

Niall McKeown's short monograph represents an important and thought-provoking contribution to the large and often disparate body of scholarship on ancient slavery. The first work in this area that seeks to question and challenge - rather than to criticise and replace - its predecessors, it constitutes a step forwards in terms of the field's self-awareness. The work is founded on several basic premises:

- 1) Historians of ancient slavery, like scholars in any discipline, cannot avoid making judgements conditioned by their own social and political milieu; the evidence cited to substantiate their culturally-conditioned claims is very often vague and open to alternate readings.
- 2) So many alternate readings of the sources are possible that it can be difficult to choose one reading over another; this is exacerbated by the paucity of sources by slaves themselves. Scholars will see in the ancient sources what their own political and moral beliefs lead them to look for. Some, for example, might choose to stress the cruelty of slaveowners and high level of slave resistance, whilst others focus on the potential for loving bonds between masters and slaves (e.g. Chapter 1).
- 3) Somewhat unavoidably when dealing with such emotionally, morally and politically loaded subject matter, scholars who claim that "this is the way it actually was" are, in fact, asking their readers to "share in their ethical ideals, which is, in fact, something very different." (p.28)
- 4) Historians should be aware of the above points when "reconstructing the lives of slaves" (p.9). This publication aims to make scholars aware that they unavoidably fill the "gaps" in their narratives, and realise why they have chosen to fill them as they have.

That scholarly work is conditioned by its moral and political context should surprise no-one. However, McKeown clearly feels that the point needs to be made. Plenty of scholars working on ancient slavery have been happy to criticise their colleagues' work as skewed by their supposed ideological leanings, without stopping to examine how their own might be affecting their work (e.g. duBois, 2003). "The Invention of Ancient Slavery?" (TIAS) is a potentially useful corrective to this, if its challenge to scholars to be more self-aware and explicit concerning their own political motivations is indeed taken up.

Like some of McKeown's previous work (1999), TIAS takes a "case study" approach. Each chapter in turn examines the work of a scholar or group of scholars whom he considers to represent various approaches to the study of ancient slavery (in practise, for the most part, this means Roman slavery). He endeavours to systematically take apart their arguments, illustrate the implicit assumptions which may have conditioned their work, and demonstrate that their conclusions can very easily be challenged, often using the same evidence with which they were argued. At first glance, his work seems to owe a sizeable debt to postmodernist theories of history (he does, in fact, direct the reader to a number of recent publications in modern history, including Jenkins 1997 & Fox-Genovese 1999), particularly in his questioning of the notion of "objectivity"

(mentioned briefly on p.8 and implicit throughout). He seems ill at ease, however, with committing wholesale to a postmodernist ethos – or, at least, what he defines as such – and never relinquishes the possibility that “real people had real thoughts and feelings that lead to real actions that, within limits, can be known and reconstructed” (p.9)., even when coming to conclusions which might imply otherwise. Later in the book, with reference to the value of demography as a historical tool for producing “hard” evidence, he argues that “we don’t live in a ‘postmodern’ trap of utter uncertainty” (p.140). Whether this definition of postmodernism will be accepted by those who work within its frame remains to be seen. His aim is not to prove to historians who seek to discover “realities” concerning ancient slavery that they are striving for the unreachable, but to make them “aware of just how provisional [their] answers are, and just how much they are determined by conscious and unconscious starting assumptions.” (p.140)

