

E.L. Will Book Review of Greek and Roman Slavery

by Thomas Wiedemann

284 pages, 2 maps, bibliography.

Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore, MD 1981 \$25.00

The author presents translations of selected Greek and Roman accounts of slavery, arranged in chapters exploring slavery from a variety of angles. His purpose is to define what slavery meant to the Greeks and Romans, and to illustrate what kinds of slaves existed, how they became slaves, how they lived, how and why they rebelled, and how they gained freedom.

The “classical” periods – the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. in Greece and the first centuries before and after Christ in Rome – are emphasized, and the somewhat scattered sources reveal ancient attitudes about slavery. While some archaeological evidence is used – funerary inscriptions and inscribed slave collars – no effort is made to address the large number of slaves named in pottery, glass and brick trademarks.

This book should appeal to a wide audience. Even those with backgrounds in ancient culture may be surprised to learn that slaves sometimes owned slaves, and that manumission was a normal practice, especially among Romans. Readers wanting to explore certain themes more thoroughly are given a select bibliography. For non-classicists, a useful index of cited passages identifies and comments on each source.

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