

Andrew M. Riggsby, *Roman Law and the Legal World of the Romans*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010. Pp. viii + 283. ISBN: 9780521687119. \$27.99 (pb).

Andrew Riggsby's new book seeks to provide a general introduction not only to the procedural aspects and substantive content of Roman law, but also to the contexts in which it was created, propagated and applied. For certain audiences it will serve this purpose remarkably well indeed. On the other hand, the way in which Riggsby has organized and written the book will make it less useful for advanced students than it is for students at early stages of their studies, or for those in need of only a basic grounding in the procedural and substantive elements of Roman law.

Riggsby devotes roughly the first half of the book (pp. 1–119) to a discussion about the relationship between Roman law and its broader social and historical context. After providing quick overviews of periodization and the nature of the extant sources, Riggsby guides his readers through a series of individual chapters in which he concentrates on a series of important and well-delimited issues relevant to the way in which Roman law was created, modified, and applied. Riggsby treats the social and professional backgrounds of individuals who served as advocates in court or as legal “experts;” the use of writing and written documents in legal proceedings; and changes in civil procedure (the *legis actiones*, the formulary system, and *cognitio* all receive some discussion). He also includes several chapters in which he focuses on problems of status and the law. These include a chapter in which he discusses the formal distinctions made in Roman law between individuals on the basis of their juridical status or personal characteristics; a chapter in which he assesses the impact of wealth on the ability of individuals to participate successfully in litigation; and a chapter on social control, in which he briefly discusses the way in which the law sought to leverage personal concerns about status and reputation in order to elicit socially-acceptable behaviours in the absence of formalized police forces.

In the second half of the book (pp. 120–228), Riggsby shifts to a discussion of substantive aspects of Roman law. Most important categories of Roman substantive law receive dedicated treatment. Contract law is given a chapter of its own, while law relevant to property rights is discussed in three chapters: one dealing with the distinction between ownership and possession, a second concerned with ancillary topics such as usufruct and servitudes, and a third treating the specific problem of women's property rights. Additional chapters cover inheritance, family law, delicts, criminal law, and religious law. A final chapter examines the way in which Roman law found application in the provinces and, in some instances, changed in order to accommodate non-Roman legal concepts.

Riggsby has clearly written this book with a very particular kind of audience in mind—namely, college-level students taking either introductory courses on Roman law, or courses in which a basic understanding of the framework of Roman legal practice is needed. As a result, its usefulness will depend entirely on the context in which it is assigned and studied. Riggsby's clarity of exposition and his talent for organization are

without a doubt the book's strongest asset, and for that reason the book will succeed admirably at its main task of instilling in students a basic understanding of the framework of Roman law. Riggsby explicitly conceptualizes each chapter as a stand-alone piece designed to permit readers to concentrate on those topics of greatest interest to them (p. 8); within that framework he guides the reader through a number of complex aspects of Roman law with admirable skill, and in his discussion of individual elements of procedure and substantive law he manages to be concise while nevertheless giving necessary weight to important diachronic changes (see, e.g., his discussion on important changes in the various kinds of rules governing succession and inheritance on pp. 157–161).

On the other hand, and in spite of the publisher's claim on the rear jacket that the book "will also serve as a useful reference for more advanced students and scholars," readers with prior exposure to the study of Roman law will likely find two grounds for dissatisfaction with the text. In the first place, because the book is not intended to serve as an introduction to the primary evidence itself, nor to the problems of interpretation that characterize the study of certain aspects of Roman law and legal culture, it has only limited utility as a reference work. Riggsby does thoughtfully include not just a small list of important modern works and translations in a "further reading" section (pp. 275–279), but also an interesting corpus of particularly illustrative ancient texts drawn primarily from the Murecine archive (pp. 235–263), which otherwise remains poorly covered in works in English. The text of the book itself, however, is otherwise devoid of direct references to ancient sources or to secondary scholarship, and for that reason it does not provide as much help as it could for students interested in exploring specific points or problems of interpretation in more detail.

Second, while Riggsby's decision to permit each chapter to stand on its own is certainly helpful for readers with no prior exposure to Roman law, that decision does come at a price: it prevents Riggsby from developing at length and in a straightforward manner potentially interesting arguments about the development of Roman law in which advanced readers will presumably be interested. Foremost among these is an argument about the degree to which aspects of both procedure and substantive law reflected and were shaped by the priorities and values of specific social groups. Riggsby lays the groundwork for this discussion in a chapter called "Social Control," in which he covers (among other issues) the way in which *infamia* was employed to create strong ideological associations between moral worth and social status (pp. 70–75). But while Riggsby's comments in other chapters reveal that there is a larger story that he could tell about the precise ways in which arguments over the values the law ought to instantiate played out (e.g., his comments on social status and the law, pp. 78–81; on the link between commercial law and elite attitudes toward commerce, pp. 133–134; on inheritance and the nuclear family, pp. 157–161; on *iniuria*, pp. 191–194), the structure of the book makes it difficult for him to tell that story.

In sum, provided that they remain aware of both the book's intended audience and the way in which Riggsby has shaped the presentation of his material to meet the

demands of that audience, instructors will find much to appreciate in this volume. While it may not meet the needs of readers who already have a background in Roman law, it should work very well as a basic text for introductory courses on Roman law or on the history of law more broadly construed (though instructors may wish to supplement it with additional primary sources): in spite of its short length, it manages to be comprehensive in its coverage, and Riggsby does an excellent job not only of outlining both the substantive content of Roman law in an accessible way, but also of discussing the social and political contexts in which that law was propagated and applied.

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