

Attitudes to work and workers in classical Greece and Greece and Rome

Reflections on Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly, Worthy efforts: attitudes towards work and workers in pre-industrial Europe (Leiden and Boston: Brill), 2012, 664 p.

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Ancient historians like to refer to medieval and early modern phenomena, but they rarely pursue their comparisons. Finley's contrast between ancient consumer cities and medieval producer cities (to quote only one famous example), was little more than a copy-paste from Max Weber's.¹ Medievalists and modernists, however, are no better. Surveys of European economic history rarely start before the Carolingian era. Ancient Greeks and Romans enter the scene mostly only to provide a contrast: how Roman occupational *collegia* were burial clubs rather than guilds; how slaves provided the bulk of the labour force instead of wage-workers. It seems that stereotypes frame the debate wherever classicists and medievalists/modernists meet.

Lis and Soly's 'Worthy Efforts' shows how unfortunate this is and how much both sides can learn from each other. As an ancient historian I welcome their achievement and the opportunity to discuss it. 'Worthy Efforts' comes at an opportune moment. Ancient economic history has profoundly changed since the early nineties. New tools, techniques and models in archaeology provide a continuous stream of data. New approaches have enriched our conceptual tool-boxes and offered new explanatory frameworks.² The role of culture and ideology, however, (although always looming in the background) has until now received only limited attention.³ In this respect 'Worthy Efforts' provides a valuable contribution to the debate among ancient economic historians.

The authors challenge the popular black and white notion that work was considered degrading in Greco-Roman culture, but was a recognized value in Christianity. Surprisingly for classicists, Lis and Soly argue that classical attitudes to work(ers) were generally more positive than medieval Christian ones. Greeks and Romans held a multiplicity of views on the value(s) of work. The negative statements found in Plato, Aristotle or Cicero gained

status as the 'only current opinion in classical antiquity' only in the middle ages and Early Modern Period. In turn, according to Lis and Soly, the view that the Church fathers were the first to appreciate the dignity of work(ers) was propagated mainly in the nineteenth century in response to the rise of socialism. In fact, late antique Christian writers offer a kaleidoscope of statements and opinions, similar to those of pagan authors. A distinctly Christian ideology and discourse on work emerged only gradually during the early middle ages, arising from the debate on the place of manual labour in a pious life. Christian thinkers did not value work as a way to gain wealth or status (mere worldly vanities in the eyes of the Church) but as a duty imposed by God, providing an occasion to show piety. According to Lis and Soly, it is the absence of piety as a relevant criterion and the unequivocally positive views on wealth and social status that most distinguishes Greco-Roman attitudes from Christian ones.

The structure of this paper follows the core themes of the book's chapters on Greece and Rome. For Greece this is the opposition between the views of the ancient political and intellectual elites and the ideas and attitudes of non-elite citizens. Next comes a section on the modernist-primitivist debate, in which I will sketch its long prehistory and the form it has taken today. The third section will continue with the chapter on Rome, which (contrary to the chapter on Greece) is concerned mainly with attitudes and behavioural patterns rather than with explicit norms and values. Throughout, in the footnotes, I refer the interested reader to further literature on the themes discussed.

Canonical views versus popular morality

The first chapter, on Greece, focuses on the negative valuations of work expressed mainly by Plato, Aristotle and Xenophon. The founding fathers of modern classical history saw these views by leading classical authors as representative of Greek mentality. Influential nineteenth century historians, like August Böckh, argued that Athenian citizens scorned all forms of work, living instead from the labour of slaves and the income of their empire.⁴ This idea was widely shared and propagated in the 19th century as a hallmark of Greek civilization. It runs on through classical scholarship until well into the twentieth century.⁵

Almost a century and a half after Böckh, Jean-Pierre Vernant argued that these philosophical appreciations accorded with the general Greek psyche, which he saw reflected in myths and poetry. This Greek mind-set hinged

on independence. It was not opposed to hard work but to commerce and to producing for the market. Thus, there was no unified concept of 'work' that covered both agrarian and non-agrarian work.⁶ Farming to the Greek mind was simply not in the same category as crafts or commerce. Farm work was a virtuous toil prescribed by the gods. Craftsman skills were admirable and those who possessed them (as Odysseus) commanded respect. But craftsmen working for the market forfeited their independence and were therefore scorned.

This idealized Classical Greece (or rather Athens) became a favourite counterpoint for modern philosophers, like Hannah Arendt or André Gorz criticizing the dehumanising work ethic of capitalism.⁷ Modern society is built on the division of labour. Unemployment means social exclusion. Classical Greece, however, was supposedly built on citizenship and political participation. Because Greek culture rejected 'work' as a relevant criterion for inclusion, it conveniently proved that social integration did not require the division of labour.⁸

Lis and Soly confront these 'canonical' views of the great philosophers and epic authors to the very different ones found in poetry, drama, inscriptions and reliefs. They show that appreciations differed depending on who said what to whom in which context. Hence, Lis and Soly argue, we need to factor in the discourse context if we wish to understand how ancient Greeks valued work. The later heritage of classical Greece (Athens) must not be confused with historical reality in that era. It stems from the rejection of that reality by political philosophers whose views were those of an elite minority frustrated by their loss of power in Athenian democracy.

Thus, for instance, Plato's Socrates refutes the claims of Pericles that every male citizen possessed the skills to practice politics. A belief that was the cornerstone of Athenian democracy. Plato/Socrates argued, instead, that politics was a specialized profession (*technè*) that required from its practitioners the time to learn both rhetoric and moral self-control. Those who were compelled to work could not acquire the necessary skills and should therefore stay away from politics. The intellectual and political elite, furthermore, redefined 'freedom' as being free from the need to work and particularly from depending on others to acquire a living as merchants, retailers or wage workers. Materiel independence in their view was a prerequisite for moral integrity. Xenophon added that 'banausic' crafts undermined the health of their practitioners, made them weak and unfit as soldiers. The only workers who could claim respect, therefore, were independent farmers. But they lacked the free time to acquire the skills

to practice politics or to achieve understanding of moral excellence and should consequently also be excluded from politics.

As Lis and Soly note, popular morality did not share these preoccupations. It stressed the virtue of *ponos* ('effort', 'exertion') in all forms of productive work allowing men to gain wealth. Work was both a religious duty and a virtue, idleness a vice. Technical skills (*technai*) were much admired. They formed the core of human intelligence and the key to understanding nature; the craftsman (and this included artists and intellectual professions) could 'see ahead'. He understood and mastered the mechanical processes that would produce the desired result.

