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Recommended Citation

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Material evidence for slavery is notoriously difficult to find in the archaeological record of the Roman Empire. This at least was the common opinion of scholars until the publication of Joshel and Petersen’s excellent new book on Roman slaves. Now instead we have a fresh new approach to locating slaves in the physical remains of Roman sites and a host of intriguing possibilities for how slavery functioned on a day-to-day basis.

Many groups are under-represented (or distorted) in our ancient literary sources, such as women and provincials and, of course, slaves, which means that it is crucial to turn to material evidence for their existence. Yet our male, upper class, literary sources have influenced how we interpret the archaeological record too. We are encouraged to view Roman society and material culture from elite eyes (which the authors describe as the ‘master narrative’) and thus we are conditioned to miss the presence of slaves. For example, modern studies of the remains of Roman houses focus on the way they reflect the social status and preoccupations of their owner, and ignore the role of slaves in daily household routines. This problem is compounded by the fact that few surviving Roman houses have separate slave quarters or specific remains that clearly relate to slaves. It is easy to overlook the presence of slaves, even though we know that they were ubiquitous in Roman society.

The aim of Joshel and Petersen’s book, as set out in Chapter 1, is to find ways to make slaves visible again, to seek them in contexts in which we know for sure they existed. It focuses on the ‘experience’ of different spaces, and thus is often speculative in approach. But there is a strong theoretical underpinning to the argument, which hinges on the juxtaposition of ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics’, first articulated by Michel de Certeau in *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1984). ‘Strategy’ relates to the control exercised by slave-owners: they controlled their physical environment and scripted the movements of those within it. ‘Tactics’ in contrast relates to the ways in which slaves resisted their masters’ authority, for example, by breaking dishes or finding ways to stay out of sight and avoid work. In subsequent chapters the authors discuss master strategies and slave tactics in four different contexts: the Roman house, streets and neighbourhoods, workshops, and villas. These chapters focus particularly on the archaeological remains in the Bay of Naples (and so are predominantly concerned
Chapter 2 focuses on Roman urban houses and the material lives of slaves within them and it examines choreography—how slaves moved around the house, as illustrated in the literary sources. Their movements were dictated by the master’s desire to control his domain, and the authors use the example of the banquet to highlight his scripting of slave movements. Yet they also argue that slave tactics could thwart the master’s control. Slaves could perform their tasks poorly to embarrass their masters, or slip out of sight to avoid their master’s gaze. They might also appropriate spaces in the house when the master was away from home. The Roman house was a dynamic environment, and the various possibilities for slave action and inaction are brought home clearly in this chapter. Chapter 3 addresses the subject of slaves in the city streets and considers their movements around the city. Slaves on errands for their masters, or as their attendants, must have filled the streets but there is no direct evidence for them in the archaeological record. Once again the authors turn to possibilities—that slaves might congregate at back doors, for example, and linger in back streets out of view of the master, or at fountains where they could meet slaves from other households. An errand outside the house could be used as an opportunity for some free time. Chapter 4 examines the experience of slaves in workshops. We know from literary and legal sources that most workshops were run with slave labor, but scholarship has tended to focus on the physical environment of the workshop rather than on how workers were organized and the opportunities they may have had for social interaction and collaboration. Joshel and Petersen discuss the possible degrees of freedom and confinements that the slaves working in bakeries experienced, and the impact that the size and complexity of workshops must have had both on the ways a master ran his premises and the opportunities that slaves had to subvert them. Chapter 5 considers villas and the search for slave quarters. In particular it examines three different types of villa on the Bay of Naples: the magnificent Villa A at Oplontis, the smaller, suburban Villa of the Mysteries, and the rural farm known as the Villa Regina at Boscoreale. The chapter attempts to map out the movements of slaves in the performance of their daily tasks and discusses methods of surveillance. Chapter 6 concludes the study by looking at funerary evidence for slaves, considering the nature of this evidence, and the way it has been studied in the past.

An important theme that runs throughout the book is surveillance: the methods the master used to supervise his slaves, and the ways in which slaves may have succeeded in evading this supervision. By focusing on this theme, Joshel and Petersen...
en have repopulated the ancient houses, streets, workshops and villas they discuss. Herein lies the value of this book: it encourages us to view the material culture of slavery as dynamic rather than static. It doesn't present new evidence but it challenges how the history of Roman slavery has been written in the past and offers us new ways of reading the existing evidence that give slavery and the slaves themselves greater prominence.

NECJ 42.4

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