received a Sun Palace, the main residential complex of which was aligned so that its golden ornamentation would shine most dazzlingly. In the carefully choreographed obeisance of Tiridates to Nero in 66 the emperor received the most memorable affirmation of his Sunship.

After his return from Greece, Nero's final mythological manifestation was as Hercules, the bringer of peace and undertaker of great labours—canalizing the Isthmus of Corinth, initiating a safe passage for Rome's corn from Puteoli to the Tiber. Nero was able to bring together deities which stood on opposite sides of the ideological divide between Augustus and M. Antonius.

Taking his inspiration from M. Antonius, Nero attempted to bridge the gap between *princeps* and *plebecula* by the institution of a permanent *Saturnalia*: extravagant public banquets were 'politically astute pageants' (p. 159). Rôle-reversal could be taken to apparently distasteful extremes, e.g. his publicly enacted *irrumatio* of condemned prisoners. However, in general, the appreciation of rôle-reversal depended on one's perspective: for the élite generators of the historical tradition on Nero it was shameful; for the 'ordinary people, riotous subversion might be amusing—it might even be liberating' (p. 177). Moreover, when this principle was extended to the monumental reconstruction of Rome, it could bring the pleasures of the seaside to Rome and open to the people an imperial pleasure park, an unprecedented avenue of access to their emperor.

The development of C.'s thesis is problematic in some aspects. C. argues (pp. 182–91) that Nero was responsible for the fire of Rome: Tacitus' doubts are cast aside and a highly circumstantial case is concocted from testimony during his trial for complicity in the Pisonian conspiracy of Subrius Flavus, who claimed that Nero was an incendiary, and from Nero's twice abandoned trip to the east and the omens he received in the temple of Vesta. Are Subrius' allegations any more compelling than those of Apicata against Sejanus?

C. set out to explain why Nero is fascinating. Even if he does not succeed in every detail, his *Nero* is as dazzling an achievement as the Sun King and his creations.

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## ROMAN DEMOGRAPHY

W. SCHEIDEL (ed.): *Debating Roman Demography*. (*Mnemosyne* Supplementum 211.) Pp. x + 242, ills. Leiden, Boston, and Cologne: Brill, 2001. Cased, €94, US$134. ISBN: 90-04-11525-0.

Ever since the beginnings of demographic studies on the ancient world, which started with David Hume's famous essay on the 'populousness of ancient nations' (1752), attempts have been made to overcome the lack of statistical data from antiquity by drawing on comparisons with societies of later periods from which apparently better data are known. Such comparisons are in principle—due to constants of human biology—more promising than in other fields but they have nevertheless produced embarrassingly divergent results.

The present volume aims at depicting the current state of the art in the field of Roman demography. The papers originate from a 1997 Cambridge conference. Its

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organizer S. has added a long prologue ('Progress and Problems in Roman Demography', pp. 1–81) in which he concentrates on recent work on the 'hard core' of demography: quantitative data for population size and structure. According to S., serious work in this sense only started with Keith Hopkins in the 1960s, whereas Beloch's pioneer work of the 1890s had provoked an overall negative response. Though sketching a sort of success story with respect to the last decades, S. points out the problems implied in transferring demographic models to the scarce ancient evidence. However, the first part of his general statement that 'it is important to select *appropriate* [S.'s emphasis] comparative data, and imprudent to question convergent claims in ancient sources from a variety of backgrounds and periods' (p. 52) does not seem very helpful since it begs the question of the reliability of, for example, medieval or early modern data, which for obvious reasons play an important rôle in comparisons.

Brent Shaw ('The Seasonal Birthing Cycle of Roman Women', pp. 83–110) points out that epitaphs from Christian tombs indicate that the highest numbers of births took place in the winter months and that this fits into a general pattern to be stated for Mediterranean societies in the pre-industrial periods. Shaw is very reluctant to suggest wider conclusions that might be drawn from this statement.