In making their case, Lis and Soly rely on a number of relatively recent studies. The view of *ponos* as a general productive virtue, for instance, is based on Hanson's thesis of the agrarian work ideology, characterized by an obsession for hard manual labour as 'both intrinsically ennobling, moral if you will, and a wise economic investment'.⁹ Another source of inspiration is Balme's insightful (although somewhat impressionistic) essay from 1984 arguing that most Athenians strongly opposed the philosopher's anti-work rhetoric and stressed instead the value and virtue of hard work.¹⁰ But, in fact, these revisionist ideas, criticizing the views of Böckh et al., go back to the interbellum when Glotz wrote his influential study on *Le travail dans la Grèce ancienne* (1920). According to Glotz there was no general contempt for manual or non-agrarian labour, but 'theories in favour among the philosophers spread from the circles which welcomed them out of interest to those which affected them out of snobbishness'.¹¹ Rural Athenians (a majority) despised and looked with suspicion upon city workers. Merchants looked down upon shopkeepers, who in turn looked down upon hawkers and retailers on the *agora*. This hierarchy of professions induced Athenians to pursue a career in politics or liberal arts instead of business. Those who could afford it, became rentiers. It was the ambition to climb the social ladder, not contempt for work, that drove Athenians away from manual labour; much the same as why parents and adolescents today prefer university degrees to vocational careers, even when the latter offer better job prospects.

Paul Veyne agreed (for both Greece and Rome) that on the surface the elite's contempt for manual labour and commerce was a question of market (in)dependence. But he pointed out that elites in pre-industrial societies were wont to condemn manual labour and commerce, without this having any real effect on workers, businessmen or even elite investments.¹²

Interestingly, Lis and Soly argue that despite the polyphony audible in classical Greek appreciations of work, there was also a common ground in the concepts of *ponos* ('exertion'), *technè* ('skill') and *eleutheria* ('freedom').

These 'were applied in different contexts and by different actors, with varying degrees of success, as discriminating criteria to retain or acquire honour, prestige and power'.¹³ Because these underlying values were widely shared, they stimulated professional performance and the formation of social identities based on economic occupation. Hence, they argue that Greek culture was conducive rather than inhibitive to the development of positive work ethics. This is a bold claim that may not be accepted by all classicists, but merits attention nonetheless. One obvious critique will be that the Greek chapter is focused on classical Athens, a highly exceptional *polis*. Caution is needed when extrapolating Athenian ideas and attitudes to the whole of Greece. This is true, but Athens was not an island unto itself and the solutions it devised for the growing importance of commerce and markets strongly influenced other *poleis*.

An important aspect of Greek culture that deserves more attention, in my view, however, is that of *timè*. The concept is usually translated as 'honour', although (public) esteem better suits its semantic coverage. A person's *timè* only existed through the recognition of one's worth by others. It was the cornerstone of a man's social position, reflecting his influence and credibility.¹⁴ The elite discourse on work was not so much on the respectability of work per se, but on the esteem/*timè* that workers lacked. This is what Xenophon means when he objects to banausic professions: they make the worker physically unfit to serve the polis; hence the community does not owe them *timè*. Finley was thinking of *timè* when he argued that ancient economic decision making was not guided by profit but by status considerations. Merchants, bankers and craftsmen lacked *timè*; hence those who desired social advancement or those who had a social position to protect needed to stay away from such activities. The assumption that they did so, has successfully been challenged (as duly noted by Lis and Soly). Wealthy merchants and bankers did enjoy civic honours and civic elites did invest in commerce and finance. Some scholars even argue that investments in trade rather than agriculture became the main basis of elite wealth.¹⁵ The link between *timè* and profit-making, however, may be more complex and should not be dismissed offhand. Engen, for instance, recently argued that tokens of *timè* could actually be instrumental in attracting traders and could be used by entrepreneurs to convince investors.¹⁶



Illustration 1 Fresco showing Daedalus, the mythical inventor and protector deity of woodworking, offering the wooden bull to Pasiphaë. The smaller figure on the left shows a carpenter at work
Pompeii, House of the Vettii

Minimalism/primitivism/substantivism vs. maximalism/modernism/formalism

The Roman chapter opens with the controversy between primitivists and modernists that has plagued ancient economic history since the nineteenth century¹⁷. These pages are necessary to understand the backdrop against

which ancient labour history has developed. Their place at the start of the Roman chapter, however, is surprising. Very few Roman historians still follow Finley's substantivist paradigm, but among Greek historians substantivist economics continue to enjoy some popularity as a valuable alternative to mainstream economics even though they have evolved far beyond Finley's determinism.¹⁸

The controversy, however, has a long prehistory, not told by Lis and Soly. It stretches back to the early eighteenth century and is bound up with the status of classical culture as one of Europe's two major reference cultures. In 1716 Pierre-Daniel Huet published a study of Roman trade and navigation. It had been commissioned by Colbert many years before to promote his mercantilist policies. Huet argued that Greeks and Romans had always promoted commerce to increase the general welfare. Montesquieu, however, forcefully rejected this: the only respectable occupation in Roman eyes had always been agriculture. Instead of promoting trade, Rome had been bent on war and conquest. The discussion remained lively throughout the eighteenth century.¹⁹ It only temporarily abated when Blanqui argued in his *Histoire de l'économie politique en Europe* (1837) that even though ancient Greeks and Romans had despised manual labour and commerce, the universal laws of (classical) economics could be seen at work in their institutions, monuments and jurisprudence. The main difference between the ancient and modern economy, according to Blanqui, was that the former had been wholly based on slave instead of free labour.²⁰

Until the mid-nineteenth century the discussion can be described as minimalists versus maximalists. The terms of the debate and the applicability of the same concepts and models to both the ancient and modern economy were not disputed. This changed when the German historical school of economics argued that the ancient economy was *qualitatively* different from medieval and modern economies and unfit to be studied by the concepts of classical economics. Rodbertus argued in the 1860s that the dominant production unit in antiquity had been the (ideally) self-sufficient household or *oikos*, of which slavery was merely an extension. Merchants were outsiders, wage labour was a marginal phenomenon.²¹ Karl Bücher expanded this idea in his *Entstehung der Volkswirtschaft* (1892) where he distinguished three historical phases in economic development: the 'household economy' (*Hauswirtschaft*), typical of antiquity, the 'city economy' (*Stadtwirtschaft*), typical of the middle ages and the 'national economy' (*Volkswirtschaft*), typical of the modern age. This provoked a sharp reaction from the classicist Eduard Meyer, who argued in *Die Wirtschaftliche Entwicklung des Altertums* (1895) that the economies of antiquity, from

ancient Babylon to late antiquity, were similar to the European capitalist economy.²² The Bücher-Meyer controversy was born and scholars explicitly began to take sides, defining their views in opposition to their 'opponents'.