Chapter one, for example, contrasts “1930’s” treatments of slave ethnicity and ex-slave integration into imperial Roman society with more recent works on the same topic. The racist, “1930’s”, view is represented by Frank (1916), Barrow (1928), Duff (1928) and Gordon (1931); according to McKeown, it held that the freeing of Roman slaves contributed to a “dilution” of the Roman character as decadent or deviant “Oriental” freedpeople interbred with Romans. Evidence was provided by Tacitus and Juvenal (p.12), whose complaints might today be read as vitriolic snobbery. Such a view was constructed in the socio-political climate of its time, with a racially segregated, pre-civil rights U.S.A. as well as both American and European academic interests in “racial characteristics”. Protesting that he does not wish to be misunderstood, and indeed finds “a racist view of history...morally repugnant” (p.23), he nonetheless stresses that this view is not necessarily founded on any shakier evidence than more (at least to the modern scholar) acceptable, recent, ones – it is not “bad history”. In opposition to this view he posits Treggiari 1969 and Wallace-Hadrill 1994, discussing in particular the latter’s claim that it is only in our “postimperialist” society, dealing with “problems of ethnicity and the integration of immigrant populations” that we can fully appreciate issues concerning the integration of ex-slaves into Roman society. Such views, he believes, might well be correct, but how to prove it, when other readings, less acceptable to contemporary sensibilities, can also find corroboration in the ancient sources? Moving on to a brief discussion of Joshel 1992, he aims to demonstrate how the author has fashioned a narrative of slave *resistance* out of evidence (imperial-period occupational inscriptions) which could just as easily be read to suggest its opposite – slaves’ *acceptance* of the fact that their masters defined them solely by their occupations.

The issues of slave resistance and acquiescence appear often in chapter two, titled “Ancient Slavery and Modern Geography”. Here McKeown deals with the work of two non-Anglophone scholars – the German Kudlien (1991), and French Garrido-Hory (1981/1998) – who, he represents as diametrically opposed to each other but equally as open to challenge. Kudlien (under the banner of the Mainz

*Forschungen zur antiken Sklaverei*) endeavoured to challenge what McKeown refers to (without a comprehensive definition) as the “liberal Anglophone” approach, as well as the eastern European Marxist one, both of which were concerned with emphasising the “social death” of slaves and miserable hopelessness of slave life. In this respect he had something in common with the revisionists of 1970s and 1980s U.S. history (e.g. Genovese 1974), who sought to stress slave autonomy and ability to shape their own lives, although perhaps with a more liberatory bent than the dynamic described by Kudlien, who stressed acquiescence. He used primarily oracular texts – such as Artemidorus’ *Oneirocrita* – to argue for the possibility, indeed, regular occurrence of, loyalty, loving bonds and consensual sex between free and slave. The sexual abuse of slaves, for example, whilst an unquestionable fact, represented only one side of the story.

Criticising Kudlien for being one-sided himself, McKeown nevertheless takes up his phrase “the pleasant side of slavery” and uses it without question. The rest of the book is peppered with references to “pleasant”, “positive” and “negative” sides of slavery, terms which leave me decidedly uncomfortable, and which seems to need more qualification besides the scattered expressions of moral outrage (e.g. on p.23). Surely any “positive” or “pleasant” sides of slavery – opportunities to have a family, perhaps, loving relationships or a degree of financial independence – had nothing to do with slavery itself, but were simply aspects of life taken for granted by most free people, and conceded to slaves only if they were fortunate enough to have humane owners. To call it a “side of slavery” could imply that these “pleasant” experiences were somehow intrinsic to, or specifically enabled by, the institution, when they were nothing but possibilities in free people’s lives granted to slaves by their masters’ whims. McKeown values Kudlien’s work as a counterbalance to the “social death” school of thought, which “simply reproduced the anti-slave snobbery of a few elite writers” (p. 33) and as a representative of the often overlooked *Forschungen*, a series which he believes challenged and helped refine his own readings of ancient slavery (p. 30-3). Garrido-Hory, working under the GIREA (*Groupe Internationale de Recherche sur l’Esclavage dans l’Antiquité*) umbrella, is characterised as stressing “the more negative side of slave life” (as opposed to the “positive”). Examining representations in Martial and Juvenal, she focused on, according to McKeown, the cruelty towards, objectification of, and resistance by slaves. Here too, he suggests alternative readings of her sources; where Garrido-Hory argues that slaves in Martial and Juvenal are treated as objects and violently abused without moral censure, he forwards that, for example, the woman in Juvenal’s sixth satire (219-24) is characterised as monstrous precisely *because* she abuses her slave. This second chapter concludes with an openended declaration that “the problem is not connected with individual historians of ancient slavery, but with the very idea of producing a narrative of Roman slave life” (p.51).

