Valuing Labour in Greco-Roman Antiquity

Edited by
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& KIM BOWES

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction: Value at Work

Miko Flohr and Kim Bowes

The COVID-19 pandemic revealed itself to the world in full force a couple of months before the colloquium from which this volume results was originally scheduled to take place. As an unprecedented, systemic and worldwide crisis, the pandemic produced an enormous upsurge in value discourse as societal and cultural principles and practices were suddenly turned upside-down: what is the desired ratio between safety and risk in the public sphere? Who has the authority to infringe upon fundamental liberties, and to what extent? What is the value of (scientific) expertise and knowledge, and what is the value of lived expertise and intuition? Suddenly, it seemed, everything was up for revaluation. In Europe and North America, the pandemic particularly exposed labour and its value. On both sides of the Atlantic, intense debates were held about what constituted 'essential work', and how it should be facilitated—and what it meant that so many people whose work was deemed essential had incomes far below their national average. At the same time as the pandemic hit, the meaning of work changed for everyone: suddenly, office-workers (and academics) had to do their professional work from a place that they normally associated mostly with their private lives and with leisure. People working in shops and factories suddenly found themselves at home, either with their days empty, or their workload doubled. For many people, the sudden disruption of their working lives led to a rethink of what they valued (and did not value) in their work. It was particularly prescient, then, that the papers in this volume were written and the conference itself took place at a moment when not only human values in general, but particularly the value of work, became a focus of such particular and urgent attention.

1 The Penn-Leiden Project

This volume results from the eleventh Penn-Leiden Colloquium on Ancient Values. In their programmatic introduction to their 2003 volume on manliness and courage in classical antiquity, the very first volume resulting from the Penn-Leiden project, Sluiter and Rosen sketched how the study of value discourse touches upon 'core issues of cultural identity and construction of self and soci-

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ety, including the behavioural norms by which one judges the social value of others and is in turn judged oneself'.[1] They also stressed the way in which value discourse can be transhistorical: the study of value discourse in antiquity can be used to contextualize (and better understand) value discourse in our contemporary world—both in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, when the first volume of this project was produced, and during and after the COVID-19 pandemic, when this volume took shape. Thinking about value discourse connects worlds far apart.

The intellectual agenda of the Penn-Leiden project started from the ancient lexicon, and was both philological and conceptual: Sluiter and Rosen write how 'a sound philological exploration of the ancient conceptual framework … supplemented by the study of actual behaviour' would 'form the basis for extrapolation and further theorizing'.[2] In introducing the volume on manliness, Sluiter and Rosen highlighted their interest in both concept formation and the rhetorical and performative character of the use of concepts in discourse. Subsequent volumes developed this approach by focusing on value discourse from different perspectives. We refer the reader to the introductory chapters in the volumes resulting from the ten preceding Penn-Leiden Colloquia to develop a sense of the way in which the Penn-Leiden project has studied value discourse from a broad range of conceptual vantage points: manliness, free speech, city and countryside, badness, others, aesthetics, the past, landscape, competition and nighttime.[3] We note that each of these vantage points not only came with a unique perspective on ancient value discourse—each volume covers a different place in the cultural landscape of the Greco-Roman world—but often also added a new element to the conceptual anatomy of valuing practices. For example, as Sluiter and Rosen have highlighted in several introductions, the individualistic focus of the volume on ἀνδρεία and *virtus* was followed by a more community-oriented focus in the volume on free speech, and by a spatially focused approach in the third volume of the series, on city and countryside.[4] As argued by Ker and Pieper, the volume on valuing the past added in the factor of (historical) time.[5]

1 Sluiter and Rosen 2003, 3.

2 Sluiter and Rosen 2003, 4.

3 Free speech: Sluiter and Rosen 2004; city and countryside: Rosen and Sluiter 2006; badness: Sluiter and Rosen 2008; others: Rosen and Sluiter 2010; aesthetics: Sluiter and Rosen 2012; the past: Pieper and Ker 2014; landscape: McInerney and Sluiter 2016 competition: Damon and Pieper 2018; nighttime: Ker and Wessels 2020.

4 Sluiter and Rosen 2006, 2.

5 Ker and Pieper 2014, 1.

By exploring ancient value discourse around 'labour' and 'work', this volume broadens the Penn-Leiden project towards the study of everyday human practices—things that humans do (routinely) on an everyday basis, like eating, sleeping and moving around. It is self-evident that there is a value discourse around such activities, and that such activities can play a fundamental role in discourse about values: if person X does activity Y under circumstances Z ('Fullers stand with their feet in rotten urine while they work'), this can, in itself, be judged as more or less desirable, normal or acceptable ('It is dirty, and I do not want to have to do anything with it!'); on top of that, however, such a situation can also in itself come to play an illuminating role in discussing what is desirable, normal or acceptable, and under which circumstances ('You know what is dirty? Fullers standing with their feet in rotten urine!').[6] It is this discursive power of everyday practices like labour and work that makes them an indispensable part of the Penn-Leiden project on the 'language, discourse and conceptualization of values in classical antiquity'.[7]

2 Definitions of Labour and Work

It is worth pausing here to consider what has been meant by words like 'labour' and 'work', and how they will be used in this volume. This is particularly important as the following chapters will interrogate the aspects of work and labour to which value is attached. That is, asking how work is valued—morally, economically, socially—involves asking what work *is*.

