AGRARIAN ECONOMY

U. FELLMETH: *'Eine wohlhabende Stadt sei nahe . . .' Die Standortfaktoren in der römischen Agrarökonomie im Zusammenhang mit den Verkehrs- und Raumordnungsstrukturen im römischen Italien*. Pp. iv + 242, maps, ills. St Katharinen: Scripta Mercaturae Verlag, 2002. Paper, €19.50. ISBN: 3-89590-127-X.

The aim of this book is to explore the relevance of modern theories concerning the spatial distribution of economic activities to developments in Italian agriculture during the late Republic and early Empire. The foundation for this enterprise is laid in Chapter 1, where Fellmeth scrutinizes the writings of Cato, Varro, and Columella, and detects evidence for an acute awareness of the importance of location factors (*Standortfaktoren*) in determining a farm's profitability. Thus the Roman agronomists are unanimous that slave-staffed *villae* for the cultivation of grapes and olives cannot be made to yield a substantial profit unless they are situated near a sizeable town (Cato, *Agr*. 1.1.3: *oppidum validum*) or close to the sea or a navigable river. In line with this finding the author goes on to identify Von Thünen's theory that the viability of various types of market-orientated agricultural production is determined largely by the cost of transportation (and hence by distance from the market) as an important key to the spatial structure of agricultural production in the countryside of Roman Italy (Chapter 2). In themselves, these are valuable observations. They will not, however, come as a surprise to those who have read P. W. de Neeve's *Peasants in Peril* (Amsterdam, 1984) or N. Morley's *Metropolis and Hinterland* (Cambridge, 1996), of which only the former appears in F.'s bibliography. As a result, the reader is left with the impression that the first two chapters do not move beyond a position already reached in the existing literature. Similarly, F.'s analysis of the early-Imperial *indices nundinarii* fails to take into account most of the recent literature, including several important contributions in E. Lo Cascio (ed.), *Mercati permanenti e mercati periodici* (Bari, 2000).

The third chapter is devoted to a discussion of the maximum distances over which various cash crops could be transported. Not surprisingly, the author subscribes to the view that only those landowners who had easy access to seaborne or riverine transport were able to sell the produce of their farms in distant markets. In calculating the economic horizon of land-locked farms, however, F. starts from the premise that the annual rate of return on capital in Italian agriculture (which is generally put at five or six per cent) refers to net profits before the transportation and marketing stage. This reading of the ancient evidence cannot possibly be correct, if only because it implies an absurdly low level of profitability in commercial agricultural production. Furthermore, Columella's comparison between the rates of return achieved or achievable in agriculture and in money-lending (noted by F., p. 46) makes no sense if the former rates do not cover the costs of moving cash crops to the market.

Finally, the author proceeds to calculate the maximum size of an Italian town with a territory of *c*. 700 km^2. Starting from the assumption that about twenty per cent of the population lived in town, he demonstrates that many Italian cities must have numbered between 2,000 and 5,000 inhabitants (p. 123), which is far less than the usual estimate for Pompeii (e.g. W. Jongman, *The Economy and Society of Pompeii* [Amsterdam, 1988], p. 111: between 8,000 and 10,000). Although some of the assumptions underlying this calculation may be open to challenge, there can be little doubt that this is the most valuable part of F.'s book. Unfortunately, however, the

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author goes on to spoil this interesting finding by arguing that the entire urban population of early-Imperial Italy was fed with cheap grain imported from the provinces. Moreover, he pledges his adherence to the old view that Italian viticulture was wiped out by provincial competition during the second century A.D. without taking any account of the decisive counterarguments developed in A. Tchernia's *Le vin de l'Italie romaine* (Rome, 1986) and in many other publications.

All in all, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that the book under review is of limited value to those who are interested in the economic history of late-Republican and early-Imperial Italy.

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ECONOMIC *AMICITIA*

K. VERBOVEN: *The Economy of Friends. Economic Aspects of* Amicitia *and Patronage in the Late Republic.* (Collection Latomus 269.) Pp. 399. Brussels: Éditions Latomus, 2002. Paper, €54. ISBN: 2-87031-210-5.

In recent years, scholars have increasingly paid attention to the ways in which concerns, which we would tend to characterize as social, played significant rôles in Roman politics and law. Now, Koenraad Verboven offers up a splendid study of the interrelationships between the two most important social mechanisms engaged by the aristocracy, and the economic world of the late Republic (also the early Empire). V. is perfectly clear, in his preface and introduction, regarding boundaries. The book aims to examine the ways in which friendship and patronage shaped 'the allocation and circulation of scarce resources, and the organization of economic activities and strategies' (p. 10). In order to get at these matters, V. concentrates first on three specific techniques for the giving and getting of those scarce resources, namely, gift exchange, loans, and legacies. Next, he examines various methods of managing such resources, once they were in hand. Here, the book takes up relationships of agency (looking at *mandatarii* and *procuratores*), partners in business (*socii*), and the employment of personal contacts to accomplish economic goals (by means of *commendationes*). V. realizes full well that his chosen approach causes him to disregard various other important and interesting matters, e.g. the ways in which *amicitia* might have influenced prices, or the effects of patronage on the awarding of public contracts. V. is also fully conscious of the fact that he is dealing throughout with the concerns of a small élite; but, as he says, the people who populate the pages of his book were precisely those who dominated the economic life of the Roman world. And finally, V. is very careful to set the stage for the whole book by carefully discussing the distinctions between emotional friendship, instrumental friendship, and patronage. In doing this, V. makes real and significant use of (esp.) sociological work in these areas.

The result of this all is a book that is extremely well focused on its particular goals, and which is always conscious of (i) the limitations imposed by the nature of our evidence, but (ii) the possibilities opened up via theoretical or comparative methods. In

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