The opposition between “positive” and “negative” which McKeown sets up in this chapter raises a very interesting ethical issue which, although

problematised by the author, remains uninvestigated in full: One must tread a fine line between recognising the possibilities that ancient slaves may well have “made their own worlds”, or at least that they were not totally passive objects but human beings with the potential to act autonomously (and be aware to these possibilities where they might be suggested in the sources) whilst taking pains not to obscure the actual and potential horrors of slavery. How this should be done is a matter for further investigation –lip-service asides and caveats, such as Kudlien’s (“while the reality of sexual abuse should in no way be disputed or toned down...”), referred to on p.34, can easily be implicitly contradicted by the work’s content. Any scholar who was to openly declare their work to have an explicit, self-aware agenda seeking to emphasise the atrocities of slavery (as opposed to presenting it as “truthful” or “objective”) would effectively be giving up their claims to accessing historical “truth” or “reality”, something which McKeown, as I have noted above, is unwilling to do.

Returning to TIAS, chapter three examines in detail Shtaerman & Trofimova’s 1975 volume *La schiavitù nell’Italia imperiale: I-III secolo*, holding it up as an “excellent study of a Marxist approach”. Despite offering a very short characterisation of “Marxist” history (p.52-4), he nonetheless acknowledges the absence of an “orthodox” Marxist historiography. He clearly admires their work, but can still meticulously deconstruct their argument (that imperial Rome saw a growing fear of slaves) to show that it is founded on evidence that could be used to prove its inverse. He again stresses the inconclusiveness of their sources, that “the general argument gives meaning to isolated pieces of evidence” (p.76) and that the work “owes its authority to a set of assumptions the reader may not share” (p.75). Such statements, and perhaps the second in particular will prove exceptionally valuable to the undergraduate reader. To those involved in higher-level research, however, who are involved every day in questioning their colleagues’ assumptions, they might seem quite truistic.

Chapter four deals with Keith Bradley’s 1984 and 1994 publications, praising his “noble aims” and his attempts to “rescue slaves from the silence imposed by elite writes, to give a voice to the voiceless and dispossessed” (p.77). Concerning Bradley’s tentative forays into slave psychology (1994), he summarises that “any attempt to recapture the psychology of the ordinary slave demanded the use of the fullest range of sources, including both comparative sources and one’s imagination.” Bradley’s focus, McKeown states, is on the “negative aspects of slave life”, and on slave resistance. Despite clear admiration, McKeown picks up on Bradley’s arguments from Roman legal sources and argues that such sources are not as “hard” as the author believes. Is it not possible, for example, that they might overrepresent concerns over slavery, as a result of a preoccupation with legislation concerning property? Are the examples featuring slaves mentioned because they are typical, extraordinary or just merely possible? He examines Bradley’s readings of the sources which argue for a connection between slavery and criminality and questions that the relationship might not have been as wide-ranging as the author might suggest; the actions of rebellion (theft, escape attempts) argued for as commonplace by

Bradley would indeed have been possible, but that it is very difficult to prove that they were as common as he contends. As with his treatment of Garrido-Hory's work, McKeown questions Bradley's emphasis on cruelty against slaves, cruelty which might provoke them to resist and rebel. Could it be that mentions of slave abuse in source are meant to be shocking, not commonplace?

Moving on to a discussion of Bradley's use of comparative evidence from U.S. slavery, McKeown examines the possibilities, explored in Bradley 1984, of using U.S. sources to suggest possible reconstructions of "the emotional factor in slave life" (p. 93). To McKeown, the main problem here is that the American sources are just as open to interpretation and bias as the ancient ones. Bradley's work, he concludes, constitutes a polemic shaped by the authors' (admirable) moral position, but a position which in turn has led him to "offer particular interpretations where the evidence remains ambiguous" (p. 96). Despite quoting Bradley's statement that "since no accounts written by slaves of their emotional experience in slavery exist, the extent of this posited emotional factor in servile life cannot be adequately evaluated", McKeown never questions in any detail whether attempts to "recover the psychology of the slave", or to "reconstruct their lives" are, by the very nature of the sources, impossible. Throughout the book he displays an implicit tendency to seek the realities of ancient slave life, whatever they may be. Publications investigating "imaginary" slaves tend to emerge from his deconstructions without the esteem he affords to, for example, Shtaerman and Trofimova, or Bradley. His fifth chapter is an excellent example of this.

