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Slave Systems, Ancient and Modern

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Broadly speaking, Clark's thesis is neither new nor controversial. Scholars such as Crosby, Jacob, Landes, and Mokyr have previously arrived at similar conclusions, each with his own special emphasis.¹ The controversial element in Clark's argument is an evolutionary twist. Specifically, he argues that the principal mechanism underlying the spread of middle-class virtues was the strong relationship between wealth and reproductive success in England, which allowed the genes and inherited attitudes of the economically successful to constitute an ever-increasing proportion of the population. The argument is similar to that of the theorists Galor and Moav, who focused not on middle-class values but on attitudes toward child rearing and education.²

Clark supports this Darwinian explanation with compelling evidence that correlates wealth and reproductive success. He shows no evidence, however, that the children of the rich in the settled agrarian society of eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century England carried the genes and attitudes that were needed to enact the greatest economic transformation that the world has known. The early ancestors of the landed aristocracy had become wealthy not by virtue of their middle-class values but by virtue of their military prowess and capacity for violence, and their descendants had become wealthy by birth.

Despite the importance that Clark seems to place on a debatable evolutionary argument, his central thesis, which he argues convincingly with well-chosen evidence, does not depend critically on it. The notion that the Industrial Revolution depended on culture remains compelling even without a definitive explanation for the evolution of culture. Overall, Clark has provided a sensible and readable account of important frontier research in economic history.

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Slave Systems, Ancient and Modern. By Enrico Dal Lago and Constantina Katsari (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2008) 375 pp. \$99.00

The editors' summary of the issues and chapters in this book adopts an interdisciplinary approach and discusses a wide variety of authors, but it omits one important discipline, economics. A few of the chapters, particularly those by Stanley Engerman and Walter Scheidel, compensate for this omission to some extent, but the book as a whole reveals a common limitation of interdisciplinary history.

1 Alfred W. Crosby, *Ecological Imperialism: The Biological Expansion of Europe, 900–1900* (New York, 1987); Margaret Jacob, *Scientific Culture and the Making of the Industrial West* (New York, 1987); David Landes, *The Wealth and Poverty of Nations* (New York, 1998); Joel Mokyr, *The British Industrial Revolution* (Boulder, 1993).

2 Oded Galor and Omer Moav, "Natural Selection and the Origin of Economic Growth," *Quarterly Journal of Economics*, CXVII (2002), 1133–1192.

The scholars in this volume are well-known historians of both the ancient and modern worlds, but the book seems to emphasize apparent differences between ancient and modern slavery. For all of the detailed distinctions made between various ancient societies and various modern tribes and countries, slavery in any particular era seems remarkably homogeneous compared to its change over time. It is a pity that the books by Steinfeld were not known to these authors.¹ He widens the concept of slavery to analyze various forms of bound labor. Only Stephen Hodgkinson breaks down the dichotomous view of the other essays and discusses Spartan helots in the context of “diverse examples of servile exploitation (290).”

Orlando Patterson, a student of modern slavery whose earlier work is cited in most of these essays, opens the volume with a statistical analysis of slavery in primitive, largely nonliterate societies. He represents the difference between them as an equilibrium position dictated by the sex ratio and other aspects of the societies. Joseph C. Miller, another modern historian, discusses slavery as a dynamic process, assuming that slave systems were not in equilibrium but rather waxing and waning as historical conditions changed. Appearing in separate essays, this fundamental question of how to regard slave systems is not confronted directly.

Scheidel uses economic models from Fenoaltea and Temin, who started the discussion with simple models that illuminated one or another aspect of slavery, to analyze ancient slavery, but he argues for a more nuanced view than either of these authors.² Scheidel’s synthetic approach tries to combine a variety of insights into a single schema. Tracey Rihil offers a detailed look at Roman baking, discussing the interaction of slavery and technical change: “I believe that mass urban supplies of grain [in Rome] encouraged mechanization of its processing and the mass production of bread. . . . Slavery was perhaps the main agent of technology transfer and innovation in any society in which physical mobility amongst the free was unusual” (141, 147). Michael Zeuske follows with a description of early modern Atlantic slavery largely through the eyes of a nineteenth-century observer.

Two essays examine the ideology of slave holding. The volume’s editors contribute a chapter analyzing mostly ancient manuals for slave owners, and Rafael de Bevar Marquese and Fábio Duarte Joly look mostly at modern writing. The common theme is that because slaves were expensive property, they needed to be maintained and fed well. Two essays examine exits from slavery, Olivier Pétré-Grenouilleau focusing on individuals and Engerman on the emancipation of groups. It

1 Robert J. Steinfeld, *The Invention of Free Labor: The Employment Relation in English and American Law and Culture, 1350–1879* (Chapel Hill, 1991); *idem*, *Coercion, Contract and Free Labor in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 2001).

2 Stefano Fenoaltea, “Slavery and Supervision in Comparative Perspective: A Model,” *Journal of Economic History*, LXIV (1984), 635–668; Temin, “The Labor Market of the Early Roman Empire,” *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, XXXIV(2004), 5, 13–38.

appears that slaves everywhere had to pay for their freedom, whether individually by purchase or collectively by paying taxes to reimburse their former owners for the loss of slave property. Hodkinson's analysis of Spartan helots, which closes the volume, returns to the intent of the volume by recognizing the variety of instances throughout history in which workers have been at a severe disadvantage in bargaining with their masters and employers.

This volume will interest students of slavery in both the ancient and modern world, although the chapters offer less insight about the differences between ancient and modern slavery than might be hoped. The chapters by Hodkinson and Scheidel are the standouts.

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The Fall of the Roman Household. By Kate Cooper (New York, Cambridge University Press, 2007) 319 pp. \$ 99.00

The theme of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire, after a long eclipse, recently has returned to the forefront in the study of late antiquity.¹ In her new book, however, Cooper does not take sides with the partisans of the decline view. Her title seems to be a reference to Gibbon's theory that the fall of the Roman Empire was due in large part to Christianity and to the ascetic ideal that ruined the Roman household—the predilection of Roman youth for “the penance of the monastic life.”² Cooper challenges this view, which, curiously, has not been fully revisited until now. Her book is about the late Roman household in the western, Latin-speaking part of the Empire, from the reign of Honorius (395–425) to that of Theodoric the Great (493–526), a crucial period of change that saw emerging independent kingdoms replace the Roman Empire as the administrative unit of the western territories.

Her main documents are little-known texts—Latin conduct manuals and letters written in the fifth and sixth century. Although the names of the authors and addressees cannot be established in most cases, Cooper finds enough textual clues to date the documents and to identify their authors as clerics (by their pastoral concerns) and their audience as aristocratic laypersons, especially women. An English translation of one of these texts, the *Ad Gregoriam in palatio*, is included as an appendix.

In the ideal Christian household that these texts promote, wives are depicted as mistresses of slaves with all of the attendant obligations. With hindsight gained from the historiography of nineteenth-century planta-

1 See John Hugo Wolfgang Gideon Liebeschuetz, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman City* (New York, 2001); Bryan Ward-Perkins, *The Fall of Rome and the End of Civilization* (New York, 2005); Peter Heather, *The Fall of the Roman Empire: A New History of Rome and the Barbarians* (New York, 2006).

2 Edward Gibbon, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (London, 1776).