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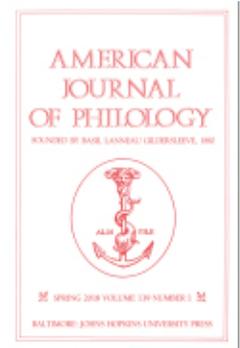
*Honor among Thieves: Craftsmen, Merchants, and Associations
in Roman and Late Roman Egypt* by Philip F. Venticinque
(review)

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American Journal of Philology, Volume 139, Number 1 (Whole Number 553),
Spring 2018, pp. 168-171 (Review)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/ajp.2018.0009>



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Alban kingship with his half-brother Silvius and by his persistent association with the Trojan past. The frustration and anxiety surrounding Ascanius reflect the frustration and anxiety of Virgil's epic and contemporary Rome.

Throughout the book Rogerson relies on solid, insightful, and original close reading of the *Aeneid*, enhanced by frequent recourse to allusion and occasionally to broader intertextuality. *Virgil's Ascanius* is a methodologically conservative book, and it avoids explicit methodological and theoretical reflection. In a different book on the subject it would not have been unexpected to find, for example, a theoretical discussion of Roman childhood. Rogerson is certainly aware of work on Roman childhood, making occasional use of Néraudau (1984), Golden (1990), Rawson (2003), and Laes (2011), but she does not engage with them extensively. There are hints of another possible theoretical discussion in a few sentences on pages 11 and 12 about characterization in literature, but Rogerson moves on quickly while a footnote directs us to further reading. The detailed analysis of the ways in which characters within the poem appropriate the legends of Virgil's ancient past might have inspired questions about the use of the ancient past in the construction of imagined communities, and in what ways uses of the past and uses of the future relate. Any of these discussions, however, would have seemed out of place in a book that does not aim to be theoretical, and what it aims to do it does very well.

Virgil's Ascanius adds a new focus to the scholarship on the ways in which the *Aeneid* emphasizes uncertainty and competing agendas. It is not a book with which many readers will disagree, which is, I think, both a virtue and a flaw. It is a substantial and original contribution to the study of the *Aeneid*, and one that scholars and students will find clear, useful, and illuminating.

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PHILIP F. VENTICINQUE. *Honor among Thieves: Craftsmen, Merchants, and Associations in Roman and Late Roman Egypt*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016. xii + 275 pp. Cloth, \$75.

The new book by Philip Venticinque, *Honor among Thieves*, assesses evidence for associations in Roman and late Roman Egypt from the annexation of the province in 30 BCE until the seventh century CE and systematically approaches the complex relationship between honor, commerce, and associative membership in Roman antiquity. Based on his 2009 dissertation written at the University of Chicago, the book uses hundreds of papyri, ostraca, and—to a lesser extent—inscriptions in order to explore how various degrees of uncertainty were mitigated by Egyptian artisans and merchants through the formation of associations. He then compares this material evidence within the surviving literature and

demonstrates the gulf between elite ideologies of work philosophized upon by the likes of Cicero and the way work is represented by documents produced by the workers themselves. The book consists of six chapters, as well as an Introduction and Conclusion. The Introduction sets the stage for understanding the formation of associations often termed *collegia*, *corpora*, or *societates* in the Latin West and θίασοι, κοινά, or σύνοδοι in the Greek East. This was the most common terminology applied to these associations, but it is a slippery lexicon; artisan groups could, for instance, simply refer to their occupation in the plural.

In the introductory chapter, Venticinque not only lays out the terms, but he also begins to deconstruct the false typologies created by modern scholars for ancient associations. He poses the important question of economic uncertainty and risk in Roman antiquity, which will be a central theme of the book. This uncertainty can be located spatially—in the forum, agora, *macellum*, fairs, and the workshops of ancient cities—and could be caused by a number of external factors: prices, demand, competitors, legal ambiguity, and even poor communication. There were internal sources of uncertainty as well: personal financial crisis, injury, and sickness were genuine challenges faced in the day-to-day lives of merchants and artisans both today and in the past. Venticinque notes that most of the individuals known to us from the papyri from Roman and late Roman Egypt were male and freeborn, although there were indeed women's groups as well, with small groups of 10–25 members being the norm in the province.

Chapter One focuses on the economic nature of many associations through the lens of charters and transaction costs. Here Venticinque perhaps overstates the lack of analysis of the economic aspects of Greco-Roman associations (of which there has been much in the past few years), but does rightfully underscore the need to look more closely at charters in order to access the internal structure, ideals, and anxieties of this pivotal social unit. A look at a first century CE charter likely for a sheep and cattle herder association from Tebtunis, for instance, shows the desire to meet regularly, pledge support, offer financial backing for funereal costs, and expresses the group's power to punish members for various offenses. Beyond this, charters from Roman Egypt reveal not only how an association could manage tax payments for a member, but also how members employed the association in economically advantageous ways: to collect information on the particulars of prices or the state of the market, or to disseminate information about their own goods and services. However—as with the study of Roman legislation and juristic opinions—charters often project an ideal rather than providing us with a depiction of social reality. Here Venticinque accentuates the associative reliance on trust, reputation, and honor which seems to infuse itself into every crevice of the ancient city.

