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Gonzales, Antonio and Ennio Biondi (ed.). *Revisiter l'esclavage: d'hier à aujourd'hui*. Besançon: Presses Universitaires de Franche-Comté 2019. 216 p. €20,00 (pb). ISBN 9782848676579.

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This edited volume contains twelve contributions (nine in French, three in Italian) on slavery in different time periods. The book abstract stresses the aim of ‘taking stock of what we know about slavery at a time when 40 million individuals find themselves in a condition of slavery worldwide’. Although the focus of the volume is clearly set on Graeco-Roman slavery, many studies contrast it with the slave trade and US slavery, or even contemporary slavery, which yields fruitful ways of thinking about ancient slavery.

The scope of the individual contributions varies considerably. Framed by two conceptually oriented chapters by Gonzales and Annequin that take a holistic approach, studies are either comparative (Nuño, Grenouilleau, Plácido Suárez), focus on classical antiquity (Reduzzi, Mazza, Gattinoni, Porciani, Biondi), or discuss more recent contexts of slavery (Jamet, Spagnoli). Themes addressed range from public slavery in ancient Greece (Porciani) to mental illness that results from slavery (Nuño), abolitionist movements (Grenouilleau), Shakespeare’s plays (Jamet) and Brazilian coffee plantations in the 19th century AD (Spagnoli). Each chapter ends with a bibliography listing both primary sources and secondary sources used. The book concludes with abstracts of the individual contributions in both French and English.

Although the topics and aims of the individual contributions are independent, there are themes that resurface throughout the volume.

Most of the themes can be found in Antonio Gonzales' contribution, which not only gives an up-to-date account of facts, figures, and debates surrounding the history of slavery, but also introduces the reader to some key observations that arise from a holistic view of slavery. One is that the term 'slavery' is frequently overused to describe forms of dependence that are not slavery, so that these other forms, such as forced labour or other forms of constraint, are understudied. He then turns to economic considerations. Here he first questions the long-standing idea that slavery was incompatible with market economies: not only was the cotton trade highly speculative yet dependent on slave labour, but even modern market economies feature forms of constraint, some of which may be qualified as slavery. Second, he asserts that in economic life the legal status of being a slave was less important than the costs of labour in deciding what tasks slaves would perform or not, which blurs the boundaries between free and unfree labour. Paradoxically, he observes that slave systems survived even when they lost their profitability vis-à-vis, for example, machine labour. This leads him to consider the long-term consequences of slavery even after abolition. Not only did stereotypes and racism survive long after slavery was abolished, but the experience of slavery also affected family patterns for generations and affected the mental health of those involved.

Even if the chapter is not an 'introduction' and does not explicitly refer to other contributions, Gonzales' essay anticipates questions that are revisited in one or more of the contributions and in different historical contexts.

Most contributions devote most or at least part of their attention to the relationship between slavery and other modes of dependence, be it in theory or in practice. Jacques Annequin draws on his long-term engagement with concepts of slavery and dependence to discuss 'slavery' as a paradigm. He stresses that other forms of subjugation have stood somewhat in the shadow of 'slavery', even though slavery was not the only and perhaps not even the most dominant mode of exploitation across history. For example, in modern definitions of slavery which incorporate practices such as sexual exploitation and forced child labour as 'analogous' to slavery, slavery becomes a 'paradigm' rather than one practice among many. He provides selected examples from Classical antiquity that testify to emic distinctions between different forms of submission and gives a brief account of the relatively recent interest (from the 1970s onwards) in 'dependence' as a concept used to better grasp the spectral nature of servitude and the differences between

these different practices, before highlighting that the key elements which define slavery are difficult to pin down across time and space. Annequin's reflections not only provide a useful overview for those interested in dependence studies but also urge the reader to rethink the analytical categories we use in the study of submission across time and space.

Two contributions on Late Roman slavery scrutinize its relationship to other forms of dependence prevalent in that time period or in the early Middle Ages. Redduzzi revisits the theories of the Italian lawyer, politician, and historian Francesco de Martino, one of which concerns the link between the Late Roman colonate and the Medieval feudal system, while Mazza, in response to recent work by classicist Kyle Harper,[\[1\]](#) assesses the role of slavery in the Late Roman economy, focusing especially on the usefulness (or not) of the terms 'transition' and the 'Slavery Mode of Production' in describing and explaining Late Roman labour relations.

Other contributions focus on the distinction between slaves and non-slaves in different societal contexts. Domingo Plácido Suarez stresses that our ways of understanding ancient slavery are shaped by our modern capitalist world view, discussing aspects such as liberty, ethnic identity, and the role of labour as means of social distinction in ancient and modern societies. Leone Porciani revisits public slavery in Greek cities. Commenting on the work of Paulin Ismard,[\[2\]](#) he considers Greek philosophy and epigraphic evidence to argue that, despite their legal status, slaves' economic activity did not differ considerably from that of non-slaves. They could own property, could be compensated for work, and often shared tasks with free citizens. Ultimately, Porciani wonders whether public slaves may have had some form of influence on political life given they shared socioeconomic activity with free individuals.

