

11-17-2022

Cyril Courier and Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, eds. 2022. Ancient History from Below: Subaltern Experiences and Actions in Context. London: Routledge. Pp. 320 14B/W Illustrations. Cloth. (ISBN 9780367424411) £120.00.

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Recommended Citation

Cimino, Anna Maria (2022) "Cyril Courier and Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira, eds. 2022. Ancient History from Below: Subaltern Experiences and Actions in Context. London: Routledge. Pp. 320 14B/W Illustrations. Cloth. (ISBN 9780367424411) £120.00.," *New England Classical Journal*: Vol. 49 : Iss. 2 , 34-37.

<https://doi.org/10.52284/NECJ.49.2.review.cimino>

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Two Worlds dialogues. The third definition (*epistêmê* is true *doxa* plus an explanatory account) may be a new epistemology. And yet, the definition's failure may show Plato rejecting Form-less epistemology, and emphasizing eye-witnessing in the jury passage (*Tht.* 201) may metaphorically emphasize contact with reality, and so *epistêmê* may still have its own exclusive object, Being.

Among this book's limitations: nothing about recollection or participation, and little attention paid to *Parmenides*. Overall, however, anyone interested in these issues must read Moss' excellent book, because it reacts to recent challenges to and provides shored-up better foundations for the historically prevalent interpretation.

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This trail-blazing volume appeared in September 2021 in the series Routledge Monographs in Classical Studies. Its title is enough to understand the mission of the editors, Julio Cesar Magalhães de Oliveira and Cyril Courier, who mean to pose two crucial questions: is it possible to study the ancient world from *below*? If so, how? Because of the clarity with which these issues are addressed and the vigor that characterizes each contributor's theoretical approach, the volume offers an innovative bottom-up perspective on the Ancient World. While the answer to the first question—namely the “common conviction that another ancient history is possible” (1)—is announced by the editors in the introduction of the volume (1–31) and presented as both its political and epistemological principle (2), the ten chapters of *Ancient History from Below* analyze a wide variety of case studies, illustrating how to achieve such a change of perspective, which affects not only the common understanding of the past but also the most widespread methodologies used to manage ancient sources.

The publication of this volume cannot be considered a mere intellectual achievement, since it openly displays a *political* commitment. As Brent Shaw pinpoints in his foreword “What is this history to be?” (x–xxv), both the conditions of “history” and “pre-history”—far from being simplistic criteria of periodization—are determined by power and wealth (xv). Beyond being characterized by oppression and lack of hegemony, the condition of subaltern groups materializes as an absence of sources and the impossibility of leaving a trace in the world: a “crisis of the presence”, we could say, borrowing an anthropological category coined by De Martino (1977, 177–78); or a result of the “epistemic violence” conceptualized by Spivak (1985, 247–52) in her attempt to show how, throughout the history, archives have been a privileged place of crystallization of the power relations. History is not only the final judgment of the hegemonic group on the subaltern but also the narrative representation of their hegemony, as the editors underpin (4). Therefore, the methodological difficulty encountered by the contributors appears to be a sociological and anthropological problem, as well as an academic one (xiv).

The volume is built on a solid theoretical structure, the foundations of which lie in conception of historiography by Benjamin 1980, meant as the task to rescue the oppressed from the narrative shackles of the elites. Hence, to recover the memory of the subaltern groups, we must “brush history against the grain”. On the same page, if the definition of “subaltern groups” adopted in the volume is inspired by both Gramsci 1977 and the works of Guha 1983 and the Subaltern Studies Group, the notion of

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below directly derives from the re-discussion of Edward Palmer Thompson's *Customs in Common: Studies in Traditional Popular Culture* carried out by Cerutti (2015, 931–55): following her reflection, the *history from below* should be the history of the people who have lost the battle for their legitimacy.¹ To give them back their past and reconstruct their memory, the attention to the discursive dimension is revealed to be an essential tool, to the extent that it allows us to understand how these people used to represent themselves and narrate their world. In a similar framework, language is interconnected with the notion of agency, which is observed in the light of the subaltern groups' multiple subjectivities, for how they were able to build solidarity networks and negotiate the terms of their status (14–15). In this sense, the works of Kostas Vlassopoulos (2007; 2009, 347–63; 2016, 5–27) on the history of ancient slavery represent another point of reference for both the authors and the editors of *Ancient History from Below*, while his chapter ("Subaltern community formation in antiquity: Some methodological reflections", 33–54) invites the reader to "start by taking the implication of the linguistic turn seriously" (43) and arises crucial methodological issues, useful to highlight the difficulties that still make impossible to encompass lives and experiences of subaltern groups in antiquity: just in rare cases, they produced written sources and the majority of their testimonies have a non-narrative form. These pieces of evidence do not permit to retrace their diachronic journey through history, but just to glimpse their presence in isolated and synchronic contexts.

