to its intended wide readership. The choice of material and the discussion of themes are well suited to the needs of students of classics or archaeology and offer insights for experts in neighbouring fields as well, while the text is clear and accessible even to laymen interested in the topic.

*Ulla Laitakari*

*Poverty in the Roman World.* Edited by MARGARET ATKINS and ROBIN OSBORNE. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006. ISBN 0-521-86211-6. XIII, 226 pp. GBP 50.

The origins of this collection by Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne lie in a conference given in honour of Peter Garnsey in 2003, and the authors contributing to the volume are all former pupils of his. The papers published in the volume are reworked versions of the papers given at the conference.

The ten contributions (excluding the introduction) of the book can be roughly divided in two categories: the historico-archaeologically oriented, which feature approaches and questions already familiar to classical scholars; and the theologico-historically oriented, where the sources used are mostly early Church Fathers, and the questions pertain more to Christianity. Both categories have important bearing on the question of poverty.

In his introduction ("Introduction: Roman poverty in context") Robin Osborne reminds us that "poverty" in the Roman sense was a relative concept, not an absolute one. This is in strong contrast to our current concept of poverty as an absolute state. In the ancient world, poverty was more the lack of something than only having very little. As a consequence, the social category of "poor" was not well defined, and it could signify persons who in our view were relatively well-to-do – they were poor only relatively, because they did not have enough of something. This point of Osborne's summarises well a recurrent theme in the articles.

Neville Morley in his paper ("The poor in the city of Rome") tackles especially the contrast between our modern conception of poverty and the meaning of the corresponding Roman concept. His analysis of poverty in the economic writings of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries shows how the concept of "poverty" was formulated then, and how the "common sense" meaning of the word we share actually derives from these discussions. Morley uses the triad of "vulnerability", "exclusion" and "shame" to try to find and position the poor in Roman society, and through these, proposes a basic idea of how the history of poverty in Rome might be written.

Walter Scheidel proposes a very different approach to the question in his chapter ("Stratification, deprivation and quality of life"). He looks at poverty with two different concepts: asset and income distribution in the society, and quality of life. Scheidel wants to be able to compare Rome to other historical societies, and he proposes these two measures for that purpose. Based on the evidence of land ownership, he challenges the common binary division of Roman society into haves and have-nots, and suggests that the scale of property and resources might actually be much more nuanced; the problem lies in our uncritical acceptance of the division *honestiores*/*humiliores* as the basic structuring principle for that society. He convincingly argues that the sizes of the propertied classes could have been much larger than is usually assumed, and that this would lead to the existence of a "solid middle-class". In the "quality of life" approach Scheidel shows how difficult it is to relate GDP to the overall quality

of life; he then proposes other schemes to assess the quality of life, but in this case, does not take the analysis further.

Anneliese Parkin ("'You do him no service': an exploration of pagan almsgiving") very interestingly shows how the meanings given to almsgiving actually might promote its practice. Her starting point is an analysis of Stoic "giving", where Cicero and Seneca are shown to write in the language of patronage when writing about giving. The recipients of their gifts were not worthless beggars, but worthy poor, who could be assumed to be thankful and be able to give something in return. Still, the beggars were to be given alms, although without pity, as pity was a weakness of the soul – many Romans tended to disagree with this, though, and pity was also considered a virtue. Parkin's paper then presents some of the strategies exercised by the beggars to ensure alms and shows how they profitably used the images of filthiness associated with beggars.

Greg Woolf in his chapter ("Writing poverty in Rome") explores the literary use of the word "poor", especially in Seneca's *Controversiae* and the epigrams of Martial. Seneca seems to apply "poverty" to the moral analysis by distancing the reader from his well-to-do position by putting him in the position of an impoverished individual; Martial, on the other hand, alienates himself with poverty, and presents himself as a poor, humble poet, perhaps for purposes of entertainment. Woolf's analysis shows the varied uses of the concept, and the distance the authors and their readers actually had from real "poverty".

The question of "real poverty" is aptly addressed by Dominic Rathbone in his paper on Roman Egypt ("Poverty and population in Roman Egypt"). He comes to the shocking conclusion that it is very difficult to find any large numbers of really poor people in Egypt. He argues that in the documentary material, poverty is used as a topos, and in many cases it remains on that level; even with careful reading of the sources Rathbone has had to come to the conclusion that he cannot find hordes of destitute beggars – not even in the last years of Byzantine Egypt.