Max Weber accepted Bücher's view that formal classical economic concepts were not applicable to antiquity, but downplayed the importance attached to the household. According to Weber, antiquity experienced its own form of commercial capitalism, which was predominantly agrarian and political, driven by slavery and imperialism. The free market was never of central importance to it, because widespread slavery prevented the development of a free market economy. Tax-farming companies were the pinnacle of ancient capitalism. Political elites were large landowners and derived their wealth from selling their crops to feed the cities they ruled. Cities were the pillars of Greco-Roman society but they were consumer centres, deriving their wealth from the rents extracted from their rural hinterland.²³ These ideas deeply influenced Karl Polanyi, whose substantivist school of economics also rejected the use of formal economic concepts to analyse pre-industrial economies.²⁴

In classics, however, the influence of Bücher's approach soon dwindled. During the interbellum, Weber inspired Johannes Hasebroek,²⁵ but the latter was soon overshadowed by Michael Rostovtzeff who as an archaeologist and social-economic historian followed in the footsteps of Meyer.²⁶ It was only in the 1960s and 1970s (in the context of decolonization and cold war) that Finley turned the tide and brought Weber and Polanyi to the fore, establishing a highly polemic 'new orthodoxy' that stood its ground until the 1990s.²⁷

The Bücher-Meyer controversy and its ensuing polarization are well explained by Lis and Soly and need no further comments here. One aspect, however, needs to be stressed more. The divide between Bücher-Weber-Polanyi and Meyer-Rostovtzeff was not just about opinions, but also (mainly) about disciplines. Meyer was a classicist, Bücher an economist, Rostovtzeff a classicist/archaeologist, Weber and Polanyi social scientists. The modernists Meyer and Rostovtzeff were naïve in their use of economic and social concepts. On the other hand, neither Bücher nor Polanyi had any familiarity with ancient history or its sources. Weber did, but his historical views were those of the late nineteenth century. Finley's lasting legacy is that he bridged the gap between ancient history and social sciences. Today, social science models are firmly at the heart of ancient economic history. Finley was not alone responsible for this shift. It would probably not have happened (or perhaps in a very different way) without Keith Hopkins, Finley's successor at Cambridge, who was both a sociologist and

classicist. Hopkins added formal-mathematical rigor to Finley's modelling and introduced the concepts of macro-economics.²⁸ This 'Cambridge school' is now continued at Stanford by Walter Scheidel, Richard Saller and Ian Morris (all three Cambridge PhD's). This 'Stanford group' has defined a new research program for ancient economic history inspired by (but not limited to) Douglass North's New Institutional Economics.²⁹ Their views differ strongly from Finley's, but methodologically they are his direct heirs.

Nevertheless, fundamental disagreements and nasty confrontations still exist, although now on a theoretically more advanced level, between scholars who favour market based explanations and those who prefer domination ('predation') based models.³⁰ One of the fiercest polemics, for instance, is that between the economic historian Peter Bang and the economist Peter Temin. The latter approaches the Roman economy as market economy. The former sees the Roman economy as a developed 'bazaar-economy' and the Roman empire as a predatory 'Natural State' in the sense defined by North, Wallis and Weingast.³¹

These recent developments have deeply influenced ancient labour history today. Temin sees a flourishing labour market as the core of an empire wide market economy, in which slaves participated as well as freedmen.³² Scheidel focuses on slavery as a form of coerced labour, but stresses the opportunity cost in determining whether slaves or free wage workers would be used and emphasizes the effect of supply and demand on the slave market.³³ Saller re-emphasized the role of household production.³⁴ There is no way of telling how these debates will develop.³⁵ My guess is that the contribution of economic archaeology will prove decisive because it is finally bringing in the much desired data to test the proposed models and has lifted empirical analyses to a much higher level.

These methodological shifts also profoundly affect the thesis of the 'plurality of views and values' endorsed by Lis and Soly. Finley readily acknowledged that lower classes did not share the elites' contempt for work. Nor could they have afforded not to work. But for him, this was beside the point. Elite values were dominant not just because they represented the 'Leitkultur' but because there were no true middle classes to provide a counterbalance. A vast majority of the population everywhere were subsistence farmers, often landless peasants. A small elite of urban based notables owned most of the land. Urban craftsmen and merchants were mostly slaves, freedmen or outsiders. The rest of the urban population were servants, day-labourers or peddlers. Where social equality was greater – as in classical Athens – middling citizens relied on slaves and foreigners to perform crafts and trade. Their life-styles ultimately depended on their

citizenship of dominant tribute extracting polities. In Rome, inequality was rampant, but the urban poor were fed by the grain dole. Those who did achieve upward social mobility were quick to adopt elite values.³⁶ It is not that work was not considered respectable by a majority of the people, but wealth distribution was so unequal and the chances for upward mobility so few that such under-class views never developed into middle class views with a significant impact on investments, schooling or political agendas. They may have been wide-spread, but they were impotent.

This idea has been swept away. Scheidel and Friesen recently postulated a Gini coefficient of 0.42-0.44 for the Roman empire as a whole in the second century CE. Approximately 6-12 percent of the population would have been 'middling class'. This corresponds well to pre-modern Europe. Of course, the guestimate relates to the empire as a whole, including slaves. We should take into account wide regional variations, with much higher proportions of 'middle class' workers and of slaves in Italy and other prosperous parts of the empire.³⁷

The opposition between peasants and markets too has faded. Hopkins recognized that although peasant families had little surplus to spend, their numbers were so large that their aggregate demand was huge. Erdkamp showed that peasants' labour potential was not limited to subsistence farming. A large part of the year there was little to be done on the fields. Members of peasant households worked as wage labourers on large estates or in non-agrarian enterprises in the countryside (for instance in brick and tile works) or in the cities (for instance in the building industry).³⁸ Hesiod reflects seventh-century ideals when labour and commodity markets were still largely a peripheral phenomenon. But the commercialization of Greek agriculture started well before the end of the sixth century BCE.³⁹ There is no reason to think that Hesiod's ideology still prevailed in classical Attica or in any of the other more advanced *poleis*.⁴⁰ Of course chattel slavery played an important part in the commercialization of agriculture, but only where it was more profitable for a landowner or entrepreneur to invest in slaves rather than to rely on cheap wage labour provided by peasant families. Vernant's anti-market 'peasant psychology' thesis (see above), therefore, is unconvincing.