Chapter five turns to explicitly "literary" approaches to the study of Roman slavery – works such as Fitzgerald 2000 ("Slavery and the Roman Literary Imagination"). Paraphrasing Hopkins 1993, he characterises this approach as "how Roman writers *thought* about slavery and how they expected their audience to respond to their stories" (p.97-8). He opens with Bradley's review of Fitzgerald; the former scholar criticising the latter for using "soft" sources (imaginative literature) which could supposedly be contradicted by "hard" evidence – material remains and legal speeches. McKeown agrees with Bradley's criticism of Fitzgerald's foray into the "psychological world of Roman slaveowners" (p.98); "psychoanalysing the living can be difficult enough – psychoanalysing those dead for two millennia is even more so" (p.99). One might wonder why he did not raise the same objections when, without judgement, he mentioned Bradley's "attempts to recover the psychology of the slave". Again he refers to "positive" and "negative" scholarly works; Fitzgerald, discussing material from epitaphs and poetry suggesting emotional bonds between master and slave, presents a more "positive" side with the potential to undermine Bradley's more "negative" view.

McKeown's main criticism of Fitzgerald (with particular reference to his work on Horace's *Satires*) is that "the real slave starts to disappear entirely, to be replaced by the "imaginary" slave through whom slaveowners think about themselves" (p.101). This, he says, "poses real problems for social historians".

One might well wonder where this leaves the scholar who is not seeking to investigate “social history”. McKeown does not offer a definition of this term, but it is reasonably safe to assume he is referring to the investigation of “realia” and, as the back cover of *TIAS* states, “discovering the reality of slave life.” When, on p.100 he asks of Horace’s *Satires* 2.7: “What does the episode tell us about master-slave relations?”, it is unclear whether he seeks information from Horace on historical, lived relationships, the relationship of the specific master and slave within the text, or what the source could suggest about free negotiation of slavery, protocols of representation, and their possible significances. Of course, trying to extrapolate the former would be a near-impossible task, and if this is indeed the kind of history he advocates, literary sources are bound to emerge from his investigation somewhat lacking.

Why are imaginary slaves not worthy of study in their own right? To examine the “imaginary slave” is by no means “bad history”, but an excellent, and indeed important, project for historians of the imagination; this holds particularly true for those studying Greek slavery, for which there are even fewer sources than at Rome. Despite acknowledging that the so-called “hard” sources can be “just as self-deconstructing” as the “soft, imaginative texts we were trying to escape” (p.103), McKeown does not give up on his quest to “discover the reality of slave life”, nor does he question the underlying validity of the distinction between “hard” and soft”. If “hard” evidence itself can be “self-deconstructing”, surely all sources must be “soft”?

Continuing in his discussion of Fitzgerald, McKeown notes that, although the author discussed overdetermination – “that is to say, the existence of multiple meanings for literary texts” (p.103), he neither explored the effect of this on “the overall interpretation of slavery”, nor “attempted to undermine traditional narratives” (which narratives are these, and who narrated them?). His separation of “history” and “classics” in his reading of Fitzgerald is somewhat problematic, as it seems to perpetuate a divide it simultaneously criticises. “Historians”, he says, “prefer to narrow down interpretations and present a single picture”, whilst “classics” is inhabited by those who “enjoy exploring extra meanings of a text” (p.103-4). Fitzgerald’s problems, to a “historian”, appear not when he is doing “bad history”, but “good classics”. McKeown may problematise this divide, but does not go as far as to challenge it. If Fitzgerald does “limit his readings” by unconsciously accepting a background for his interpretations, offered by “textbooks” such as Bradley’s (p.104), it may be because universities, scholars and publications involved in investigating the ancient world perpetuate this false divide, preventing “classicists” from accessing “historians” theoretical training, and “historians” from opening up the full potential of “literary” sources.