Moving forward more than 2000 years, Frédéric Spagnoli focusses on Italian emigrants from the Trentino area working on Brazilian coffee plantations (*fazendas*) in the latter half of the 19th century AD. Not only does he illustrate the motivations of different actors (including the state, landowners, and shipping companies) in recruiting mostly poor Italian families, ranging from the replacement of slave labour to attempts to 'whitewash' the population, but also outlines forms of resistance on the plantation, conflicts between (ex-)slaves and Italian immigrants, and the ensuing rural exodus of the workers once they were released.

Another recurrent theme is owner-slave relationships, and several contributions explore very different facets thereof.

Ennio Biondi studies domestic slavery in the *Oikonomika* of Pseudo-Aristotle. This work devotes a whole chapter to the work of the slave in the *oikos*, and, in the words of Biondi, is a short ‘user manual of slaves’, focusing especially on the right relationship between master and slave that would lead to self-sustainability of the household and the choice of the right slave for this purpose. But Biondi notes that beyond underlining the economic advantages of treating a slave well there may also be the first formulation of moral aspects of slavery. He tentatively links this to a potential transformation of the conception of slaves in the 4th century BC, as other sources (e.g. theatrical plays) suggest more sensitivity to the slave and his sufferings.

Moving into the modern era and switching genre, Pierre Jamet focusses on the relationship between Prospero and Caliban in Shakespeare’s *The Tempest*. In line with recent post-colonial readings of the work, Jamet first outlines the context of colonialism in which Shakespeare wrote the play and highlights that the play can be read as colonization, with Prospero being the colonial force and Caliban the colonial other. Jamet argues that rather than justifying Prospero’s rule, however, Shakespeare subtly criticizes its very foundation, namely humanism and its ‘cult of books’, represented by Prospero’s sorcery book. Prospero subjugates the island and especially Caliban with the help of the book, which Caliban hates for doing so. Prospero later releases himself from the book’s power when he throws the book into the sea. Jamet sees here two role reversals. Humanism as a bulwark against barbarism has itself something barbaric to it, Prospero’s superiority over his island is not innate and bound to an object, and the finest language of the play is uttered by Caliban, the stereotypical ‘savage’.

Another contribution focusses specifically on the *psychological consequences* of owner-slave relationships. Antón Alvar Nuño aims to identify mental illness that arose from slavery and structural violence in ancient, modern, and contemporary sources. Being aware of the challenges of retrospective diagnosis, he draws on Roman, American, and modern slavery contexts. He reinterprets Roman sources that discuss defects of behavior (including suicidal nature) and 19th century AD medical treatises on typical slave ailments, suggesting that some of these may indicate post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), which recent studies have found to be pervasive among modern victims of slavery.

The two remaining studies pursue other, equally productive paths of enquiry. Olivier Grenouilleau pursues the question why critical voices about slavery resulted in a collective movement in the 18th-19th century BC but remained individual efforts in

antiquity. For Grenouilleau this distinction between individual and collective is not helpful. First, he stresses that in the modern period, abolitionist movements developed in relatively restricted contexts (e.g. clubs, societies), and suffered several setbacks, which calls into question said dichotomy. As regards previous assumptions that open public debate on legitimacy and slavery did not exist in antiquity, Grenouilleau underlines that ancient critics were aware of earlier criticisms of slavery and reacted to it, which would create ‘communities of thought’ transcending time and space. Comparing ancient criticism and early modern movements, he conceptualises the observed differences as a by-product of a transnational society and a change in protest culture over time from merely criticising the status quo to attempting to change it.

Lastly, Franca Landucci Gattinoni provides yet another interesting case study. In passages from Herodotus and historical accounts of Alexander the Great’s court life she spots an aversion in Greek writers to the submissive relationship between Middle Eastern courtiers and their ruler, epitomized by the practice of *proskynesis*, which was later adopted by Alexander the Great to the discontent of his followers: despite acquiring wealth and exercising power, friends of the king failed to know liberty. Gattinoni then elucidates how Roman writers’ attitudes towards court life (especially Polybius, a native Greek and critical of monarchy) had a similar opinion towards ‘friends’ of the king. In contrast, court propaganda went so far as to reverse this relationship and presented the king as ‘honorable slave’ of the people.

Gattinoni highlights how fruitful a consideration of Middle Eastern conceptions of slavery and dependence can be, even if mainly serving as a comparandum for Greek conceptions. His contribution also highlights a slight imbalance in this edited volume: despite the ambitious title of this volume, non-Western cultures are, with one exception, only mentioned in a few footnotes across the book.

That said, this volume is a welcome addition to the study of Classical slavery. Rather than aiming at presenting a big picture, the short contributions often focus on seeming details that turn out to have wider implications for the ways we think about and provide interesting new readings of well-known sources. As such, it provides numerous ideas and thoughts to ponder for scholars interested in Classics, the world history of slavery, and to an extent also for the interested public.

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[1] E.g. Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275-425*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

[2] Esp. Paulin Ismard, *La démocratie contre les experts: les esclaves publics en Grèce ancienne. L'Univers historique*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2015.