Sophie Lunn-Rockliffe's paper ("A pragmatic approach to poverty and riches: Ambrosiaster's *quaestio* 124") moves us to the second part of the collection, with the emphasis on Christian sources and late antiquity. She situates Ambrosiaster's discussions of poverty in the wider context of his time, when the Church fathers were defining the position of the Church to the idea of absolute poverty easily deduced from the Bible. She presents Ambrosiaster's view as a synthesis of the most extreme notions on the subject, and finds his originality in his emphasis, how each man should be judged according to relevant standards, so that where a poor man might commit a minor sin, the same act by a rich man would be a grave sin, and *vice versa*. This she sees to reflect the problems the Church fathers had in trying to make Christianity more acceptable to the old Roman values – an outright denial of property would not generate positive reactions in some of the audience.

Richard Finn, O.P., follows a similar theme in his article ("Portraying the poor: descriptions of poverty in Christian texts from the late Roman empire") in analysing the figure of the "poor" in the sermons of Augustine and two saints' lives. Here he comes to similar conclusions as Lunn-Rockliffe in the sense that the texts do not emphasise the characteristics of the individual poor in order not to make their destitution too obvious and visible.

The difficulties of integrating the poor and the needy to the social reality of unequal distribution of property without antagonising anyone are apparent also in Lucy Grig's paper ("Throwing parties for the poor: poverty and splendour in the late antique church."). Through

a detailed study of two different parties given to poor people Grig is able to demonstrate how different attitudes towards the poor could be in the writings.

One might question, however, whether these images of the poor in the texts really depict the reality or not, especially because of the strong ideological position of poverty in Christianity. These three papers share the same limitation, which is also their strength: the argumentation stays inevitably within the Christian tradition, and while the articles illuminate the Christian way of thinking about and with the poor, they do not tell much about the other sectors of society.

A different approach is adopted by Cam Grey in his article ("Salvian, the ideal Christian community and the fate of the poor in fifth-century Gaul"). His examination of Salvian's ideal Christian community and its contrast with his presentation of the poor brings the reader to an appraisal of the new logic regulating the relations between the rich and the poor. According to Grey, the traditional values defining the relations between social classes were replaced by a "market-place logic", and bases this on Salvian's recurrent usage of commercial terminology in describing these relations.

Partly in the same vein, Caroline Humfress's article ("Poverty and Roman law") analyses the disputes regarding the legal position of the "poor" and whether it was to be interpreted as similar to the "low and degraded". She does not come to any definite conclusion, but it seems apparent that the attitudes towards the poor were changing. With many examples Humfress shows how in many cases poverty became secondary to the fact of whether one was born free or not, when it came to defining social position.

This collection brings out very clearly that the poor had a very different position in the Christian way of thinking that had been the case in the "pagan" Rome. Most of the authors acknowledge this difference, and what emerges from these papers is two very different images of poverty: one of destitution and endemic beggary from the Christian writings, and one of relative affluency from the pagan sources, documents and archaeological material. The question remains, whether the increased visibility of the poor is a result of a changing mentality with the introduction of Christian ethics, or whether it reflects a real change for worse in the living conditions over time. Although Rathbone's results do have some implications also for late Antiquity, otherwise this question still remains open.

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SUZANNE DIXON: *Cornelia, Mother of the Gracchi*. Routledge, London – New York 2007. ISBN 978-0-415-33148-7 (pb). 95 pp. GBP 18.99.

L'opuscolo di Dixon s'inserisce nella collana "Women of the Ancient World", che mira a presentare biografie concise di alcune figure femminili del mondo antico. Benché tutte le donne scelte come oggetto di studio (Olimpiade, madre di Alessandro Magno; Giulia, figlia di Augusto; Giulia Domna, l'imperatrice) siano personaggi notissimi, le loro vite hanno sicuramente meritato di essere studiate da esperti in grado di contestualizzarle alla luce di nuove scoperte e con bibliografie aggiornate. Il presente libro è una bella introduzione alla straordinaria figura di Cornelia, nota successivamente come "madre dei Gracchi". Dixon offre un'affascinante visione della fama e dell'afterlife di Cornelia nel turbulento periodo tardorepubblicano e più tardi (fino