world and in early modern France, remains the sole exception.

Yet in this case, even a bookbinder's synthesis has much to offer. Gallo seeks to explain the low level of the prices recorded in the Attic *stelai* of 415 B.C. with reference to the crisis of that period rather than the specific context of an auction that might depress valuations. Descat and Migeotte search for evidence of price control. The

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latter, in a useful survey of material from all over the Hellenic world, concludes that although cities regularly sought to exert a moderating influence on the prices of basic commodities such as grain, only limited means were at their disposal, ranging from state-organized purchases and sales and pressure on importers to reliance on private euergetism. The next two authors take a fresh look at the unique corpus of serial price data from Hellenistic Delos. Broadening the scope of his pathbreaking previous researches, Reger analyses the price history of imported goods from oil and perfume to papyrus and pitch, and argues that short-term fluctuations were most likely created by changing political and military circumstances. The asynchronous movement of the prices of different products highlights the complexity of the interplay of supply and demand. Like Reger, Chankowski-Chablé accepts that Delos provided a forum for regional (rather than more global) exchange, but returns to the question of the relative importance of local and outside forces in determining price levels. She concludes that the economic influence of the sanctuary of Apollo is 'not particularly visible' in the record. Schaps emphasizes the coincidence of the invention of money/coinage (in his view, the same thing) with the rise of retail trade in sixth-century B.C. Athens and elsewhere. Without arguing for a direct causal relationship between these developments, he considers systematic small-scale market exchange to be crucially dependent on the availability of cash. The importance and ubiquity of small-denomination coinage from the late Archaic period onwards—discussed by H. Kim, 'Greek Fractional Silver Coinage' (unpublished MPhil thesis, Oxford, 1994)—would seem to corroborate this interpretation.

Andreau bridges the Greek–Roman divide by exploring the absence from the classical record of published series of observed market prices comparable to the late medieval and modern 'mercuriales'. He argues that although prices were indeed monitored or even recorded by Greek and Roman officials, they were not normally made publicly accessible. The pervasiveness of this neglect speaks to the structural uniformity of the 'ancient economy' *à la* Finley. In the second part of his paper, Andreau tracks the long-term evolution of interest rates, again documenting considerable continuity over time. Duncan-Jones expands his (and my own) examination of the stylization of amounts of money reported in Roman texts, demarcating three tiers of digit preference in different categories of sources (low in inscriptions, Cicero, and the Elder Pliny, moderate among certain historians, and high in non-historical literature) and revealing for the first time the considerable corruption of ostensibly precise booty totals in the Republican tradition. Once again, it becomes clear that literary sources are unable to furnish solid building blocks for a history of Roman prices. Two chapters on Roman Egypt form the core of the Roman section. Rathbone collects and analyses papyrological references to the price of wheat, wine, and donkeys from 30 B.C. to A.D. 294. His comprehensive survey enables him to identify three distinct price bands, from the mid-first century A.D. to the 160s (the time of the Antonine plague, which appears to have triggered a doubling in commodity prices), from the 190s to 274 (the retariffing of the Alexandrian tetradrachm against the aureus, prompting prices to rise tenfold), and from 274 to 296 (the end of the regular production of Alexandrian tetradrachms). He convincingly demonstrates that, owing to the considerable scatter of individual valuations created by inadequate sources, it makes more sense to group price data from different periods into ranges than to conflate them into overall means or medians. His paper makes a fundamental empirical contribution to our understanding of the economy of Roman Egypt and provides an invaluable basis for more general reconstructions (such as my own forthcoming demonstration that wages fell into the same bands as prices). Carrié

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adopts a broader perspective in his exploration of the changing ratio of land rents to land prices, and of the price of land relative to wheat during the first six centuries A.D. In late antiquity, higher taxes translated to smaller profits for landlords who relied on tenants. Lo Cascio calculates the gold equivalent of attested grain and wine prices of the second to fifth centuries, an exercise which once more reveals a fair measure of long-term stability underneath periodic variation.

I will comment only briefly on the Near Eastern papers, which will be of minor interest to this audience. Menu finds that land 'prices' in (mostly) late Pharaonic Egypt were determined by the quality and legal status of the soil, but reminds us that as long as rulers or priests retained an ultimate claim to all land, sales of real estate are best understood as mere transfers of the right to exploit it. Aperghis looks at prices in the Persepolis tablets, Fales deals with Neo-Assyrian sources, and Joannes considers various samples of Neo-Babylonian prices and wages. The three remaining papers in this section (by Vargyas, Slotsky, and Zaccagnini) revolve around a unique body of price data, a large number of market quotations for various commodities preserved in the astronomical diaries of the Neo-Babylonian period. Somewhat disappointingly, apart from two brief comments on Schaps's paper tucked away at the end of the volume, this is the only time the reader is presented with alternative interpretations of the same evidence and given the chance to witness some genuine debate among the contributors. Even so, notwithstanding the lack of (explicit) dialogue between most of the chapters, this volume significantly advances our knowledge of the potential and the limits of price data from the ancient world, and for this the organizers deserve our sincere thanks.

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SITUATING ROME

K. CLARKE: *Between Geography and History. Hellenistic Constructions of the Roman World.* Pp. xi + 407. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1999. Cased, £50. ISBN: 0-19-924003-5.

This scholarly and intelligent book, a revision of the author's doctoral thesis, adds to the continuing debate about the relationship between the disciplines of geography and history (in ancient and modern times), and explores how three intellectuals of the Hellenistic period cross easily from one to the other.

The first chapter begins with a broad look at the modern constructions of geography and history. Hayden White, Einstein, Evans-Pritchard, *Annales*, modern feminist geography, and Don Fowler jostle somewhat unhappily with Scylax of Caryanda, Agathemerus, Herodotus, Ptolemy, Eudoxus of Cnidus, et al. Modern geographers turn out to be a most self-reflective tribe (no surprise here to non-geographers). They can teach us about abstract and experienced space, the identity of space and time by the Matapuquio of the Peruvian Andes, about how space, place, and time can be linked to notions of narrativity, and the disjuncture between the categories of the continuous-universal and discrete-local. The rise of geographical studies in the Oxford ancient history school presumably exemplifies the latter (pp. 46–52). But the final section on Müller and Jacoby, their classifications of ancient historians, and the Jacoby-an undifferentiated beginnings of ancient historiography is more obviously relevant to the rest of the book (where modern theories of geography are rarely needed or mentioned).

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