Behaviour and attitudes

Most of the Roman chapter in 'Worthy Efforts' studies attitudes and behaviour rather than explicit norms and values. Four important research

themes are discussed: the question of elite involvement in non-agricultural sectors, the social status and mobility of freedmen, the role of *collegia*, and skills and technology. The last section on Roman 'work ethic' turns again to philosophy.

As noted by Lis and Soly, prosopographical research since the 1970s showed the involvement of Roman elites, from local notables to senators, in trade and finance.⁴¹ Most Roman aristocrats and notables remained passive investors, lending money at interest to businessmen or financial intermediaries. Since the late Republic such loans were a standard part of an aristocratic portfolio, alongside urban and rural real estate.⁴² Some aristocrats, however, were much deeper involved in business activities. D'Arms showed how some used lower order middlemen – freedmen, clients and 'friends' – to manage their investments.⁴³ Businessmen had no difficulty circulating in aristocratic circles, receiving honours or fulfilling political or bureaucratic functions.⁴⁴

Freedmen played a central role in elite business networks. Their role, however, is hard to interpret. Manumission was an integral part of the incentive system, allowing slaves to be entrusted with care-intensive tasks. On average, 15 percent or more of the adult male population in Italian cities were probably freedmen. In commercial hubs as Ostia and Puteoli this rose to more than 50 percent.⁴⁵ Some were very wealthy and although the *Lex Vitellia* (26 CE) excluded freedmen from political offices, they had no difficulty in receiving official tokens of honour or obtaining appointments as *augustales* (a formal status group with a special connection to the imperial cult) or as *apparitores* (civil servants).

Lis and Soly rightly stress the close link between freedmen's professional and public identity. They cultivated workmanship ideals and occupational identities. We find this depicted in funeral reliefs and inscriptions and it is implied in Petronius's story of Trimalchio's banquet.⁴⁶ But there is an important aspect that, I think, needs more consideration. Until the 1980s scholars generally believed that in practice freedmen (except in exceptional cases) remained bound to their patron.⁴⁷ An influential article by Peter Garnsey published in 1981, however, argued that many of the freedmen we find in inscriptions, were truly independent. Either because their patrons had died or because the freedmen had bought their freedom (in which case a patron could not impose *operae*).⁴⁸ These independent freedmen would have been vigorous entrepreneurs. Garnsey's view has recently been challenged again. According to Mouritsen, the large number of freedmen engaged in urban trades suggests that local notables tightly controlled the urban economy. As a rule, freedmen would have continued to work under

the authority of their patrons.⁴⁹ If true, however, this raises the question which incentives induced skilled freedmen to accept such authority. There is, as yet, no satisfactory answer.⁵⁰

Freedmen lead us back to slaves, a subject that Lis and Soly pay only little attention to. This is unfortunate because slavery takes a central position in the debates sketched above. The idea that most work in classical antiquity was performed by slaves rather than free people is (too) well entrenched in modern intellectual history.⁵¹ Adam Smith launched it in economic history.⁵² It seemed to find a firm basis in the works of ancient authors. Appian and Plutarch claimed that slaves drove out free peasants in Italy in the second century BCE.⁵³ Pliny the Elder claimed that great slave-run estates (*latifundia*) had been the ruin of Italy and were in his time destroying also the provinces.

Most scholars today no longer believe that slavery determined labour relations. Not only because most free people had to work for a living but mainly because wage labour is now recognized as a crucial part of the rural and urban economy. Nevertheless, while perhaps only c. 10 percent of the empire's population were slaves (many of whom domestic servants), the proportion was much higher in some regions. Probably a third of the Italian population were slaves. In some places more than half of the free male adult population appear to have been freedmen (see above). It is hard to imagine that there was no effect on how freeborn construed their social identity.

But this effect was not straightforward. Roman chattel slavery should not be confused with early-modern and nineteenth-century slavery.⁵⁴ Roman slaves were put to work in a wide range of activities. Many were highly skilled. They were entrusted with responsibilities as managers and instructors. This was only possible with strong positive incentives. Slaves with care-intensive tasks enjoyed considerable freedom. They received compensations, were allowed (pseudo-)private possessions (*peculium*) and enjoyed realistic prospects of manumission.⁵⁵ Manumission and upward social mobility were integral parts of Roman slavery *qua* institution. Obviously, many slaves (especially servants and chain-gang slaves) remained excluded from such opportunities and did suffer abuses. But among the multiple slave identities, those of skilled workers and ambitious managers were as 'natural' as those of the faithful or treacherous servant. There was no single slave-identity that could have imposed itself on free workers.

Ancient historians have long downplayed the importance of occupational *collegia*. They were considered 'Ersatz-cities' for commoners who on account of their poverty or servile birth were excluded from civic offices, or agencies of the state to ensure provisions or serve as fire brigades. There is still

much debate on whether *collegia* actively contributed to the organization of their members' economic activities (for instance by guaranteeing contracts or organizing apprenticeships), but scholars now generally acknowledge their role as institutions enhancing their members' status and providing successful businessmen with the social capital needed to weigh on political decisions. *Collegia* provided an institutional framework to transform occupations into social identities that integrated workers in, rather than segregated them from, civic and imperial institutions.⁵⁶

This is excellently described by Lis and Soly. One element, however, needs reconsidering. Guild membership for craftsmen and merchants in late antiquity became hereditary only for some corporations that served the state, primarily those working for the food supply of Rome and Constantinople (the *annona*). *Collegia* did become the main unit for the collection of taxes on crafts and trade in late antiquity; hence membership may have become obligatory for craftsmen and traders. But with the exception of *collegia* working for the *annona*, nothing indicates that they were under close supervision of public authorities. Many of the presumed changes since the second century CE, moreover, may simply reflect the different source materials (legal versus epigraphic) or could have developed gradually. New studies on late antique occupational *collegia* are sorely needed.⁵⁷

Until the 1980s ancient technology was considered backwards and stagnant. Advances in archaeology have shown the opposite. Between the archaic age and late antiquity, many innovations were developed and spread. Hydraulic technology in particular saw huge advances in the Hellenistic and Roman period. Watermills became widespread. The same technology was used to drive saws and hammers (for instance to crush ores or saw stones). Water-lifting devices and pumps increased the capacity for irrigation and deep-vein mining.⁵⁸

Technology both reflects and depends on specialized skills. The Roman economy strongly depended on skilled labour. Leading intellectuals like Cicero or Seneca scorned mechanical skills. But positive opinions are easily found even in elite literature. Many of the negative evaluations should be read as attempts to distance 'high' culture from a non-elite culture centred on professional skills.

