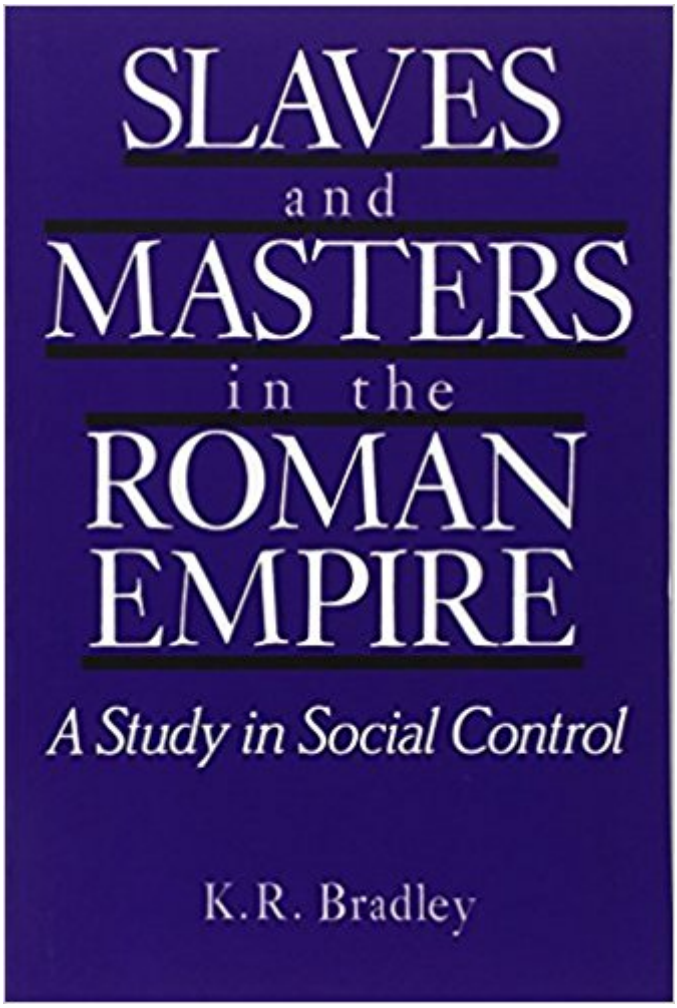
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Slaves And Masters In The Roman Empire: A Study In Social Control



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Synopsis

This ground-breaking book is the first to show how the institution of slavery, one of the most characteristic and enduring features of Roman imperial society, was maintained over time and how, at the practical level, the lives of slaves in the Roman world were directly controlled by their masters. The author demonstrates, first, how the tensions generated between slaves and masters can be perceived in the ancient sources, and, second, how those tensions were dealt with, as masters treated their slaves with varying forms of generosity and punishment in order to elicit obedience from them. Special attention is given to the slaves' family lives, to their acquisition of freedom through manumission, and to the climate of violence that surrounded them. Emphasizing the harsh realities of Roman slavery in a new way, this important book will stir intense debate among scholars and students.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

"A first-rate book....Excellent in drawing out the basic facts, and giving a wholly convincing interpretation....Clear, compassionate and compelling."--JACT"An informed interpretive essay on the means of social control inherent in the system of slavery in imperial Rome....The value of the book comes from the coherence and persuasiveness of [Bradley's] interpretation."--American Historical Review"An ideal book to recommend to students as an introduction to the controversies and problems of methodology involved in the study of ancient slavery....An excellent introductory survey."--Classical Review"In compact and accessible prose, Bradley has produced an innovative work of scholarship eminently suitable for courses on the Roman economy, society and the family

as well as slavery per se."--Suzanne Dixon, University of Queensland"will do nicely for an undergraduate one-semester course on Roman history....The book has lots in it and the better students will profit."--Thomas H. Watkins, Western Illinois University

K. R. Bradley is at University of Victoria, British Columbia.

I found Slaves and Masters in the Roman Empire: A Study in Social Control to be a tremendous resource for accurately building the relationships between the slave and free characters in my novel,Ã Â Rubies of the Viper. Anybody who is interested in this subject will find this book useful.Could slaves interact easily and openly with their owners? Were they educated? Smart? Moral? Loyal? The answer is: In many cases, yes.Certainly, there were many slaves who were uneducated, disloyal, conniving, and self-serving. Many never met their owners, much less built a personal relationship with them. Many adults and children were abused--sexually, physically, and psychologically--on a regular basis. Many spent their entire lives in conditions that we today simply cannot imagine or believe.But many Roman slaves managed their masters' estates competently and honestly. Many were true companions to their masters, often from childhood. Many served the same master loyally from birth to death.But they were still property... and that fact was never far from their minds.Every aspect of a Roman slave's life was 100% under the control of another person. The master determined what they ate and wore. What work they did, when, and how. What kinds of sexual relationships they could have.A master's understanding of what he wanted from his slaves--total obedience and loyalty, in most cases--and his methods of getting what he wanted were perfected long before the first century A.D. They consisted primarily of what we would call the carrot and the stick.The carrots: a tolerable life, decent food and living conditions, a semblance of family life, a chance to have their own savings and property (peculium), and a hope of manumissonThe sticks: corporal punishment, threats of being sold or sent to labor on a plantation, and even the possibility of death at the master's sole discretion

OKAY TO READ

This book is an excellent introduction to the social condition of slavery in the Roman world. The only thing lacking is more of a historical sense of how things changed and why. Bradley does a good job of balancing the "master" view with the "slave" view, presenting several sides to each issue without much moralizing of his own -- a rare thing often in the history of slavery. A good book for both

undergraduate and graduate and a good basic text to begin research from.

Bradley asks how the Romans controlled their slaves. He discovers that "It is indisputable that physical coercion from the owner played a large part in servile life...and that subjection to brutality was a basic component of slavery" (p 122).There were all kinds of slaves, from the workers in the mines, who apparently endured unbelievable cruelty, to the pampered nannies of the rich. It is difficult to truly understand Roman slaves since there is no slave literature (p 18). However, we have the records which have been left, and the advice about slaves left by wealthy landowners.Slaves appear to have been considered utterly base by their owners. The owners had a long litany of complaints about their slaves. They stole; they lied; they were lazy, were common complaints.Although Roman law forbade slaves to marry, slaves of course did form families, although they could be sold at any time. There appear to have been many more male slaves than female ones (p 73). Some were later freed, perhaps by wills, or perhaps by saving up enough money to buy their own freedom."Domitian first forbade the castration of slaves" (128), although eunuchs were ubiquitous for centuries.A fascinating book.

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This is an excellent overview of the ways in which masters controlled their slaves in the Roman Empire. It doesn’t go into incredible specifics (but considering the resources available, this is not surprising). Think of it more as a really long essay instead of as a book. It’s a fast and easy read

and can be done in a few hours. That being said, I agree with the other reviewer who says it lacks specifics on how master/slave relationships changed over time. I don't, however, think that really detracts from the value of the book.

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