

T. Terpstra, *Trade in the Ancient Mediterranean: Private Order and Public Institutions*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, 2019. Hb. \$39.95.

Taco Terpstra's book, *Trade in the Ancient Mediterranean: Private Order and Public Institutions*, seeks to transform and complicate our understanding of the ancient economy. Writing in the tradition of Moses Finley's *Ancient Economy* (1973), Terpstra returns to the idea that Ancient Mediterranean economies shared certain common elements that derive primarily from their relationship to the state. In this way, Terpstra challenges the prevailing view that the basic structure of economies in the antiquity were regionally and chronologically diverse (e.g. P. Horden and N. Purcell, *The Corrupting Sea: A Study of Mediterranean History* (Blackwell, Oxford 2000)). He adopts the Neo-institutionalist perspective of Douglass North and uses it to argue that the emergence of the state created the environment promoting economic growth starting in the 7th century BCE. Parallels between the trend lines produced from graphs showing the number of shipwrecks and quantity of lead pollution in Greenland ice cores offers a surrogate for economic growth and traces the emergence and collapse of ancient states in the Mediterranean. The significance of this book, however, is that it adds considerable nuance to the parallel between economic growth and the growth of states. Terpstra argues with varying degrees of effectiveness, that the development of the ancient economy did not rely on the state's enforcement of private property.

Chapters Two to Four of the book argue for a complicated interaction between state and non-state groups in the emergence of the ancient economy. Chapter Two considers the trade diaspora in the ancient Mediterranean and demonstrates that ancient cities actively supported diaspora communities. The epigraphic record and textual sources document the ongoing relationship between the Phoenician city of Tyre and merchants from that city who resided in various cities in the Eastern and Western Mediterranean. Terpstra indicates that while the city councils at Tyre and in host cities recognized the diaspora communities and this sanction encouraged their existence, these groups largely acted independent of state control. In Chapter Three, Terpstra draws upon papyrological evidence from the Hellenistic Zenon Archive, which contains the correspondence of Zenon, an employee of Apollonios and a high official in the Ptolemaic kingdom. It documented the easy combination of official and private affairs for government officials. For Terpstra, the use of official status for private gain, as is evident in these letters, shows how the state functioned as a "stationary bandit" and state officials leveraged their access to resources for personal gain. Even in this situation, however, the state did not provide enforcement or protection of private property; in fact, private actions and terms almost always resolved incidences of unethical, illegal, or uncooperative behavior in the archive. Chapter Four considers the role of witnesses in the Roman world. Terpstra draws on upon a number of preserved witness lists from Italy and the provinces that were attached to private contracts. The arrangement of these lists by social rank suggested

that status within Roman society provided a meaningful check on private contracts and transactions. While status within the Roman world depended upon and paralleled the organization of the state, it was not a state function in a formal sense nor did it mark state involvement in the enforcement of private dealings. In these chapters, Terpstra paints a compelling picture of the limits of the state's involvement in the ancient economy and the way in which private relationships structured economic activity. That these private relationships often depend upon the authority of the state to thrive and grow explains parallel rise of the Mediterranean's economic fortunes between the 7th c. BCE and the 2nd c. CE.

Terpstra's work finds itself on shakier grounds when he reaches Late Antiquity. Rather than continuing to trace the role of non-state relations in the changing economy of the 4th– 5th centuries, Terpstra turns his attention to how changes in the reach of the state may have led to the constriction of the ancient economy. He acknowledges a wide range of probable causes for the decline of the Roman economy including environmental, political, and military challenges. At the same time, he suggests that the rise of Christianity and the suppression of polytheism undermined one of the main ways in which non-state diaspora communities created “honest signaling” across the Mediterranean. The suppression of paganism compromised diaspora communities organized around the devotion to regional deities and the interregional relationships that these communities maintained. To support this point, however, Terpstra looks at the destruction of the Marneion in Gaza and the Sarapeion in Alexandria by Christian groups. Absent is any clear connection between these events and the diaspora communities who identified with these cults. An epilogue explores the decline of the Roman Empire and the Mediterranean economy in the 6th century. Terpstra suggests the loss of Egypt to Roman rule in the early 7th century marked the end of the ancient world and its economy. We are left to assume that the non-state relationships and practices so carefully outlined in the first three chapters expired with the decline of the state structures in which they incubated. This perspective, however, overlooks or, at least, downplays the growing body of archaeological evidence for the persistence of economic ties into the 7th and even 8th century.

Terpstra's book concludes on a more speculative note. He suggests that the political and social stability enjoyed by the Roman Empire may have served to suppress innovation by carefully managing competition between groups and for access to commodities. In contrast, the dynamism of the Late Medieval and Early Modern economy benefited from the highly fragmented political landscape of that period. The expansiveness of the book's final pages does little to undermine the compelling arguments in the first four chapters which could have easily stood alone as a much shorter and tidier volume. Terpstra acknowledges that much more work is necessary to produce a definitive perspective on the ancient economy. In this context, perhaps readers will excuse the unevenness of this short book and share the author's optimism.

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