Chapter Two explores the theme of trust by looking at papyrological archives and dossiers from the Fayum, Oxyrhynchus, and Aphrodito, and then uses comparative examples from elsewhere in the Mediterranean in order to see how this idea might have manifested through documented collaboration between group members. The chapter demonstrates that the impact and significance of

being a member of an association often extended well beyond attendance at special events like meetings, festivals, or funerals. Membership was part of one's quotidian existence, when working to secure loans or perhaps assessing the cost of needed labor. The rules of a charter may have provided a way to structure interpersonal relations between merchants and artisans, although it must still be kept in mind that the charter was—as Venticinque notes—but a model framework to move within. As Chapter Three explores more fully, proper adherence to this framework could insure one's reputation, but violence and broken rules still occurred. Moreover, associations had a collective reputation to uphold through engagement with the community at large. Voluntary associations throughout the Mediterranean regularly engaged in civic euergetism that not only shaped physical civic spaces, but also visually impressed upon the populace the import of the group. This chapter also provides an excellent analysis of the ways in which papyri can help scholars to recreate the meeting spaces (often termed *scholae*) for artisan and merchant groups in Roman Egypt, which are unfortunately not attested archaeologically as they are at other sites like Ostia, Rome, and Delos.

Whereas the previous chapter looked at interactions with the public through the language of munificence, Chapter Four focuses on the relationships between official administrators and associations. Nominations, petitions, and contracts reveal the complex ways that these levels interacted and demonstrate an expectation of civic participation imposed upon many wealthier artisans and merchants. Here Venticinque reminds the reader that associative membership fees in Roman Egypt were not cheap. Often those individuals mentioned in contracts or who are cited on member lists had a level of privilege, social network, and financial security that was above that of many anonymous lower-level laborers and unaffiliated workers.

Chapter Five pans out to look at the impact of law on associations in Roman Egypt, bringing in the comparative example of the unruly Demetrius and his silversmiths at Ephesus as recounted in the Acts of the Apostles (19: 23–41). Venticinque gives a solid overview of Roman legal attitudes towards licit and illicit associations and then offers a number of familiar examples of state intervention from across the Roman empire: the firemen issue that Pliny writes to Trajan about from Pontus-Bithynia, Flaccus' handling of the associations within Alexandria during his stint as prefect (32–38 CE), and the Ephesian bakers riot of the second century CE (*I.Eph.* 215). This chapter is essential to understanding the overarching legal framework that governed associations (and how these rules were at times broken); however, the provided literary examples demonstrate that responses to associative behaviors by Roman administrators were often individualized, sporadic and inconsistent. They could vary greatly over time and space.

Chapter Six focuses on the artisans and merchants of late antique Egypt. Although Venticinque overstates that there is a “consensus” (31) among scholars of Late Antiquity that life outside the elite social circles was bleak (there isn't; particularly as concerns North Africa), he does provide a wealth of information that challenges the more traditional narrative of the third century crisis and the

idea that artisans became increasingly tied to their occupations and locations in the later empire. This idea has been born predominantly from adherence to the *Theodosian Code* as a kind of historical chronicle, rather than understanding the complex rhetoric of late antique legal evidence, its limitations, and the specificity of many of these laws. Venticinque here uses a number of petitions to demonstrate the continued working of artisan associations with administrators. Most importantly, he emphasizes that there was a marked difference between the governing of compulsory imperial *collegia* or *corpora* (e.g., the *fabricae*) working in service to state workshops and assuring the food supply to Rome and Constantinople, and those artisans and merchants in Egypt not under this designation. The chapter includes a stimulating look at the taxing of associations at the level of the village by examining Aphrodito, and confirms the continued role of the associations in mediating the payment of taxes in the later empire. Such tax accounts and registers also endorse the existence of a vibrant associative life within late Roman Egypt that cannot be ignored. The accruing of social capital and economic benefits through the use of networks provided by local associations did not die out in the late Roman Egypt, even if the law codes present a dire picture.

There is no question that *Honor among Thieves* deepens our knowledge of associations in Roman Egypt and complements earlier work done on the subject by scholars such as Ilias Arnaoutoglou and Matthew Gibbs. It joins a growing collection of scholarship on ancient associations that extends beyond the geographic bounds of Egypt; including Jinyu Liu's work on the *collegia centonariorum* (Brill 2009) and volumes on the social and legal aspect of associations from Philip Harland, John S. Kloppenborg, Jonathan S. Perry, and Nicolas Tran—to name but a few of those scholars currently contributing to the renaissance of associative history. Venticinque's book is unique in that it impressively—and persuasively—documents the ways in which papyri can disclose the persistent economic truth that there is strength from uncertainty in numbers. It also reveals that many craftsmen and merchants realized that the investment in social capital through participation in a network of associations in Roman Egypt could pay incalculable but irrefutable dividends. These associations in turn created codes of honor adhered to by those unfairly cast by elite literature as little better than thieves. Venticinque uses papyri, ostraca, and inscriptions to provide the counter narrative that instead casts many artisans and merchants in Roman Egypt as individuals who were civically engaged, taxpayers, and often proud members of an association.

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