The contributions collected in the volume have the additional merit to unmask our misleading way of considering sources by employing a Marxist lens, since we are used to relying on the discursive apparatuses of literary texts to interpret the evidence deriving from material culture. This assumption is revealed to be particularly true in the sixth chapter ("Roman agriculture from above and below: words and thing", 121–53), which guides the readers to get familiar with *The Roman Peasant Project*, directed by the author herself, Kim Bowes.² In a previous issue of the *New England Classical Journal*, Mauro Puddu reviewed the edited volume which synthesizes the final results of this project. Puddu (2022, 139–42), underlines how *The Roman Peasant Project* has questioned traditional elite-centric approaches in the field of Archaeology. He also insists on how this volume offered theoretical and methodological frameworks useful to scholars who aim to deconstruct the canonical narratives of ancient landscapes and their economic role, by uncovering the multiple lived experience of the peasantry in central Italy. In the same way, Bowes' contribution in *Ancient History from Below* shows how different the images of Roman agriculture turn out to be, depending on whether we adopt a top-down or bottom-up approach. Through the latter, Bowes is able to demonstrate that sources and disciplines we adopt in order to understand antiquity can lead to hierarchic outcomes: starting from archaeology and paying attention to the "minor" realities of Southern Etruria, instead of great estates, this chapter appoints the category of "below" (in the proper sense of the term) as a fundamental tool of its methodology and, from such a perspective, discusses not only the content but also the role of literary sources in reconstructing the history of Roman agriculture. Without denying their importance, the author proves that the confrontation between literary sources and archaeological evidence emphasizes the rhetorical attitude of ancient authors, who obfuscated the smallholders' know-how and transformed it into an artificial genre designed for the self-representation of the elites (144).

The volume is split into four thematic parts, each of which examines the world of the subalterns from a different perspective to provide the groundwork for comparison (17): Part I ("Who is below? Subaltern conditions, languages, and communities")

¹ On the use of the terms "subalterno" and "subalterni" in the *Prison Notebooks*, see especially Liguori 2016, 89-125.

² The website of the project is available at <https://www.sas.upenn.edu/romanpeasants/> (last accessed 24/03/2022).

lays out theoretical framework for the following sections; Part 2 (“Experiences of poverty, dependency, and work”) discusses the role of economics, focusing on what kind of relationships could be built on/through work; Part 3 (“Gender, ethnicity and subalternity”), going beyond the category of class, questions how and why both gender and ethnicity contribute to determining a condition of subalternity; finally, Part 4 (“Politics from below: subaltern agency and collective action”) reconsiders the political agency of subalterns.

Other key concepts of the volume are those of subaltern subjectivity and plurality. The term “subjectivity” is meant in all its richness of meanings to define the condition of people who are subjugated to someone’s authority but who are able to express, at the same time, multiple types of agency. “Plurality” instead represents the variety of identities which characterized/existed in the subaltern world: different individuals, who lived diverse experiences of subalternity in distant areas of the ancient world. As Vlassopoulos suggests, only the adoption of a multifocal lens can help encompass the multiple subjectivities of subalterns in antiquity and avoid reductive tropes, leaving the floor to intersectionality instead (40) and more nuanced understanding of different languages and discourses (43–46). A good example of the way in which these concepts interact with each other is the eighth chapter (“Subaltern masculinities: Pompeian graffiti and excluded memories in the early Principate”, 174–91), where Renata Senna Garaffoni discusses the *graffiti* realized before the eruption of the Vesuvius in 79 CE. These testimonies allow for the wide variety of encounters that took place in the *lupanar* area of Pompeii—in close proximity to the *forum*—to re-emerge. In light of this, Garaffoni rethinks the ways in which different kinds and images of masculinity were socially constructed, and which roles were played by those masculinities, and how, in the political and relational community of a city during the early Principate.

The epilogue by Pedro Paulo Funari (“Agency, past, present and future”, 278–84) reflects on the innovations brought by this collection of essays and pinpoints how the research of each author has contributed to transposing into practice centuries of philosophical and sociological theories on inequality, thanks to their successful attempt to reconstruct the experiences of subaltern subjectivities in antiquity, starting from the concreteness of their material culture. Funari also invites the reader to conceive of the subalterns as human beings whose capacity for thinking and acting allowed them to construct their own history despite the social boundaries imposed on them by the elites. Both the attention to the agency of people from the lower classes and the intent to rediscover their single stories and their perspectives on history reflect the scholarly collaboration which has made possible the writing of this volume: people coming from different backgrounds—different from a geographical, political, and academic point of view—joined their efforts to memorialize to those who have lost their voice and their identities in centuries in which the history has been narrated and dictated only by the winner and the richer. This book aims to rewrite not only the past from an innovative perspective, but also the future of the discipline on the key value of intersectionality, reminding the entire scientific community that a writing history is a political act: it has always been an act of power, but it could also become an act of social justice.

Even if authors and editors intended scholars and university students as their primary interlocutors, high school teachers could also benefit from *Ancient History from Below* to elaborate innovative and inclusive didactic strategies. This volume offers stimulating materials on peripheric areas and marginalized contexts of both Ancient Rome and Greece. By focusing on Southern Gaul with its epigraphic documentation, Cyril Courrier and Nicholas Tran provide for example thoughtful insights to describe the multifaceted and multilayered composition of the subaltern world (“Southern Gaul from below. The limits and possibilities of epigraphic documentation”, 55–58).

Far from being an aseptic analysis of the epigraphic pieces of evidence produced by wealthy and well-esteemed people from the Roman communities, the third chapter of the volume reflects on the role of epigraphy and re-examines its effectiveness in the light of the Foucauldian linguistic turn. Epigraphy contributes to recovering the voice of the non-elite precisely on the terrain of language: in this way, we can understand how they built their own narratives and which social dynamics regulated their relationships, especially those concerning the social mobility. Beyond such a challenging discussion, which brilliantly put together the theory of subalterns and the analysis of material culture, Courier and Tran's essay suggests that top-down approaches regard not only how we study antiquity but also what we teach about it. A real historiographical turn will be effective only when it begins to affect the educational paths of thousands of young people enrolled in different scholastic and academic programs: focusing on the peripheries more than on the centers, encouraging the students to interrogate themselves on the social dynamics of areas such as Southern Gaul more than on the military strategy of the Roman empire could certainly support the growth of a new generation of scholars already educated to think from below.

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