SELLING PEOPLE: FIVE PAPERS ON ROMAN SLAVE-TRADERS AND THE BUILDINGS THEY USED

Introduction

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Although slavery is a recurring theme in Roman historical studies, the general consensus is that slavery is barely retrievable archaeologically. Slave-quarters are subject to positivist doubts, for how do we *know* they are really for slaves (Webster, above). The few examples of chains have not stirred much interest. The one area where we might expect to have more success is in the identification of buildings used for trading in slaves. More than 20 years ago F. Coarelli proposed several identifications, but they have been hotly contested.[1] However, no other serious proposals as to the venue of slave sales have been made. Indeed, we seem to suffer from a general scholarly denial of the problem: slavery is, of course, unpleasant and immoral, so to associate any given building with the trade, particularly a well-known public building, is to stain its reputation. As Coarelli points out, this denial extends to antiquity itself. Only one known inscription actually identifies a *statarion*, and although we know of people who worked in the *venalicia* no such building has been identified. A similar phenomenon is visible in the case of historically-attested slave-markets in the Maghreb or the United States: at Salé, home of one of the most notorious slave-markets of the 18th c., traders currently operating in the old marketplace meet enquiries with polite denial, while at Marrakesh the tightly enclosed slave-market square, with its central, slightly raised pavilion, is known as the 'women's market'. In the United States, only one slave-market, that of Charleston, is now extant, used as an African-American museum and craft shop (in spite of its well-attested use for the sale of slaves, local people are inclined to say that this is simply 'tourist hype'). All others have been torn down or otherwise consigned to oblivion: the publication of W. A. Johnson's fascinating *Soul by soul: life inside the antebellum slave market* (Cambridge, MA 1999) marked a turning point for this research, but there is still much to do.

The following collection of papers is intended to re-open for discussion the subject of Roman slave-markets. The papers derive from a conference entitled "Selling People" held at the British School at Rome in June 2001. The regrettable delay in publication has resulted in the loss of several, including W. V. Harris's revisitation of his earlier work on slave supply, E. Curti's investigation of a possible holding-pen for slaves near Pompeii's harbour, J. DeLaine's discussion of commercial buildings at Ostia, and T. Mavrojannis's analysis of slaving and brigands in Judea and Phoenicia in the Hellenistic period, with the stimulating suggestion that Chalkis in the Bekaa valley, lying at an important intersection of caravan routes, may have given its name to the Chalcidicum. Finally, the late J. H. D'Arms gave a particularly memorable conclusion to what seems to have been one of the last academic conferences he attended.

We might have wished for more papers comparing our own suggestions as to what can be taken as the general characteristics of Roman slave-markets with markets known at other periods. J. Webster's paper, added to the group in the last year, shows just how important such modern analogy can be when attempting to discern the sort of patterns that the material culture of slaves might leave. It is clear that we cannot prove any of it, but it is high time that we started looking.

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1 F. Coarelli, "L'"Agora des Italiens" a Delo: il mercato degli schiavi?" *OpAcadFinl* 2 (1982) 188-224; P. Bruneau, "Deliaca 3. L'Agora des Italiens servait-elle de marché aux esclaves?" *BCH* 109 (1985) 557-64; C. Le Roy, "Encore l'Agora des Italiens à Délos," *Mélanges P. Lévêque* 7 (Paris 1993) 183-207; N. K. Rauh, "Was the Agora of the Italians an établissement de sport?" *BCH* 16 (1992) 293-333.

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