

Thomas Pekáry, *Die Wirtschaft der griechisch-römischen Antike*. Wissenschaftliche Paperbacks 9. Franz Steiner Verlag, Wiesbaden 1976. 133 Seiten.

There has been a considerable revival of interest of late in the economy of the ancient world; yet economics remains one of the most intractable fields of Altertumswissenschaft. The ancients themselves took little serious interest in it, and the literary and epigraphic sources are meagre, rarely quoting useful facts and figures. Moreover, modern commentators have sought to put widely differing interpretations on the available evidence, aided and abetted by numismatists.

It was Professor Pekáry's brief to present in this volume a student's introduction to the economic life of the Greek and Roman world. He sets out in the Foreword and Introduction his basic premiss: that the ancient eco-

nomony was essentially very simple and that attempts to interpret it in the light of modern economic theory and practice lead to error. There is a suspicion that he underestimates sometimes the achievements of ancient technology; but it is a sound position for a beginner to take.

The first section deals with the Greeks from the ninth to the fourth century B. C. Beginning with the picture of an agrarian society given by the Homeric poems and Hesiod, Pekáry moves on to discuss the spread of Hellenism, the invention and use of coinage and the development of overseas trade. Land-holdings and land-reform, sources of personal income and the trade of the leading city-states in the sixth and fifth centuries B. C. are scrutinised. Pekáry then considers the role of the state and the banks in the economy, and calls attention to some developments in the years between the fall of Athens in 404 and the rise of Macedonian hegemony. He offers some valuable insights, but treats circumspectly controversial topics such as the Solonian reforms.

The Hellenistic World is the theme of the second section of the book. In it Pekáry reviews the effects of the enormous widening of Greek horizons through the conquests of Alexander and the subsequent growth of the successor states. He charts the rise of state bureaucracies and the emergence of Delos and Rhodes as influential, but independent, mercantile centres. The directed economy of Ptolemaic Egypt, taxation and other sources of state income, the achievements of Hellenistic agriculture and industry and the character of contemporary trade are all considered. The section ends with an account of the disintegration of the Hellenistic economy in the face of difficulties which Pekáry regards as primarily political.

Although the volume of information on the Roman economy available to us is immense, Pekáry manages to compress his account of it into a third section of roughly equal length to the previous two. As Rome grew from a small settlement, which in the regal period controlled the Tiber crossing, to an imperial power, so the economic structure developed and became more complex. Pekáry's account of Italian agriculture, industry and trade are in general sound; but in places the effect of compression begins to tell. In the chapter on industry (III 4), for instance, the reader may lose grip on the chronology and find himself unexpectedly in the first or second century A. D. Nevertheless, the crucial point that the industrial and trading units were small and that state intervention in the economy was minimal are strongly emphasised. Perhaps the most illuminating chapter is III 6 in which the interrelationship of money and the government's spending is examined. Pekáry takes a gloomy view of the third century crisis in the Empire – and an even gloomier view of the fourth century.

Factual errors in the work are few. The *Codex Theodosianus* X 21,1 does not forbid weaving outside the state factories (p. 129), but only the weaving of garments of silk interwoven with gold thread. But such details do not detract from the argument of the book.

In recent years archaeology has shed a great deal of new light on the ancient economy, particularly the Roman economy; but Pekáry seems unexpectedly ill-informed about it. He could, for example, have made good use of the discoveries at Pompeii in his chapter on industry (III 4). Where he knows something of the archaeological evidence, it is not always enough. The potters making terra sigillata were far more flexible than he suggests (p. 94); for the potters of Arezzo physically moved to southern Gaul and migrating potters seeking to circumvent punitive transport costs for their products are a regular feature of the industrial scene.

In the late Roman period the archaeological and the historical sources often seem to tell quite different stories. The depressing picture of decline given by the literary sources is simply not borne out by the archaeological record in many cases. The signs in Britain, for example, point to a period of greatly enhanced prosperity and peaceful growth after some years of stagnation in the third century. However we explain this, it is not a problem which the historian can ignore.

In its avowed intent to be an introduction to the ancient economy the book succeeds admirably. Each chapter ends with a bibliography of further reading matter, together with helpful comments. Printing by lithography has kept the price low. Misprints are few; but there is, alas, no index.