Lis and Soly focus on funeral epigraphy and reliefs to argue that skills were at the core of craftsmen's social identity. This could be more elaborated. Already in 1963 De Robertis argued that inscriptions, reliefs and papyri reveal a widespread popular culture that greatly valued work and professional skills.⁵⁹ Until the 1990s this worker-culture was seen primarily as a culture of slaves and freedmen.⁶⁰ In 2000, however, Paul Veyne revived the

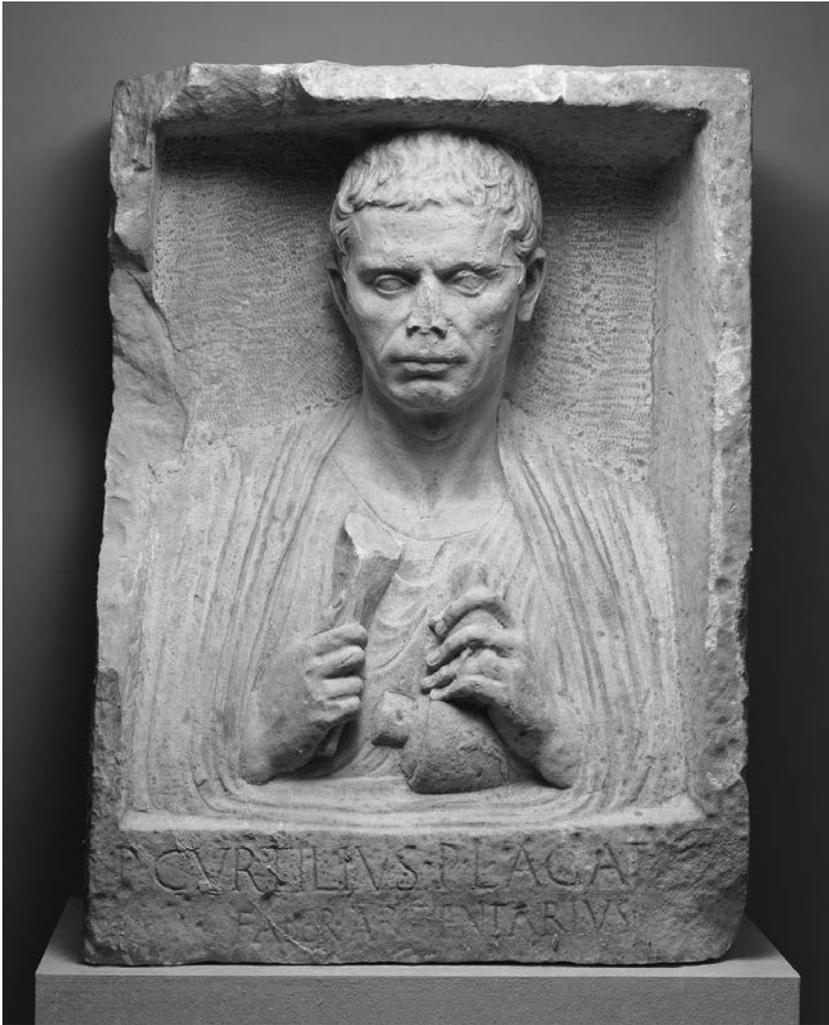


Illustration 2 Funerary relief with inscription reading: "Publius Curtilius Agatus, freedman of Publius, silversmith". The deceased is shown finishing a silver cup Italy, early 1st c. AD, Paul Getty Museum

idea of a self-conscious Roman 'middle class' – the *plebs media* – with its own culture premised on hard work and virtuous living.⁶¹ Veyne believed that this *plebs media* distinguished itself from the 'class' of freedmen, but this idea soon faded. Today, most scholars accept the reality of an urban 'middle class' culture, shared by freeborn and freedmen, centred on craftsmanship, professional expertise and co-operative values.⁶²

Studying this middle class culture, however, is not straightforward. Although literary sources provide clues, the data mostly come from funerary epigraphy and reliefs. Occupational references, however, are not as common as Lis and Soly appear to think. Only a small percentage of funerary inscriptions and reliefs refer to the deceased's occupation. In Italy, by far most inscriptions and reliefs mentioning occupations belong to freedmen. Mouritsen pointed out that many were barely or not at all publicly visible, suggesting that they reflected personal emotional preferences rather than a distinct sub-culture.⁶³ There are, moreover, local varieties that have more to do with epigraphic habit than with cultural values. Grand funerary monuments in Italy, like that of Eurysaces the baker, imitate those of the Augustan aristocracy. Freedmen continued the habit only until the time of Nero.⁶⁴ The impressive funerary monuments depicting occupational scenes in the region of Trier, on the other hand, date roughly to the period 150-225 CE and belong to local notables.⁶⁵

The last section ('Work ethic') turns again to explicit norms and values, viz. those of stoicism and its relation to popular morality. It sums up well the connections between both, following a tradition that reaches back to Rostovtzeff. Stoicism emphasized that it was every man's moral duty to fulfil the task nature had given him. There were many variants, but all stressed social responsibility. Which occupations were morally acceptable, depended on one's social status. Some were always reprehensible (particularly those catering to sensual pleasures). But Cicero's famous list of which means of income were fit or unfit for free men (*liberalis*) cannot be generalized.⁶⁶ Stoicism provided a sound foundation for a positive appreciation of work. It resonated well with the general appreciation for exertion and efforts that pervaded all strata of Roman society and the condemnation of leisure spent in idleness. Mechanical arts were valued for their contribution to human society. The stress lay upon social roles and the ensuing moral duty to perform the tasks attached to them, underscoring the link between social identity and economic occupation.

There is a need today, I think, to look at the role of Neoplatonism, a contemplative philosophy (contrary to stoicism), whose ethical views have received only very little attention. Neoplatonism became popular in the third century and influenced early Christianity. As far as I know, however, its relation to economic culture has not yet been studied.

