

modes of combat were known to him. Without his ideology, the individual whom Hanson would have us know escapes us.

There is much information in this book, and the focus is novel and not without merit. Nevertheless, W. Kendrick Pritchett's *Greek State at War*, volumes 1-4 (1971-85), remains the authoritative study on virtually all matters, to be supplemented now with Robin Osborne's "The Field of War," in *Classical Landscape with Figures* (1987), pages 137-64.

EDMUND M. BURKE
Coe College

PETER GARNSEY. *Famine and Food Supply in the Graeco-Roman World: Responses to Risk and Crisis*. New York: Cambridge University Press. 1988. Pp. xiv, 303. \$39.50.

This is a provocative book. Peter Garnsey looks afresh at Greco-Roman society's vulnerability, and responses, to food crisis. A fundamental distinction is made, based on textual analyses, between food shortages and mortal famine, and one key conclusion from Garnsey's survey of recorded food crises in the Greco-Roman world is that food shortages were endemic whereas genuine famine was rare. Food shortages were a natural consequence of fluctuating yields in all areas of the Mediterranean, even those renowned for grain exports, and, at base, interseasonal climatic variability was to blame. But distributional inequalities exacerbated crop failure, so that one symptom of real famine is evidence that the wealthy succumbed alongside peasant and proletarian. Institutionalized mechanisms for local government to stabilize food supplies for ordinary folk failed because of the political dominance of the wealthy classes. Thus, a city faced with shortage had either to encourage traders to improve imports or to press the major landowners to release hoarded grain stocks. Responses to food crises were therefore usually ad hoc. Exceptions to these generalizations were the imperial capitals of Athens and Rome, where particular arrangements were made to facilitate food supplies.

The special needs of Athens and Rome arose from abnormal population growth, which far outstripped the capacity of their natural supply regions. Garnsey attacks one orthodox view, however, by suggesting that the fertility of the Attic countryside has been seriously underestimated and that Athens, because of that fertility, was reasonably self-sufficient until its population peaked in the climax of empire in the late fifth century.

Moving beyond these plausible conclusions, one is less satisfied with the methodology employed. Although showing some willingness to introduce data and models from other disciplines (for example, the history of climate), Garnsey remains a historian of traditional mold, building up arguments through a medieval process of cross-questioning the ancient written sources. Often, as in his discussion of the Athenian grain supply, Garnsey's criticisms of traditional textual read-

ings leave one doubting whether any firm viewpoint can be extracted from such ambiguous information. Furthermore, in his treatment of the sources for early Republican Rome, Garnsey would have us believe that he can separate fiction from fact, yet, by acknowledging no alternative evidence to resolve his dilemma, he often has to appeal to what is more probable, usually his preferred model.

Garnsey seems little aware of the necessity for historians of antiquity to broaden horizons and join with other specialists in analyzing the dynamics of the ancient world. When a scholar buttresses an argument on the potential fertility of Attica by reference to a German geographer of the turn of the century, I want to know why that scholar is content to mull over the question in the bleak corridors of a university library and does not get out to south-central Greece (ideally with the advice of a specialist on hand) to find out for himself or herself. He or she would then be in for additional surprises. Leaving ambivalent texts behind, the scholar would discover that German archaeologists have revealed dramatic rural expansion and contraction in the Athenian countryside in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C. Threshing floors, terracing, and well-built farmhouses imply a major impetus in food production, followed by abandonment for one thousand years. Evidence of this nature is flowing in from every province of the Greco-Roman world, revolutionizing our data base for understanding what actually occurred in ancient societies.

Garnsey decides that Polybius is totally unreliable and that his description of population decline and economic collapse in Hellenistic Greece can be ignored. If we consult that eminent historian F. W. Walbank, however, we read: "Polybius was a sane and balanced writer." Resolution comes from a recent archaeological survey of the towns and countryside of Boeotia, where the dramatic emptying of farmers from the countryside and contraction of towns fully bear out Polybius's account.

Garnsey paints a picture of a static society beyond the imperial capitals, prone to food scarcity from perennial factors. Restricted to the preoccupations of the ancient sources, he lacks a sense of trends operating at different time scales and out of phase from region to region of the ancient Mediterranean. The existence of agro-demographic cycles, which may take five hundred years to run their course, is clearly brought out by archaeology and a reading of ancient history informed by Annaliste approaches. Integrated textual and archaeological studies of provincial trade and settlement shifts have demonstrated how regional economies rose, fell, and diversified in responses to both internal cyclical pressures and changing modes of interregional interaction.

JOHN BINTLIFF
Durham University