McKeown then moves on to a reading of McCarthy’s 1998 work on slaves in Roman love poetry, applying the same kind of deconstruction and alternate readings seen in the previous chapters. Continuing to a discussion of work on slaves in Roman comedy, he briefly examines Dumont 1987, who believed that

comedy “could not have convinced its audience if it didn’t contain aspects of the truth” (p.110). When he offers a naïve-sounding statement that “one can only agree with Dumont that there is some reflection of social reality in the plays, but the difficulty is in establishing how much and where” (p.110-1), one may wonder if he has read some of the more theoretically advanced scholarship on comedy, both Greek and Roman. (Likewise, his ambiguous reference to the “never-never land of the Roman slave” on p.109). Publications such as Konstan 1995 and McCarthy 2000 valuably recognise traces of ideological struggle in imaginative texts, and see unavoidable but encoded and mediated nods to the “reality” of their conditions of production. A cursory glance at the bibliography shows that McKeown has indeed read these authors; perhaps he is prevented by constraints of space from discussing their methodologies in depth, or perhaps this omission constitutes an implicit disagreement with their theories. He explicitly sets “literary and psychological” readings against “real slavery” on p.113, bringing us back to the question he leaves unanswered – when all sources are free-authored, is it possible to access “real” slavery? Recognising this does not have to mean ignoring the existence of real slaves, or the many ways in which they may have shaped the master class’ writings about them, but accepting that we may never be able to fully access their experience. McKeown comes tantalisingly close to suggesting this by the chapter’s end, stating that “we may find repugnant the idea that the ‘real’ slave has disappeared into the imagination of the slaveowner. We may, however, have to accept the fact that it sometimes [n.b. not *always*] *has* disappeared, and be clearer about where that may leave our reconstructions” (p.121). Such a statement may point to a cultural-historical approach as the way forward, but McKeown prefers a different tack entirely, looking to statistical and demographic analyses as a potential source of “hard” evidence and asking, “can they give us a more ‘scientific’ basis on which to rest our hypotheses about Roman slaves?”

Chapter six turns to a “very different style of history writing” (p.124), an approach seemingly promising an “escape from literary evidence which can be used (apparently) to ornament both sides of an argument.” It focuses on the use of demographics and probability to generate theories on the origins of imperial Roman slaves – birth, abandonment, and capture. McKeown outlines the use of “Model Life Tables” (Coale, Demeny & Vaughan 1983) to “predict the age profile of a given population”; such profiles are known by regions, such as “Model South” and “Model West”, the latter being an average of many “life tables”, and chosen over the others as the “safest to generalise from in the absence of solid information” (p.125). The largest part of this chapter is dedicated to examining the work of Scheidel 1997 and Harris 1999 in some detail. He clearly seems a fan of the tangible appearance of this evidence, stating that Scheidel’s argument that freedpeople tended not to interbreed with the free Roman population “contradicts the arguments we saw in Chapter 1 that the population of Rome became a bastardised slavish rabble”. If correct, this model, to an optimistic McKeown, “allows us to move beyond the biases of our sources (and, to some extent, the biases of modern historians), towards a more objective picture of ancient slavery” (p.130). That the biases themselves might be worthy of study is

not an issue addressed, neither is the fact that such statistics may not be available to scholars working on Classical Greece or other less well-documented areas of antiquity.

