

CLA 545: Problems in Roman History: Economies of Empire

Instructor: Brent Shaw
Term: Fall Term 2004
Place: East Pyne 161
Time: Thursday: 1:30-4:20 PM

Rather than answers and discrete facts worth knowing, this seminar will deliver one big problem and a number of vexatious questions. The problem will be an attempt to understand the nature of 'the economy' (if such even existed) in the period of the high Roman empire and to understand the nature of economic transactions (production, consumption, distribution) in this same period. Since there is considerable dispute about how these fundamental matters are to be conceptualized, this will be no easy task. The instructor will try to lay some basic groundwork: the nature of the debates over the ancient economy to the mid-twentieth century, from Weber to Rostovtzeff. He will then consider the different model offered by Sir Moses Finley, replies by his critics, and innovations from amongst his own students, most notably Keith Hopkins. The survey will also include models suggested by the Marxist tradition, including, in the Anglo-Marxist tradition, those of Geoffrey de Ste. Croix. He will also attempt to outline those developed by the Italo-Marxists and scholars in that tradition, amongst them, in recent decades, Andrea Carandini and Aldo Schiavone. Finally, the innovative vision of Mediterranean communications that has been presented by Nicholas Purcell and Peregrine Horden will be outlined as offering another different route of analysis.

Out of all of this we shall then try to forge an estimate of what kinds of factors, variables, parameters, hypothetical constraints, and problems should form the basis of our inquiries. We shall then settle on a series of case studies that will investigate the production, consumption, and distribution of goods and services in the Roman world.

From this point onwards we shall venture into unknown terrain. Our procedure will require each seminar member to select a particular facet of the economic relationships of the time on which to work, and on which he or she will report to the seminar in terms of: (a) the quality of work that has already been done, for example, on an 'industry' like brick production in central Italy; (b) the types of debates that have already configured this area of scholarly investigation; and (c) how what can be determined about this specific case (e.g. brick production) confirms or refutes the various hypotheses and theories that have been proffered about the economic relationships of the time.

Weighting of the final assessment (grades) will be equally divided amongst the two or three elements of the seminar: first, participation in the readings and in the discussions that will be central to the seminar's proceedings; second, the presentation of a set topic of investigation to the seminar; and, finally, for those who wish a letter grade, the collation of the results of your investigations in a final research paper.

Textbooks:

Jean Andreau, Banking and Business in the Roman World, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999

M. I. Finley, The Ancient Economy, rev. ed. with introduction by Ian Morris, Berkeley – Los Angeles, University of California Press, 1999

Peregrine Horden & Nicholas Purcell, The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History, Oxford, Blackwell, 2000

Neville Morley, Metropolis and Hinterland: the City of Rome and the Italian Economy, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2002

Aldo Schiavone, The End of the Past: Ancient Rome and the Modern West, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press, 2002

Needless to say, these textbooks only scratch the surface of important studies and analyses that are relevant to the questions that we are asking. Singularly absent is any good overview of the agricultural economy of the Roman period (I could not discover a single good affordable introduction). Two of the books, the Finley and the Horden/Purcell, embody the results of the many of the debates and the fundamental questions that we shall have to ask, and they represent reasonably good points-of-departure for inquiry. Other, more detailed references will be presented to the seminar in the course of lectures and the individual presentations.

Seminar Presentations

In making the seminar presentations, the following steps should be taken — in what manner, and containing what precise elements will depend on the type of data and the particular case-study that you are analyzing. Try to bear in mind, as much as possible, the constraints of time.

1. All members of the seminar should prepare to handout to each member of the seminar a photocopy of one or two articles (or book chapters) that they regard as either being a good introduction to the problems that they are proposing to analyze, or that represent particularly good case studies of the evidence. THESE HANDOUTS ARE TO BE DISTRIBUTED NO LATER THAN THE SESSION IN THE WEEK BEFORE YOU ARE SCHEDULED TO PRESENT. Since we shall be reading for at least two presentations each week, please make the article or chapter selections ones of reasonable length in order to make it reasonably likely that the handouts will actually be read.

