

FRANCESCO GRELLE: *Diritto e società nel mondo romano*. A cura di L. FANIZZA. Saggi di storia antica 26. "L'Erma" di Bretschneider, Roma 2005. ISBN 88-8265-324-2. XVI, 561 pp. EUR 290.

Salutiamo con grande piacere questa raccolta di alcuni scritti di Francesco Grelle, il noto romanista barese. Nella produzione di Grelle, particolarmente coinvolgente e produttiva appare la sua ricostruzione della "storia locale" relativa ad ambiti storicamente significativi, per quanto delimitati, in nulla diversa dalla "grande storia", pur con le sue peculiarità; questi ambiti territoriali sono gravidi di nuove informazioni che solo l'anatomia del territorio può rilevare. In questo ambito un ruolo particolare rivestono proprio i suoi numerosi studi su Canosa romana, poi raccolti in un volume nel 1993. E' stato ispiratore del progetto di creazione del corpus delle epigrafi romane di Canosa, raccolte e commentate in due volumi (Bari 1985 e 1990). E non mancano altri studi su Canosa, alcuni dei quali ripresi nella presente collana. In Francesco Grelle si deve sottolineare una simbiosi di giurista e storico. Attenzione alle fonti unite con una visione larga dei vari problemi che il mondo offre. Tutto sommato, si tratta di una lettura stimolante, raccomandabile a tutti coloro che vogliono approfondirsi nella storia romana.

*Heikki Solin*

PAUL ERDKAMP: *The Grain Market in the Roman Empire*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge – New York 2009. ISBN 978-0-521-83878-8 (hb), 978-0-521-11783-8 (pb). XIV, 364 pp. GBP 62, USD 111 (hb), GBP 21.99, USD 39.99 (pb).

Once upon a time a professor of economic history told me that, in books on economic history, the text is quite superfluous. The crux of the argument should be found and the majority of the effort of the author should be directed to the tables and graphs. The main difference between quantitative and qualitative research is that the first exposes the truth through a scientific method, while the latter is just a collection of opinions from people, be they ancient or modern observers. Because people are frequently unreliable and their observations subjective, the text that is based on them suffers from the same defects. Quantifiable information, analyzed with scientific statistical analysis, would offer an unbiased view that transcends the limitations of human observers. Good economic history would thus reveal not what the contemporaries thought but what actually took place.

Paul Erdkamp, a noted scholar of Roman military history, has written a book on Roman economic history which does not have a single table, graph or other tool of statistical analysis. As is evident to every student of Roman history, the topic is of utmost importance. The Roman Empire was in essence consisted, in addition to the countryside, of a number of large cities, and the organization of food supply to those cities was the prerequisite of the very existence of the empire. The size of the cities, with Rome in a class by itself, was far too large to be supported by their immediate hinterland which is why an elaborate grain market existed to supply them with grain from areas with large surplus production such as North Africa, Egypt and the Black Sea. The aim of the book is to examine the functioning of the grain market, the mechanisms with which, to take a famous example grain from Egypt, was acquired, transported and delivered to the Roman plebs. Because of its general importance, the grain market was heav-

ily regulated and, to use an anachronistic expression, there was very little in the way of a free market. To continue on the Egyptian example, much of the grain was acquired through the levying of the grain tax, which was roughly 10 % on private property and between 30–40% on public lands. In addition to the grain tax, grain was also bought, but even here the government regulated the price of grain and authorized acquisitions. Thus if a city wished to buy grain, it had to first get permission to do so.

Because of the political and social dimensions, the grain market was not purely a matter of economics, if such a thing even exists outside the imaginations of economists. Thus Erdkamp's approach is valid from a perspective of general significance. The second point validating this approach is the lack of consistent data for the making of statistical analyses, consider, for example, the patchy information from which scholars have attempted to deduce the fluctuations of grain prices.

The book is divided into six main chapters which follow the natural course of the food stuffs, beginning from the producer and ending up in the urban markets, from the small-scale local production to the long-distance mass transportation. Erdkamp considers food production issues from land tenancy to crop yield, small scale farming and its dynamics, the relationship of the peasants to merchants and the contracts with which the grain was sold. The great regional variations in crop yields and yearly price-cycles made the market incredibly volatile, offering both possibilities of serious market failures to the extent of famines as well as making huge profits with the well-timed storage and sale of grain. Because of the economic, social and eventually political disturbances this produced, there were constant efforts by the Roman regional and state officials to control the market by storing grain and imposing prices.

On the whole, the book is a carefully researched and judicious attempt at a holistic approach to the important and complex issue of the grain supply in the Roman Empire. While it offers a good survey of the various methods of grain supply and their respective issues and attempts to solve them, the respective parts are at times not interlinked and do not lead to an overarching synthesis. Caution is a virtue, of course, but in this case it is debatable whether the limitations of contemporary observers are really transcended. Nevertheless, the book is essential reading for every student of Roman history and hopefully will lead to further studies in this vital and relatively understudied field.

*Kaius Tuori*

*Est enim ille flos Italiae... Vita economica e sociale nella Cisalpina romana. Atti delle Giornate di studi in onore di Ezio Buchi, Verona 30 novembre – 1 dicembre 2006. A cura di PATRIZIA BASSO – ALFREDO BUONOPANE – ALBERTO CAVARZERE – STEFANIA PESAVENTO MATTIOLI. Qui Edit, Verona 2008. ISBN 978-88-89480-51-9. 617 pp. EUR 30.*

Ecco il volume in onore del noto storico romano di Verona Ezio Buchi, un vero monumento alla sua attività e al suo insegnamento. Una buona parte degli autori sono suoi allievi o comunque colleghi. La grande varietà e l'alto numero dei contributi rende impossibile un loro apprezzamento più approfondito nel breve spazio concessomi dalla redazione di Arctos. Molti di essi sono di grande interesse e importanza, altri però meno – un comune tratto di opere di questo genere.