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## UCLA Historical Journal

### Title

Thomas A. J. McGinn. *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 2004. Pp. xv, 359. \$80.00

### Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7pv4n0r8>

### Journal

UCLA Historical Journal, 21(0)

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### Publication Date

2006

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Thomas A. J. McGinn. *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World: A Study of Social History and the Brothel*. Ann Arbor: The University of Michigan Press. 2004. Pp. xv, 359. \$80.00

Thomas A. J. McGinn's *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World* is an attempt to define and examine the business of venal sex and to delineate the difficulties of locating and interpreting the venues through which prostitution occurred. He proposes moreover to discover, to the extent possible, the lived experience of the women who worked in the profession; a difficult venture, given the pervasive elite male bias of the sources. Chronologically, the study spans the central part of Roman history, from approximately 200 B.C.E. to 250 C.E. It focuses geographically on the site which provides the greatest degree of material evidence in the Roman world, the city of Pompeii.

The central question of the book is concerned with how precisely the Romans managed the business of prostitution. Specifically, did they have a coherent public policy, either towards prostitutes themselves or the profession in general? Did they practice any form of moral zoning, in which prostitutes were banned from sections of the city? Here, McGinn finds himself in disagreement with Andrew Wallace-Hadrill, who is otherwise frequently cited and much relied upon.

Surveying a wide variety of evidence, McGinn moves easily through a mass of literary, legal, archeological, material, and pictorial sources. In addition to the ancient evidence, he employs comparative history to clarify the unique position the Romans hold in their management of and response to prostitution within their society.

McGinn concludes that, although a number of legal rules can be discovered in the sources, the Romans did not have a coherent policy concerning the profession; rather, two trends, toleration and degradation, are discernable amidst the confusion of rules. As to the women themselves, it is difficult, given the lack of sources, to construct a comprehensive description of the average age or ethnic background. The number of prostitutes in the Roman world is also unable to be determined, as brothels were only one of several venues through which prostitution occurred. What does seem clear, however, is that many lower class women took up casual or part-time prostitution in order to supplement the family income. In a society where the possible avenues of employment were severely limited for women, comprising labor on the family farm, in a workshop, or in the marketplace, few options remained to those who required additional income. It appears likely, therefore, that these women

prostituted themselves on a part-time basis when it was economically necessary. Whether taken up by choice or coerced by a male family member, however, these women most often suffered a high degree of degradation and exploitation from both their employers and their clients.

McGinn devotes the first two chapters of his book to an examination of the "basic economics" of the trade. Arguably the best of the work, these chapters include comparisons of the earning potential between prostitutes and urban laborers or soldiers, and a discussion on venues of prostitution as an investment opportunity for pimps, masters, and landlords. Most venues through in sex was sold were owned and operated by the elite, who were bound only by the degree of their desire for profit and their ability to maximize the exploitation of their workers. Prostitution was a cash-rich venture, and therefore appealing to members of the aristocracy whose primary wealth was tied up in land. Prostitution was widespread, tending to be associated with places designed to attract large gatherings: inns, taverns, baths, and circuses; lower-class housing districts; and high-class special events. Clients were drawn primarily from the lower classes, as sex was easily found and relatively inexpensive.

The social organization of prostitution seems to have been left almost entirely to the private sector. Although the state had a vested interest in the organization of prostitution, as it benefited from the imposition of a tax and was concerned with the management of public peace, state intervention was fairly low. This may be because the Romans' moral stance on prostitution concluded that, like marriage (though unlike adultery), it was a form of licit sexuality; a healthy venue, moreover, for siphoning male sexual aggression away from respectable women. A policy therefore of toleration and regulation, rather than repression, was maintained. There is no evidence, as strange as it may seem, that the Romans attempted to confine prostitution within certain zones until the Christians introduced the idea (without noticeable results) in Constantinople in the fourth century.

McGinn concludes therefore that the basic motivating factor for the establishment of brothels and other forums for prostitution was the consideration of profit, which governed both their number and location. This conclusion seems simplistic in what is otherwise a lucid and compelling work. McGinn's study should be of interest to archaeologists, legal, social and economic historians, and those interested in the role and status of women in the ancient world.

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