In recent years, scholars have studied with increasing sophistication many aspects of the agricultural economy of the Roman Empire, including the development and diffusion of technology, such as olive presses and wine presses and water mills, settlement patterns, land tenure systems, Roman legal and administrative policy toward agriculture, and the economic mentality of Roman landowners. These questions are important to the field of ancient history, since agriculture was the basis of the ancient economy, employing the vast majority of the population at every stage in Rome’s history. Indeed, the impressive development of cities that is a hallmark of Roman civilization required the production of surpluses sufficient to maintain urban populations that were not matched in Europe again until the early-modern period. Roman agriculture is thus crucial to the most important issues in the economic history of the Roman world, such as the overall capacity of the Roman economy in comparison to those of other pre-industrial societies, the degree to which the Roman Empire experienced economic growth, and the prosperity of different classes in society, including landowners, tenants, and even slaves. In his book, Werner Tietz contributes to this debate by providing a broad survey of Roman agriculture that focuses primarily on agricultural practices, the organization of farms and estates, and rural life. He traces the history of Roman agriculture in its various stages, including its beginnings in the bronze age, through the small-scale peasant agriculture of the early Roman Republic, the profound changes in the late Roman Republic, and the development of vast estates owned by the emperor and members of the senatorial order in the imperial period.

The most valuable aspect of this book is its presentation of the realities of agrarian life, which include the agricultural methods that farmers used to achieve their subsistence or to produce marketable surpluses, as well as the physical conditions under which farmers lived. The focus is primarily on Roman Italy, but T. also includes some discussion of agricultural conditions in the Roman provinces in the latter part of the book. T. incorporates an impressive range of archaeological evidence for the types of buildings associated with ancient farms as well as for the equipment that Roman farmers used. In discussing the everyday challenges of agriculture, T. makes effective use of literary sources, not simply the Roman agricultural writers, Cato the Elder, Varro, Columella, Pliny the Elder, and Palladius, but also imaginative literary works, such as the Moretum, attributed to Virgil, Longus’ Daphnis and Chloe, and Apuleius’ Metamorphoses. These fictional works are valuable because the authors depict seemingly realistic settings in which the readers could be expected to recognize familiar aspects of daily life. T. also makes considerable use of Virgil’s Georgics, which, in his view, provide a deeply considered portrayal of the challenges that farmers faced. A second major contribution that T. makes is to discuss the changing cultural values that Roman society attached to agriculture. Thus in the late Republic Roman writers celebrated figures such as Cincinnatus in the fifth century BCE, or Curius Dentatus in the third century, as exemplars of the Roman ideal of the citizen-farmer, even as their own society was changing. In the very late Republic and early empire, by
contrast, the aristocracy increasingly valued conspicuous displays of wealth on their estates.

The book is divided into seven chapters, as well as a brief conclusion. The first chapter (pp. 9–37) provides a broad introduction to Roman agriculture, with a survey of the climate and geology of Italy. In addition, this chapter offers a review of the most important sources of evidence, with most of the discussion devoted to the literary sources mentioned above. The second chapter (pp. 39–80) presents the early history of Italian agriculture, beginning with the introduction of sedentary agriculture into Italy in the bronze age. This chapter offers a valuable overview of the methods of cultivating the most important crops in Mediterranean agriculture, especially grain, olive oil, and wine, as well as a discussion of how animals important to the agriculture were raised, including draft animals, sheep and goats, cattle, pigs, and poultry. Throughout the volume, T. emphasizes the importance of considering livestock raising as an integral component of the agrarian economy and vitally important to the welfare of Roman farmers.

The third chapter (pp. 81–185), on small-scale cultivation, along with the following chapters on villa agriculture, represents the heart of the book. In the third chapter, T. depicts from a variety of perspectives the conditions surrounding the farm operated by a single family, whether the family owned the farm or occupied it as tenants. The individual farm remained a fundamental component of Roman agriculture from early Rome until late antiquity. T. offers a detailed account of the physical dimensions of a farm, with the types of buildings present on it, the range of crops cultivated, and the various types of equipment at the disposal of the farmer. T. also examines the social dimensions of small-scale farming, with discussion of the likely composition of a farming household, its nutritional requirements and the amount of land needed to support it, the problems of storing food, and the roles that various family members played on the family farm at different stages in their lives. An important issue connected with the welfare of farmers and their ability to produce surpluses is the productivity of cereal culture, since grain provided the bulk of calories in the ancient diet. T. addresses (pp. 154–57) this topic largely on the basis of the evidence of the Roman agricultural writers for sowing rates and yields, which he checks against comparative evidence for yields in pre-industrial and modern agriculture. T. also discusses such diverse topics as pastoralism and the social status of shepherds, and the cults associated with agriculture. In addition, to make the daily life of Roman farmers as vivid as possible, T. offers a season by season account of the various tasks that had to be carried out on the family farm over the course of a year.

