
Professor Salvioli is essentially a controversialist. In character, though not in style, this monograph reminds us of La Cité Antique; it is a protest against that "modernity," which discovers in the ancient world the economic problems of the present day. From Marquardt and Mommsen downwards the students of ancient history have supposed that the capitalist became the bane of Roman and Italian society in the last century of the Republic. They have tacitly assumed that the period of Geldwirtschaft had already begun in the time of Crassus and of Atticus; and they have found the causes of economic decay in the exploitation of slave labour by the capitalist. The object of Professor Salvioli is to show that Naturwirtschaft remained predominant in the greater part of the Roman Empire. He thinks that the importance of latifundia and slave-factories has been much exaggerated. This contention is not altogether new. Ciccotti and other writers have demonstrated that the free craftsman held his own against slave-competition, and that the skilled labour of the Empire never fell into the bondage of capital. Professor Salvioli, however, subjects all the operations of the Roman capitalist to a searching analysis; and in particular attacks the question of the latifundium. He denies that latifundia were as common as other students have assumed; he maintains that his predecessors have generalised too hastily from the cases of Africa and Southern Italy. Even the original authorities give a misleading impression; for it was the natural tendency of Romans to suppose that the economic system which they saw in Latium and the Campagna was universal throughout Italy. The fact was that a latifundium could only be worked as a commercial speculation under conditions which were realised in very few localities. The cost of land-transport was so heavy that it was never worth while to produce corn and other agricultural commodities for the market, unless there was a large town close at hand or unless there was easy access to the sea. In the ordinary Italian municipia there was but a small demand for food-stuffs; the ordinary burgher was also a farmer who normally expected that his own land would supply him with the necessities of daily life. No doubt the latifundia lying in the neighbourhood of Rome were prejudicial to the interests of the small farmers who had catered for the Roman market in the early days of the Republic. But even the latifundia were unable to compete with the corn
supply of the transmarine provinces. A point which Professor Salvioli apparently ignores is that this foreign corn-supply, so far as it was purchased and not exacted as a substitute for taxes, was probably grown on the latifundia of the provinces. But there is a great deal to be said for the thesis that the small Italian farmer could not, in any circumstances, have provided the capital with corn at reasonable prices. There was no time in the early history of the Republic when such small farmers had lived by the sale of their produce. If their class vanished away the cause must be found in the burden of military service, in faulty methods of agriculture, and in the fatal temptations presented by the doles and shows of Rome. Sometimes, no doubt, a small farmer was forcibly or fraudulently evicted by the owner of a neighbouring latifundium. But the fate of the veteran colonies which were established from time to time in Italy proves that the life of the small farmer had few attractions for those who had tasted the delights of Rome, or fingered the plunder of the provinces; and one man in eight of the free population was regularly exposed to these demoralising influences. To maintain the class of small farmers it would have been necessary not merely to preserve them in possession of their old opportunities, but also to make their industry more profitable; which would have been difficult even if there had been no latifundia.

Professor Salvioli writes in an attractive manner, and with a full knowledge of the authorities. There are many descriptive passages of interest to be found in the ten chapters which make up his monograph. We may instance the account of Atticus, who is treated as the typical Roman-capitalist (pp. 49-52); that of the free artisan (pp. 148-154); and that of the negotiatores, who flooded the remotest provinces (pp. 232-236). The ninth chapter is a brilliant sketch of the effects which followed upon the enormous and tasteless extravagance of the early Empire. The Roman world was drained of its gold; and a society which had been organised in such a way that coined money was indispensable, found itself driven back upon a system of barter and payments in kind. In his enthusiasm for his subject, Professor Salvioli writes as though all the social ills of the moribund Empire might be traced to this drain of gold. It is hardly needful to enlarge upon the error of this hypothesis. We need only point out that the decreasing birth-rate of the Empire was a calamity at least as great as the drain of gold.

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