

E.L Will Book Review of
Commerce and Social Standing in Ancient Rome
By John H. D'Arms

*xi, 201 pages, 25 black-and-white photographs, 2 maps, bibliography.
Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA 1981 \$20.00*

The author explores Roman attitudes toward trade and seeks at the same time to determine how much basis those attitudes had in reality. He juxtaposes word and deed, attitude and practice. By bringing archaeological evidence to bear on ancient literary sources, he attempts to clarify the actual relationship between trade and social standing.

D'Arms looks at the trading activities of a wide spectrum of Roman society and finds a complicated system of interrelationships defined partly by status but increasingly, as in the case of the freedmen of the Early Empire, by wealth. He restates the thesis, current among ancient historians and archaeologists familiar with the trademarks on Roman pottery, that in spite of social and even legal restrictions on the trading activity of the Roman nobility, nobles in fact actively engaged in commercial ventures of various sorts.

D'Arms draws on the extensive evidence, most of it still in process of study by specialists, provided by pottery trademarks and by other inscriptional sources. Unfortunately, some of the material he presents (that on the powerful Sestii, Roman politicians who monopolized the wine trade for decades during the Late Republic, for example, and on Cicero's friend Tuccius Galeo) is badly out of date and in need of thorough revision. More care should have been used in consulting recent scholarship. D'Arms is on surer ground in his discussion of the trading activities and social status of freedmen and their descendants.

The book is, then, an effort to comment in a preliminary way on a complicated and rapidly developing topic. It helps to prepare the ground for the revisions in Roman economic (and even political) history which will be necessary when the full documentation has been properly collected and studied.

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