2. In the presentation itself, you should try not just to discuss the details of your particular case, but also attempt to do two other things: first to introduce your materials—attempt to put them in perspective. Place the evidence in temporal and regional context and introduce the seminar to some of the general problems of interpretation. Second, even at this early point, attempt to discuss some of the problems of connecting this evidence to the hypothetical models/theories of the 'ancient economy' outlined in the introduction to the seminar
3. PLEASE bear in mind the factor of time. If two presentations are being made, each individual one should cover no more than 40 minutes or so, so as to allow some reasoned discussion of evidence and interpretation.
4. Be ready to be open to constant interruption by way of questioning even in the course of your interpretation. Many of these questions might be for matters of clarification or additional factual materials. You might well not be able to answer them all (which is perfectly fine), but you should be prepared to face queries and objections in medias res.
5. For those who are contemplating a final grade, your presentation must be redacted into the form of a final written term paper. This paper should attempt to advance beyond the seminar presentation by taking into consideration, where possible, the matters raised in discussion and debate in the seminar itself.

Research Subjects for Seminar Presentations

Make a selection from one of the following suggested subject areas on which to work and on which you will make a presentation to the seminar. Following your selection, you will be presented with a basic starter bibliography on the subject. The following specific areas for research are ranked in order, with some of the better-documented specific subjects listed first. It would be preferable for the seminar to deal with these first before attempting the less-well documented and more problematic cases that raise more difficult questions of theory and definition.

- 1) The argument over economic rationality (Kehoe/Rathbone)
- 2) The debate over the ancient city: consumer or producer?
- 3) Monetization and the nature of the Roman economy
- 4) Wine: production and distribution [Italy]
- 5) Olive oil and its distribution [Spain and North Africa] (one of two possible case studies)
- 6) Fine ceramics: their production and distribution [Arretine wares or ARS wares] (one of two possible case studies)
- 7) Brick production [Rome and central Italy]
- 8) Lamp production and distribution
- 9) Textiles and woollens: cloth production and sale

- 10) The debate over élite involvement in trade and commerce
- 11) Technology, technical innovation, and economic development (a specific case study: e.g. use of water power in mills and wheels)
- 12) The problem of the financier: Cicero and Atticus
- 13) The state and economy: governmental impact on economic development
- 14) Pliny the Younger: finances of Roman senator
- 15) Slavery: the slave trade
- 16) Agriculture: the case of the agricultural handbook (Varro or Columella)
- 17) Agriculture: the case of the imperial latifundia
- 18) Cereal grains as a mass subsistence commodity
- 19) The problem of banking and the nature of credit
- 20) What can be known about the economics of shipping? (or, a comparable area of transport of goods)
- 21) Law and commercial transactions
- 22) Property development: urban properties: investment, sale and lease
- 23) Craft production in urban contexts (the explication of a specific case: e.g. glasswares)
- 24) [A specific case of interest to you: anything from roof tiles to silk is possible]

Proposed Seminar Schedule

<u>Session</u>	<u>Topic/s</u>
9 Sept.:	Introduction
16 Sept.:	Beginnings/K. Marx/M. Weber
23 Sept.:	K. Rodbertus/K. Bücher/E. Meyer/M.I. Rostovtzeff
30 Sept.:	K. Polanyi to M.I. Finley/K. Hopkins
7 Oct. :	Post-Finleyan models: Italo/Franco Marxisms/P. Veyne
14 Oct.:	Ecological/developmental models: P. Horden & N. Purcell/E. Jones/D. Landes and others
	[NB: this session will probably have to be cancelled and the remaining sessions to be moved forward accordingly]
21 Oct.:	FALL RECESS
28 Oct.:	Seminar Presentations 1 & 2
4 Nov.:	Seminar Presentations 3 & 4
11 Nov.:	Seminar Presentations 5 & 6
18 Nov.:	Seminar Presentations 7 & 8
25 Nov.:	THANKSGIVING
2 Nov.:	Seminar Presentations 9 & 10
9 Dec.:	Concluding discussion