McKeown questions the details of the arguments discussed, but not, as in Fitzgerald's case, the premises of the work itself. McKeown indeed notes that "the course of the demographic debate remains very sensitive to its starting premises" (p.139); such starting premises are to him, however, made manifest in the details, the statistics, rather than being broadly political or methodological. "...There is, however, another vital assumption in Scheidel's arguments. He imagined that 10% of the populations of the empire were slaves. Imagine, however, that only 5% were slaves" (p.136). He neither questions the source of statistics, nor the premises or methodology underpinning the "life tables", nor the possible ideological stances of the scholars involved. One may well feel, after reading this chapter, that the work discussed is not as rigorously deconstructed as that examined elsewhere in TIAS. Concluding the sixth chapter, McKeown praises the demographic approach as one that "at least operates by debating the limits of uncertainty" (p.140), although the chapter seems to lack an explicit explanation of how it does this. Demography, to McKeown, serves as a "metaphor for how the history of slavery should be written, even if it isn't" (or, indeed, *can't* be). The chapter ends on something of a paradox; firstly, demography shows us that "we don't live in a 'postmodern' trap of utter uncertainty", then, "we need always to be aware of just how provisional our answers are, and just how much they are determined by conscious and unconscious starting assumptions" (p.140). Perhaps we are to understand that cultural-historical works such as Fitzgerald fall into the "utterly uncertain" category. The tension in TIAS between a real desire on the author's part for an accessible and tangible truth, and the problematic and fragmentary natures of the evidence are never more apparent than here. His simplistic treatment of postmodernism might be a sticking point for some, but this may well be down to the length of the book – clearly the publishers demanded a short volume.

Finally, chapter seven – TIAS's only investigation of scholarship investigating the Greek world. This chapter is largely concerned with several ways in which scholars have read around the gaps in the sources to shed light on Greek slavery – examining what sources don't say (and why they mightn't say it), as much as what they do. McKeown's mention that "Greek historians have been largely unwilling to indulge in the kind of demographic debates about slavery we saw in Chapter 6" (p.141), in the light of his seemingly positive view of demography, seems to need the qualification that this is owing to a real and insurmountable difficulty in obtaining statistics. He then turns to a discussion of scholars who have investigated what is *missing* from the ancient sources. Johnstone's 1998 reading of Lysias 4 and Demosthenes 48 and 59, for example, sought to read hints that slave agency may have played a greater part in the cases discussed than the sources make explicit; how much of the slave's story might be missing? We should not assume that slaves were merely passive

objects. Where slave agency is made more explicit, such as in the Demosthenes passages, McKeown contends that, although slave agency could have been a possibility, we should not ignore the fact that the speaker in each case “had a good motive for making things look that way” (p.145). Portraying a citizen man as being under the influence of a slave-woman may have been intended to discredit him. Likewise Hunt’s 1998 examination of Thucydides, who, he argued, deliberately tried to suppress the activity of slaves in his narrative (including an uprising at Syracuse, mentioned in later sources); a tactic quite possibly related to a social fear of slave rebellion. Thucydides, to McKeown, may not have been an enormously important “stream of opinion” as Hunt represents, and therefore “lines between slave and free may have been a little less threatened, and anxieties less severe than Hunt argued” (p.151). Hunt’s work, “illustrates the limits of knowledge, and the desire to fill the gaps with a type of story”. Moving on to duBois 2003, McKeown censures her “lapses into traditional narrative”; again, a full definition of the term would have been useful. His criticism of her desire to read works of Greek drama as a series of one-way, hegemonic discourses as “conservative” is well made; a reference to a work fully explaining the conservatism of such scholarship, such as Ryan’s 1989 *Shakespeare*, may have been helpful to the undergraduate reader. This reading, he states, undermines duBois’ own professed commitment to slavery as a “problematic, heterogeneous, contradictory cultural field” (p.153), and leads her to overlook, for example, the “good” slaves of tragedy, such as Medea’s nurse or Alcestis’ maid. To McKeown, duBois’ work “illustrates how powerful the story of slave ‘oppositionism’ is within Anglophone historiography” (p.158); she is, as are all scholars, writing-in her own preconceptions about slavery. He recognises that the passages discussed form only a small part of duBois’ work. I might add that, although duBois does not necessarily make her own biases and ideological agenda clear, she does at least encourage her readers to look for them in other sources – surely a step towards the self-awareness which McKeown advocates?