Conclusion

In their chapters on Greece and Rome, Lis and Soly show a familiarity with ancient history that is rarely found among medievalists and (early-) modernists. They offer a valuable contribution to closing the gap between ancient and medieval/modern history. In this review article I have tried to follow up on their achievement by contextualizing and adding on to the impressive learning they show and by pointing the reader to further literature. I hope that by doing so I too will have contributed a little in bringing us closer together.

Notes

1. Moses I. Finley, 'The ancient city. From Fustel de Coulanges to Max Weber and beyond', *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 19 (1977) 305-327. On the ancient consumer city see now Paul Erdkamp, 'Beyond the limits of the "consumer city": a model of the urban and rural economy in the roman world', *Historia* 50 (2001) 332-356. Note that good comparative history is firmly on the rise today in Classics; see for instance Peter F. Bang, *The Roman bazaar: a comparative study of trade and markets in a tributary empire* (Cambridge and New York 2008); Peter F. Bang and Christopher A. Bayly, *Tributary empires in global history* (New York 2011); Walter Scheidel, *Rome and China: Comparative perspectives on ancient world empires* (Oxford and New York 2009). For a discussion on 'Comparative Classics' see: Walter Scheidel, 'Comparing comparisons: ancient East and West', Princeton/Stanford Working Papers in Classics 041305, <http://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/scheidel/041305.pdf>.
2. See Peter F. Bang and Mamoru Ikeguchi (eds.), *Ancient economies, modern methodologies: archaeology, comparative history, models and institutions* (Bari 2006); Walter Scheidel, Richard Saller and Ian Morris, *The Cambridge economic history of the Greco-Roman world* (Cambridge and New York 2007); Walter Scheidel, *The Cambridge companion to the Roman economy* (Cambridge 2012); Alan K. Bowman and Andrew Wilson, *Quantifying the Roman economy: Methods and problems* (Oxford 2009).
3. The field of monetary history excepted: see Sitta von Reden, *Money in classical antiquity* (Cambridge 2010) (and here for further literature). See also recently Darel Tai Engen, *Honor and profit: Athenian trade policy and the economy and society of Greece, 415-307 BCE*. (Ann Arbor 2010) and Koenraad Verboven, 'Cité et réciprocité. Le rôle des croyances culturelles dans l'économie romaine', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 67 (2012) 913-942.
4. August Böckh, *Die Staatshaushaltung der Athener* (Berlin 1817).
5. For instance Jacob Burckhardt, *Griechische Kulturgeschichte*. 5. Aufl., Ed. Johann Jakob Oerli (Berlin 1900) 153-172 (published posthumously, based on the lectures he had given in Basel on Greek history since 1870); Friedrich Nietzsche, 'Der Griechische Staat', in: *Friedrich Nietzsche: Werke in Drei Bänden. Bd. 3* (München 1954 (reprint 1872)) 275-287, a colleague, friend and admirer of Burckhardt.
6. Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'Aspects psychologiques du travail dans la Grèce ancienne', *La pensée* 66 (1956) 80-84; Jean-Pierre Vernant, 'Travail et nature dans la Grèce ancienne', *Psychologie normale et pathologique* 52 (1955) 1-29; Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Travail & esclavage en Grèce ancienne* (Brussels 1988).

7. Hannah Arendt, *The human condition* (Chicago 1998); André Gorz, *Critique of economic reason* (London and New York 1989).
8. Regrettably, in classical Greece, this had been possible only because slaves provided the necessary labour, but that problem might now be solved by modern technology. See mainly Gorz, *Critique* for this view.
9. Victor D. Hanson, *The other Greeks: the family farm and the agrarian roots of Western civilization* (Berkeley 1999) 92.
10. Maurice Balme, 'Attitudes to work and leisure in ancient Greece', *Greece & Rome* 31 (1984) 140-152.
11. Glotz, Gustave. *Ancient Greece at work; an economic history of Greece from the Homeric period to the Roman conquest* (New York 1926) 164.
12. Paul Veyne, *Le pain et le cirque. Sociologie historique d'un pluralisme politique* (Paris 1976) 131-143, 123.
13. *Worthy Efforts*, 52.
14. For ancient Greece as a 'shame culture', first developed by Eric R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the irrational* (Berkeley 1951), see Bernard Williams, *Shame and necessity* (Berkeley 1993) and David Konstan, 'Shame in ancient Greece', *Social Research* 70 (2003) 1031-1060.
15. See already John Kenyon Davies, *Wealth and the power of wealth in classical Athens* (New York 1981) 38-72; Edward E. Cohen, *Athenian economy and society: a banking perspective* (Princeton 1992) 88: 'a new "mixed" Athenian establishment'; David W. Tandy, *Warriors into traders: The power of the market in early Greece* (Berkeley 1997).
16. Engen, *Honor and profit*.
17. For a very thorough recent study see Mohammad Nafissi, *Ancient Athens & modern ideology: value, theory & evidence in historical sciences: Max Weber, Karl Polanyi & Moses Finley* (London 2005).
18. See for instance Engen, *Honor and profit*. On the whole it is on the defensive against neo-institutionalist approaches, cf. for instance Alain L. Bresson, *L'économie de la Grèce des cités (fin VIe-Ier siècle a. C.)*. 2 Vols. (Paris 2007-2008); Josiah Ober, *Democracy and knowledge: innovation and learning in classical Athens* (Princeton 2008); Josiah Ober, 'Wealthy Hellas', *Transactions of the American Philological Association* 140 (2010) 241-286.
19. Pierre Daniel Huet, *Histoire du commerce et de la navigation des anciens* (Paris 1716); de Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur des Romains et de leur décadence* (Paris 1721); cf. Umberto Roberto, "'Del commercio dei Romani": Politica e storia nelle riflessioni del settecento', in: Carlo Zaccagnini (ed.), *Mercanti e politica nel mondo antico* (Rome 2003) 327-361.
20. Adolphe Blanqui, *Histoire de l'économie politique en Europe depuis les anciens jusqu'à nos jours* (Paris 1837).
21. Cf. Gareth Dale, *Karl Polanyi: The limits of the market* (Cambridge and Malden MA 2010) 137-142.
22. The key texts were reprinted in Moses I. Finley (ed.), *The Bücher-Meyer controversy* (New York 1979).
23. For a thorough study of Weber's view on ancient capitalism and its intellectual influence see John R. Love, *Antiquity and capitalism: Max Weber and the sociological foundations of Roman civilization* (London 1991).
24. Karl Polanyi, *The great transformation: The political and economic origins of our time* (with a foreword by Joseph E. Stiglitz, introduction by Fred Block) (Boston 2001, 2nd ed.); Karl Polanyi, Conrad M. Arensberg and Harry W. Pearson, *Trade and market in the early empires: Economies in history and theory* (New York and London 1957); Dale, *Karl Polanyi*.

