

## Book Reviews

Greek Slave Systems in Their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c.800–146 BC. *By David M. Lewis.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018. xii + 372 pp. Hardcover, \$110.00. ISBN: 978-0-19-876994-1.

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Reviewed by John Walsh

Of the myriad social and historical issues demanding scholarly attention, perhaps none is more daunting than that of slavery. A horrific institution with a long and grisly legacy, the practice of commodifying human life presents as stark a challenge to our notion of “humanity” as any we might encounter. In and of itself, the study of slavery demands objective examination, though not at the expense of compromising our appreciation of its devastating implications on the concept of “civilization.” With such a complex and socially charged subject at hand, it is a great pleasure to see the work of Classics scholars rise to this formidable challenge. David Lewis’s latest book, *Greek Slave Systems in Their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c.800–146 BC*, marks an important step in a steadily growing body of work that applies economic theories to the “riddle of freedom” and its antithesis, slavery, in the ancient Mediterranean past. Even within such a venerable field as Classics, economics remains a relatively new discipline, and the application of new methodologies is always a welcome reinvigoration of this ever-relevant body of study. A leading authority on slavery in the ancient world, Lewis provides an intriguing intercultural analysis that seeks to bridge two often seemingly irreconcilable civilizations: Greece and the Near East.

As all scholars of antiquity are well trained to understand, any inquiry into the ancient world is limited in its reach by the availability of the surviving sources. Many subjects, slavery amongst them, face significant peril in this regard. By necessity, we rely on only a very select viewpoint and, all attestations aside, we cannot avoid the long shadow of slavery over any attempt to discuss it, even within the geographical and chronological parameters outlined here. Many readers might look at the table of contents of Lewis’s book and be left wondering how Israel, Crete, Assyria, Athens, and Sparta could be woven into a single study—a question that clearly did not go unasked by the author. The work is, as to be expected, meticulously researched and assiduously presented, offering invaluable insights to both professional scholar and

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interested reader alike. The author shows a commanding knowledge of the relevant ancient sources and does well to marshal a wide array of evidence to this expansive analysis.

Although the title may at first glance seem intimidating—indeed, to survey a region as broadly defined as the “Eastern Mediterranean” across some nearly seven centuries in fewer than four hundred pages is no meager feat—the volume offers a sanguine analysis of this most astonishingly inhumane system while skillfully avoiding any attempt at an apologia. For those universities or colleges fortunate enough to offer specialized courses on slavery, the book will be well suited as a textbook and will certainly appeal to scholars alike. It would also most certainly complement a survey course, and the subject will no doubt also appeal to those who view the Classics as a means to understanding better the present. But, and this is certainly to the author’s credit, the work is readily digestible to the erudite and interested reader. The survey offered in the introduction helps initiate the inexperienced reader to the historical subject and confirms, by the preponderance of evidence stemming from post–World War II scholarship, the startling freshness of its line of inquiry.

As to matters of style, in terms of presentation, accuracy, and scholarly quality, there is no room for criticism. The work is virtually impeccable and reads with the ease of the skilled and commanding hand behind it. The author is to be commended for his forthrightness; it is the mark of a highly confident scholar to hold the discussion advanced in part 4 in abeyance until the conclusion. The issue of regional variation is very much at the heart of the book’s argument, and it arrives as a much-needed synthesis of this work as it traverses centuries and miles with every new division. If anything, we see that Greece and the civilizations that lay to its east did in fact share many structural similarities, but the difficulty the author confronts may, in fact, also highlight their respective distinguishing qualities.

Beyond its stylistic virtues, the book is eminently practical. As is standard with Oxford University Press, this book offers two resources: first, the thoughtful analysis of the author, and second, a virtual treasure trove of supplementary material. The bibliography covers more than forty pages, in addition to an *index locorum* and a general index. Furthermore, the appendix that the author provides is a veritable gift for philologists and could no doubt be constructively developed further. In that section of the work, we see on full display the tools required by the responsible Classicist who means to approach this subject. A command of the literary sources is only part of the puzzle, and we see the author employ epigraphic evidence to great effect. Inevitably,

however, we are left with a sobering conclusion: that the exploitation of human labor is systemic to civilization.

As a field, Classics continues to agonize with its own past and how it forms the basis of the discipline. In this latest contribution to an already impressive canon of work, Lewis offers a forthright, sweeping analysis of the history of slavery in antiquity, bringing light to this fascinating, albeit harrowing, human invention.

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*Trouble of the World: Slavery and Empire in the Age of Capital. By Zach Sell. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021. 352 pp. Halftones, notes, bibliography, index. Hardcover, \$95.00. ISBN: 978-1-4696-6045-5.*

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Reviewed by Ndubueze L. Mbah

In *Trouble of the World*, Zach Sell writes a powerful history of global capitalism as racialized domination. Beyond Marxist eschewal of the centrality of racism and separation of colonialism from capitalism, Sell draws upon Black radical and anticolonial critique (C. L. R. James, Eric Williams, W. E. B. Du Bois) and recent scholarship on critical histories of race, empire, and capitalism to argue that global capitalism took the forms of interconnected colonial violence, and racialized dispossession and labor coercion, which expanded after the capitalist crisis generated by slavery's abolition in the British Empire (1833) and Black emancipation in the United States (1865). Building upon the convergence of U.S. slavery and British imperialism, mid-nineteenth-century global capitalism came to be defined by racial domination and colonial occupation and was achieved through the perpetuation of plantation societies, Indigenous dispossession, and Black removal, to create white settler societies and white ethno-states, and through use of the capitalist