TIAS ends with a brief concluding section offering a chapter-by chapter overview of the book, stressing the difficulties in each case of decisively proving the conclusions drawn by the scholars examined. In particular, McKeown contends that scholars “still want to emphasise slave resistance with far greater confidence than the evidence actually allowed” (p.161). Raising – if not solving – the same ethical issues discussed above, he stays on this topic, saying that “One might even go as far as to express the hope that it might be true. How far can we show, however, that it is more plausible than alternative ‘stories’ with focus much less upon resistance?” (p.161). There are, to McKeown, “an infinite number of questions we can ask of the past, [but] not...an infinite number of plausible answers...however, there are often *several* plausible answers” (p.163). Seeming to accept the possibility of multiple truths, he states: “Too often we operate as if there are single answers”.

His conclusion ends with appeals to scholars to “be careful not to “rescue the voice of the ancient slave by making it a distorted version of our own” and to “be prepared to show their readers more of the doubts and gaps...they represent

real difficulties, not “bad” history” (p.163). How the first entreaty is possible he does not make clear; he has, after all, outlined that the ancient sources can well support more than one reading, and quite often diametrically opposed ones. Scholars who seek to “recover” slave reality, to “rescue” the slave’s voice, (to McKeown, an entirely morally justifiably project) will always be able to find support for their unavoidably culturally-conditioned reconstructions. The latter point will, if its challenge is taken up, prove far more fruitful. Any society is, after all, riddled with tensions, “doubts” and “gaps”, many of which can prove worth of study in their own right.

Reviewing this publication has proved a tricky task, since it is itself, essentially, a series of extended reviews. McKeown offers little consistent argument of his own, bar stressing the provisionality and open-endedness of the arguments discussed, and showing a certain scepticism towards the use of creative literature as a means of investigating ancient slavery. This reluctance to offer his own conclusions may be seen by some to be an attempt to remain morally neutral – which, if so, would be an attempt contradicted by the rest of TIAS. It may be better read as an extremely welcome attempt to open up self-critical academic debate in a field demanding a high level of theoretical sophistication. The fact that he does often seem to be criticising authors simply for arguing their cases, providing one reading over another, should perhaps also be read with a view to this opening-up of theorising, rather than as a case of it simply being easier to pick apart someone else’s readings than develop one’s own.

Despite his entreaties to scholars to put aside – or, at the very least make explicit - their ideological standpoints, the overall effect of his work is to emphasise that there is no such thing as entirely neutral or fully self-aware scholarship, and TIAS itself is no exception. One can, of course, subject it to the same sort of deconstruction that he applies to the scholars discussed. This is not a point lost on the author, and is something he himself mentions on p. 75. His criticism of Kudlien and Garrido-Hory – that they both “critically tested testimony that threatened their views far more than testimony that apparently supported them” (p.160) – can well be applied to TIAS’ treatment of “soft” literary evidence versus potentially “hard” demography. Perhaps the main sticking point of this publication is the seemingly uneasy relationship between McKeown’s refusal to accept a “postmodernist” view of the difficulty of reconstructing the past, and of the impossibility of ascertaining an objective truth (his language throughout speaks of “reconstruction”, and “reality”), and his insistence that scholars embrace provisionality, ambiguity and doubt. The size of the publication may be somewhat to blame for this – the publishers did not, perhaps, offer him the length which would have been necessary for further theorising. Likewise, discussion of more work on Greek slavery would have been welcome – but one can hope that it will now follow. Nevertheless, despite – or, perhaps, because of – TIAS’ limitations, it will prove to be a much-needed catalyst for theoretical discussion in the field of ancient slavery. Undergraduates will find it invaluable in shaping their budding intellectual outlooks. Whilst the scholarly community may well find fault or disagree with

some or much of what it has to say, its real strengths lie in its call for greater academic self-awareness, and in this ability to provoke debate. TIAS is not a flawless publication, but it is an important one.

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