25. Johannes Hasebroeck, *Griechische Wirtschafts- und Gesellschaftsgeschichte bis zur Perserzeit*. (Tübingen 1931); Johannes Hasebroeck, *Staat und Handel im alten Griechenland. Untersuchungen zur antiken Wirtschaftsgeschichte* (Tübingen 1928).
26. Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff, *The social & economic history of the Roman empire* (Oxford 1926); Michael Ivanovitch Rostovtzeff, *The social & economic history of the Hellenistic world* (Oxford 1941).
27. For a good introduction to Finley's work and impact see Morris' introduction to 1999 edition of Finley's most influential book: Moses I. Finley *The ancient economy. Updated with a new foreword by Ian Morris* (Berkeley 1999); and Walter Scheidel and Sitta Von Reden, *The ancient economy* (Edinburgh 2002)
28. Keith Hopkins, *Conquerors and slaves* (Cambridge and New York 1978); Keith Hopkins, 'Taxes and trade in the Roman empire (200 B.C.-A.D. 400)', *Journal of Roman Studies* 70 (1980) 101-125; Keith Hopkins, 'Models, ships and staples', in: Peter Garnsey and Charles Richard Whittaker (eds.), *Trade and famine in classical antiquity* (Cambridge 1983) 84-109.
29. See the introduction to Scheidel c.s. *Cambridge economic history*. Note that NIE is not the only source of inspiration: Scheidel brought in Neo-Malthusianism (see his own contribution to Scheidel c.s. *Cambridge economic history*) and Development Economics: Walter Scheidel, 'Stratification, deprivation and quality of life', in: Margaret Atkins and Robin Osborne (eds.), *Poverty in the Roman world* (Cambridge 2006) 40-59; Walter Scheidel, 'Human development and quality of life in the long run: the case of Greece', Princeton/Stanford Working Papers 091006, <http://www.princeton.edu/~pswpc/pdfs/scheidel/091006.pdf>). Ian Morris developed a 'social development index' to compare civilizations world-wide through the ages: Ian Morris, *Why the West rules - for now: The patterns of history, and what they reveal about the future* (New York 2010); Ian Morris, *The measure of civilization: How social development decides the fate of nations* (Princeton 2013).
30. Curiously, especially in view of Finley's personal history, Marxism never enjoyed much popularity, despite Geoffrey de Ste-Croix's impressive book: *The class struggle in the ancient Greek world: from the archaic age to the Arab conquests* (London 1981). It is still favored, nevertheless, by some. See for instance Peter W. Rose, *Class in archaic Greece* (Cambridge and New York 2012). Advanced versions of substantivism as well are still popular with some scholars (see above).
31. Peter Temin, *The Roman market economy* (Princeton 2013); Bang, *Roman bazaar*; Peter F. Bang, 'The ancient economy and New Institutional Economics', *Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009) 194-206; Douglass C. North, John Joseph Wallis and Barry R. Weingast, *Violence and social orders: A conceptual framework for interpreting recorded human history* (Cambridge and New York 2009); see the nasty review by Temin of Bang's book in the *Journal of Economic History* 69 (2009) 1165-1166.
32. Peter Temin, 'The labor market of the early Roman empire', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 34 (2004) 513-538; Idem, *Roman market economy*, 114-139
33. Walter Scheidel, 'Real slave prices and the relative cost of slave labor in the Greco-Roman world', *Ancient Society* 35 (2005) 1-17.
34. Richard Saller, 'Household and Gender', in: Scheidel c.s., *Cambridge economic history*, 87-112.
35. For a brilliant survey of the current issues and debates see Walter Scheidel, 'Approaching the Roman economy', in: Scheidel, *Cambridge Companion*, 1-21.
36. Keith Hopkins, 'Elite mobility in the Roman empire', in: Moses I. Finley (ed.), *Studies in ancient society* (London 1974) 103-120, 111.
37. Walter Scheidel and Steven J. Friesen, 'The size of the economy and the distribution of income in the Roman empire', *Journal of Roman Studies* 99 (2009) 61-91.