Elio Lo Cascio, who makes use of a number of his earlier pieces (see especially *JRS* 84 [1994], 23–40), presents the paper ('Recruitment and the Size of the Roman Population from the Third to the first Century BCE', pp. 111–37) which entails the most wide-ranging consequences with respect to general history (in a conventional sense). He makes clear that there can be no compromise solution in view of the two conflicting interpretations of the Augustan census figures. They mean either the whole citizen population of both sexes and every age (thus Beloch, followed by Brunt) or only the adult males (thus Tenney Frank); the decision between these alternatives has major consequence for the issues of the development of Italian population numbers, the ratio between citizens and slaves, the distribution of population between cities and countryside, and the burden military service would have imposed on the citizenry. The point at stake is primarily a question of philological–historical method, and in Lo Cascio's view the only possible interpretation of the evidence of how census figures were taken leads to Frank's solution. Thus, looking for comparative materials would be unnecessary, but Lo Cascio argues that Beloch's version can also be shown as highly improbable by contrast with the ratios between men under arms and the total population known from societies in early modern Europe. He then suggests that the Republican census figures were far too low, especially as there would have been too few people left to produce food for the army.

A quite different approach is offered by Bruce Frier, who starts his piece ('More is Worse: Some Observations on the Population of the Roman Empire', pp. 139–59) with professing agnosticism about actual population figures or even assumptions on their increase or decline. He wants only to offer a model that should be considered at least as one possible construction to explain the development in the early Empire. It turns out to be a sort of neo-Malthusian scheme of a 'population trap, in which the rate of growth of population exceeds the growth of real income' (p. 159), with the consequence that high fertility rates would be compensated by high mortality rates. The possibility of such a constellation is inferred from the experience of France and China in the early modern period. Frier makes it sufficiently clear that data are missing which would allow the unequivocal postulation of a similar pattern for the early Roman Empire.

As for ancient evidence, Roman Egypt is extraordinarily fecund, but even here 'the

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nature of the available material almost guarantees that no clear picture of demographic developments will emerge', as Richard Alston ('Urban Population in Late Roman Egypt and the End of the Ancient World', pp. 161–204 at p. 181) puts it. Alston traces the change of settlement patterns from the fourth to the seventh century, and is confident that one can rule out the spread of the plague (the effect of which even in late medieval and early modern Europe has to be qualified) and the impact of Arabian invasions as factors of considerable weight. The decline of cities and the growth of new villages should instead be primarily ascribed to changes in the overall societal structures (especially due to the rôle of the church), which implied a reversal in the relationship between city and countryside.

The volume succeeds in providing insights in the methodological problems of Roman demography which has shown a remarkable growth rate in recent times, as is also indicated by the long bibliography (pp. 205–35). There is, however, a gap between S.'s intention to map the discipline and the specialized approach of the other papers. Sceptics may still doubt whether the investment in the construction of sophisticated models will eventually pay.

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## THE ROMAN ECONOMY

H.-J. Drexhage, H. Konen, K. Ruffing: *Die Wirtschaft des römischen Reiches (1.–3. Jahrhundert). Eine Einführung.* Pp. 400. Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 2002. Paper, €34.80. ISBN: 3-05-003430-0.

This collaborative volume takes a fresh look at the Roman imperial economy. The authors tell us up front what they are aiming for—to do justice to the varied nature of the evidence and introduce the reader to the fruits of modern research (pp. 11, 21)—and what they seek to avoid—to take sides in the 'primitivist'/'modernist' debate, or present a new theoretical outline of the character of the Roman economy (p. 21). In keeping with these premises, they promise a series of 'statements' that draw on all available types of ancient source material but will not be linked to any particular model (p. 21): after all, 'theories and theorems' regarding the ancient economy are known to 'collide with many sources' (p. 11), and models may occasionally 'take on a life of their own' (p. 144). Targeting an audience of students, high-school teachers, and academics in other disciplines, the volume unquestionably succeeds in its stated goals: there is no shortage of facts; the narrative section (pp. 17–201) is closely tied together with a well-balanced collection of ninety-eight carefully chosen texts in translation that are accompanied by individual commentaries (pp. 203–310; about one-third each from literary and epigraphic sources, one-quarter from papyri, plus some archaeological specimens); and no Frankenstein model of the imperial economy threatens to take on a live of its own. As a result, this book both closely resembles M. M. Austin and P. Vidal-Naquet's classic *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece* (Berkeley, 1977) in its judicious interweaving of ancient sources and modern exposition, and differs sharply in its avowedly 'neutral' stance.

Two problems deserve notice. While the authors cannot be faulted for selective

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