In the following chapter (pp. 187–232), on villa agriculture in the third and second centuries BCE, T. focuses on upper-class investment strategies. Such investment led to the development of compact estates, staffed with slave labor, that provided wine and other foodstuffs for the growing urban markets in Rome, as well as in other cities in Italy. The physical dimensions and probable organization of the estates of the wealthy are an important theme, and T. focuses his discussion on estates on the Bay of Naples, such as the Villa Boscoreale, a compact estate created to specialize in the production of wine, and other, somewhat larger estates that produced wine and other crops (pp. 221–26). T. examines the conflicts that arose as the Roman elite accumulated increasing amounts of wealth and...
invested it in agriculture by focusing on the efforts of the Gracchi to redistribute land. In the fifth chapter (pp. 241–65), T. considers in detail the economic mentality of the wealthy elite in the first century BCE. These landowners were no longer simply concerned with investing in productive estates, but instead acquired properties with a view toward conspicuous displays of luxury. Such estates included fish ponds and parks in which wild animals could roam freely. Under the principate, this type of luxury characterized many of the estates of the emperors, and was also pursued by members of the senate, particularly by those from the provinces when senators were required, at least beginning in the second century, to invest a portion of their wealth in Italian land. The estates belonging to the elite, in T.’s view, played a diminishing role in furnishing Rome with food. Estates close to the city specialized in producing luxury food items as well as flowers, and those farther from the capital lost out to competition from the provinces, from which it was cheaper to import grain and olive oil by sea than to ship it overland in Italy, a topic that T. also pursues in the sixth chapter. This position, however, is debatable. While the development of specialized agriculture in the region surrounding Rome is undeniable, as is the reliance of Rome on grain from overseas to support the *annona* in Rome, the estates owned by the elite continued to produce foodstuffs and wine for the market, as is clearly illustrated by the experience of Pliny the Younger. T. rightly provides an interesting discussion of the changes in agriculture in the late Republic, but it would be helpful to have more of a discussion of the hotly debated topic of Italy’s population in this period. On the basis of Augustan census figures in the *Res Gestae* (ch. 8), it has traditionally been argued that the total population of Italy at the time of Augustus was on the order of six million. But in recent years another interpretation is that the population was much larger, perhaps twice that of traditional interpretations. Estimating the total population of Italy is clearly important for understanding the welfare of the Roman farmer, which, as was common in pre-industrial agrarian economies, was directly tied to the demand for land.

The sixth chapter (pp. 267–332) addresses the vast topic of landownership patterns in the provinces during the imperial period. This chapter treats the methods that the Roman administration developed to manage imperial estates, that is, estates formally owned by the emperor and administered by the imperial treasury, or Fiscus. T. provides a brief discussion of the methods that the Roman administration used to manage imperial estates in Africa, and uses these as a basis for understanding the management of private estates. In Africa, the Fiscus leased land on its estates out to tenants, *coloni*, who land long-term tenure rights to their land. In addition, the Fiscus employed middlemen, *conductores*, who entered into short-term leases with the Fiscus to collect the rents from the tenants. In T.’s analysis, such a method of managing land would make sense for wealthy private landowners, whose estates were too vast to be effectively administered using the structures adopted in Italian villa culture. T.’s conclusion seems likely, to judge by epigraphical evidence for the organization of estates in North Africa and Asia Minor, but one must recognize that there were also significant differences between imperial and private estates – to cite one example, imperial tenants were often exempt from civic liturgies, and this situation could lead to conflicts
between the imperial administration and the governments of towns near imperial estates. In a section devoted to the labor on estates, T. argues against exaggerating the importance of slave labor to agriculture in the empire, and argues that in many regions large estates were generally cultivated by tenants. This is a reasonable position, but it does not seem likely that the rents that tenants paid were as modest as T. argues, representing between ten and thirty percent of the harvest, or even lower (pp. 161, 301). This chapter also includes a treatment of large estates in Gaul and Germany. The seventh chapter (pp. 333–45) addresses agrarian changes in late antiquity with a focus on the emergence of the colonate and the changes in Germany that resulted from the upheavals of the fifth century. T. joins with recent scholarship in seeing the late antique economy as characterized by a substantial degree of productivity and prosperity. One sign of this is the widespread diffusion of water mills.

The presentation of the material throughout the book is without footnotes or references, so that it is not easy for the reader to follow up on interesting points. T. does include a brief bibliography for each chapter, and he supplements his discussion with illustrative quotations from ancient literary and epigraphical sources in translation. Since the subject of the book is very broad, it would be impossible to include larger bibliographies on the many topics it covers. Still, it would be helpful for the reader to have more of a guide to the scholarly discussions of individual topics. There are a few errors that might mislead the reader: the price of the estate whose purchase Pliny considers in Ep. 3.19 was reduced from five to three million sesterces, not from 50 to 30 million (pp. 272, 303); the discussion of the North Africa imperial estates confuses the lex Manciana, from the first century CE, and the lex Hadriana concerning unused lands; and the letter quoted to illustrate agrarian conditions in Egypt is from the third century BCE (pp. 298–99). T.’s study best serves the interests of students and general readers seeking a broad understanding of the historical and cultural significance of Roman agriculture as it was practiced in Italy. The most valuable parts of the book are the sections that deal with agricultural practices and the realities of rural life.

New Orleans

Dennis Kehoe


Small in size, Jörg Rüpke’s ‘From Jupiter to Christ’ is a big book. Released in German in 2011 (‘Von Jupiter zu Christus’), this text is Rüpke’s attempt to redefine Roman Imperial religion. He is right to say that Christianity in this period has been studied against either a «Jewish canvas» or a «virtual vacuum», and that the imperial cult has monopolized scholarship on ‘Roman religious history’ (1). Alternatively, Rüpke posits a model where, instead of religions or cults competing, regional cultural economies adopted and altered religious signs; that is, the Imperial Age witnessed not a proliferation of religions, but a fundamental change in the phenomenon itself. By taking a prosopographic approach and highlighting