38. Paul Erdkamp, 'Agriculture, underemployment, and the cost of rural labour in the Roman World', *Classical Quarterly* 49 (1999) 556-572; Paul Erdkamp, *The grain market in the roman empire: A social, political and economic study* (Cambridge and New York 2005) 79-104.
39. Solon is said to have taken measures to stimulate viticulture and olive. See now Lin Foxhall, *Olive cultivation in ancient Greece: Seeking the ancient economy* (Oxford and New York 2007).
40. Although it is likely, of course, that farmers were more traditional than city dwellers and that in more backward poleis traditional peasant culture prevailed for many more centuries, ... as was the case in pre-industrial Europe.
41. Israel Shatzman, *Senatorial wealth and Roman politics* (Bruxelles 1975); John H. D'Arms, *Commerce and social standing in ancient Rome* (Cambridge MA 1981); Nicholas K. Rauh, 'Cicero's business friendships. Economics and politics in the late Roman republic', *Aevum* 60 (1986) 3-30.
42. Peter Temin and Dominic W. Rathbone. 'Financial intermediation in first-century AD Rome and eighteenth-century England', in: Koenraad Verboven, Véronique Chankowski and Katelijn Vandorpe (eds.), *Bankers, Loans and Archives* (Leuven 2008) 371-419; Stanislaw Mrozek, 'Faenus': *Studien zu Zinsproblemen zur Zeit des Prinzipats* (Stuttgart 2001).
43. D'Arms, *Commerce*.
44. Koenraad Verboven, *The economy of friends: Economic aspects of "amicitia" and patronage in the late Republic* (Brussels 2002); Koenraad Verboven, 'Mentalité et commerce: le cas des "negotiatores" et de ceux "qui negotia habent"', in: Jean Andreau, Jérôme France and Sylvie Pittia (eds.), *Mentalités et choix économiques des Romains* (Bordeaux 2004) 179-197.
45. Koenraad Verboven, 'The freedman economy of Roman Italy', in: Sinclair Bell and Teresa R. Ramsby (eds.), *Free at last! The impact of freed slaves on the Roman empire* (London 2012) 88-109, esp. 91-92.
46. The classic study is Sandra R. Joshel, *Work, identity, and legal status at Rome: A study of the occupational inscriptions* (Norman (Okla) 1992. For Petronius see D'Arms, *Commerce*, 97-120; Koenraad Verboven, 'A funny thing happened on my way to the market. Reading Petronius to write economic history', in: J.R.W. Prag and Ian Repath (eds.), *Petronius. A handbook* (Oxford 2009) 125-139. Note, however, that some *caveat* is in order. Most funerary monuments mentioning occupations belong to freedmen, but even among freedmen funeral monuments only rarely mention or depict professions. Henrik Mouritsen, 'Freedmen and decurions: epitaphs and social history in imperial Italy', *Journal of Roman Studies* 95 (2005) 38-63 downplays the relevance of funeral epigraphy to reconstruct public social identities. See also Verboven, 'Freedman economy', 92.
47. See for instance Georges Fabre, *Libertus. Recherches sur les rapports patron-affranchi à la fin de la république romaine* (Paris 1981); Wolfgang Waldstein, *Operae libertorum. Untersuchungen zur Dienstpflcht freigelassener Sklaven* (Stuttgart 1986).
48. Peter Garnsey, 'Independent freedmen and the economy of Roman Italy under the Principate', *Klio* 63 (1981) 359-371.
49. Henrik Mouritsen, 'Roman freedmen and the urban economy: Pompeii in the first century', in: F. Senatore (ed.), *Pompei tra Sorrento e Sarno (atti del terzo e quarto ciclo di conferenze di geologia, storia e archeologia, Pompei, 1999-2000)* (Napoli 2001) 1-27, esp. 9; Henrik Mouritsen, *The freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge and New York 2011) 206-247.
50. Verboven, 'Freedman economy', 95-98.
51. de Montesquieu, *Considérations sur les causes de la grandeur de Romains* (Paris 1734) 63: 'Les citoyens romains regardaient le commerce et les arts comme des occupations d'esclaves: ils ne les exerçaient point'.
52. Gloria Vivenza, *Adam Smith and the Classics: The classical heritage in Adams Smith's thought* (Oxford and New York 2001) 120-121. See also Blanqui above.

53. On the historiography of this idea see Kyle Harper, 'Landed wealth in the long term: patterns, possibilities, evidence', in: Paul Erdkamp, Koenraad Verboven and Arjan Zuiderhoek (eds.), *Land and natural resources in the Roman world* (Oxford forthcoming).
54. Enrico Dal Lago and Constantina Katsari (eds.), *Slave systems: Ancient and modern* (Cambridge and New York 2008).
55. See Walter Scheidel, 'The comparative economics of slavery', in: Dal Lago and Katsari, *Slave Systems*, 105-126. This may be what lies behind the occasional mention of 'self-enslavement', rather than dire misery as once thought, cf. Morris Silver, 'Contractual slavery in the Roman economy', *Ancient History Bulletin* 25 (2011) 73-132.
56. Nicolas Tran, *Les membres des associations romaines: le rang social des collegiati en Italie et en Gaules sous le haut-empire* (Rome 2006); Jinyu Liu, *Collegia centonariorum the guilds of textile dealers in the Roman West* (Leiden and Boston 2009). See both for a historiography of the debate. On status construction, see Koenraad Verboven, 'The associative order: status and ethos among Roman businessmen in late Republic and early Empire', *Athenaeum* 95 (2007) 861-893.
57. A.J. Boudewijn Sirks, *Food for Rome: The legal structure of the transportation and processing of supplies for the imperial distributions in Rome and Constantinople* (Amsterdam 1991); Jean-Michel Carrié, 'Les associations professionnelles à l'époque tardive: entre "munus" et convivialité', in: Jean-Michel Carrié and R. Lizzi Testa (eds.), *Humana sapit: études d'antiquités tardive offertes à Lellia Cracco Rugini* (Turnhout 2002) 309-332; Liu, *Collegia centonariorum*, 279-294.
58. For a good overview of ancient technology see John Peter Oleson, *Oxford handbook of engineering and technology in the Classical World* (Oxford and New York 2008).
59. Francesco Maria De Robertis, *Lavoro e lavoratori nel mondo romano* (Bari 1963).
60. Cf. Joshel, *Work*.
61. Veyne, Paul. 'La "plèbe moyenne" sous le Haut-Empire romain', *Annales. Histoire, Sciences Sociales* 55 (2000) 1169-1199.
62. See for instance recently Nicolas Tran, *Dominus tabernae. Le statut de travail des artisans et des commerçants de l'occident Romain* (Rome 2013); Nicolas Tran, 'Les gens de métier Romains: savoirs professionnels et supériorités plébéiennes', in: Nicolas Tran and Nicolas Monteix, *Les savoirs professionnels des gens de métier. Etudes sur le monde du travail dans les sociétés urbaines de l'empire Romain* (Naples 2011) 119-133; Emanuel Mayer, *The ancient middle classes: Urban life and aesthetics in the Roman Empire, 100 BCE-250 CE* (Cambridge 2012).
63. Mouritsen, 'Freedmen and decurions'.
64. See Lauren Hackworth Petersen, 'The baker, his tomb, his wife, and her breadbasket: the monument of Eurysaces in Rome' *The Art Bulletin* 85 (2003) 230-257; Idem, *The freedman in Roman art and art history* (Cambridge and New York 2006).
65. Jérôme France, 'Les monuments funéraires et le "capitalisme" des élites trévières', in: Jean Andraeu, Jérôme France and Sylvie Pittia (eds.), *Mentalités et choix économiques des Romains* (Bordeaux 2004) 149-178.
66. Cicero, *De officiis* 1,150-151. Repeated in a slightly different form by Seneca, *Epistulae ad Lucilium* 88,21-22. Both inspired by Posidonius. See Peter A. Brunt, 'Aspects of the social thought of Dio Chrysostom and of the Stoics', *Proceedings of the Cambridge Philological Society* 19 (1973) 9-34. Note, however, that contrary to what Lis and Soly assume, Cicero was not a stoic. Epistemologically, he adhered to Academic Skepticism, which held that the truth was beyond the ability of the human mind to discover. As a school of thought it was opposed to stoicism, but its adherents were free to accept any argument they found convincing, including stoic ones – which Cicero often did. His ethical philosophy, however,

leans also toward Peripateticism (derived from Aristotle), which rejected the stoic view that only virtue was worthwhile and sufficed for a happy life.

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