Modern dictionary definitions of labour emphasize exertion, and to a lesser extent, obligation: 'an instance of physical or mental exertion, a piece of work that has been or is to be performed; a task'; definitions of work are far more general—'to act, do, function, operate'.[8] Modern sociological theories about 'labour' and 'work' have generally insisted on their distinct qualities: labour encompasses mostly remunerative activities while work includes all kinds of efforts 'that add value to goods and services', many of which are not remunerated and thus are often marginalized, like household work.[9] Such theories also draw an important defining line between work or labour on the one hand,

6 On the actual (limited!) use of urine by fullers see Flohr and Wilson 2011, 150–151; Flohr 2013, 103–104.

7 Sluiter and Rosen 2012, 6.

8 'Labour/labour, n.' OED online. 2022; 'work, v.' OED online. 2022.

9 Tilly and Tilly 1998, 22.

and leisure on the other, which serves as a notional if not actual antonym.[10] This volume will largely (although not completely) ignore these modern distinctions, and start from the idea that the concepts encompassed by 'work' and 'labour' in practice are overlapping and circumscribe an important sphere of human activity. We further argue that the English lexical distinctions and definitions are largely unhelpful in ancient contexts: the following chapters cumulatively suggest that Greeks and Romans had different sets of definitions for work/labour, in which the work versus labour and work versus leisure distinctions evident in English, and in capitalist societies more generally, are hard to apply consistently.

Thus, in what follows, labour and work will be used interchangeably to refer to something broader than profession or occupation or remunerated activities, although profession and remuneration are everywhere present here. That is, the volume speaks consistently beyond the OED definition of 'labour'. At the same time, it addresses something narrower than simply the effort to survive, and defines labour/work as those activities directed to particular ends and/or desires. That is, the volume employs a somewhat narrower usage than the OED definition of 'work'. Thus, farming and attentive listening, sculpting and philosophical thinking, emotional support and manual labour all fall under the rubric of work/labour considered here. A worker or labourer is simply anyone who does these things. This is not to argue that all these kinds of labour were called by the equivalent terms in Greek and Latin—although the range of activities and value attachments described by words like πόνος, *labor* and *opera* were, this volume argues, surprisingly wide and nuanced—but we do believe that they all fall within one sphere of human activity, and that people could think of them, debate or compare them in similar or comparable terms.

In starting from a broad working definition of work/labour we hope to both draw attention to a broader range of activities than those addressed in traditional studies of Greek and Roman professions, and in doing so become alert to a more diverse valuation of work which, in ancient philosophical texts, is particularly dependent on context—how work is done, who does it, and to what ends. As the essays in this volume show, ancient Greeks and Romans valued work not only by virtue of activity types—as often defined by profession—but as much or more so as a consequence of those activities' framing attributes—skill, status of the doer, ends to which the work was carried out, the nature of the thing produced, or the character of the consumer. As argued below, these qualifying attributes were often missed in earlier, more negative evaluations of

10 Anderson 1961. See more recently on the subject Lucassen 2021.

work in antiquity: returning them to the discussion requires a broader definition of our terms, a breadth which, as the first chapters of this volume will suggest, are already present in the nuanced meaning of πόνος, *labor*, *opera* and other ancient terms for work.

One of the qualifiers that is not highlighted in the modern definitions of work/labour but lurks behind many of the ancient discussions of work is repetition. The notion that an activity which is repeated over and over is thus improved by doing and earns its practitioner a set of skills is one of the places where ancient thinking on work lingers. In a non-mechanized society, repetition was not only socially ubiquitous but thus also ontologically interesting in a way that is not captured by modern definitions and their post-industrial connotations. In this way, knowledge creation, poetic performance, glassmaking and sculpting all share something in ancient discourses of work that is missing in a heuristic based on modern conceptualizations of work and labour.

Also missing from modern categories, but a constant theme in this volume, are the ambiguous relationships between activity, agent, object and consumer. In modern labour theory, activity sits at the fore. Even in Marxist paradigms where the agent and object are ontologically linked to activity, the consumer of the final product is left to a different sphere. It is the potential ontological integration of all four of these elements in ancient thought—from the work to the end use of its product with all the various actors in between—which makes the valuation of work so complex and nuanced. It was not simply the fact that an activity was 'good' or 'bad': the character of the person doing it, the character of the entity who would consume the final product, the physical properties of the activity or the final product—all these contributed to the valuation of ancient labour. Indeed, all labour need not be valued in the same way: the skill required might be valued, yet the activity denigrated for its unpleasantness or form of remuneration; the final product might be praised for its beauty, or excoriated for its end use. Silk-working is one such contradictory category. Fulling is another: the fuller's skill in transforming garments from old to new-looking was the object of much praise, while their handling of other people's valued possessions could be an object of derision.[11] The product here is also distinct from the dependency status of the labouring agent—a nuance that was often missed in earlier approaches to work in antiquity.

11 Flohr 2013, 324–328.

3 Ancient Work and Classical Scholarship

Work/labour has a long and charged intellectual history in the study of Greek and Roman antiquity; the terms of modern academic discourse were essentially defined in the later nineteenth century, in debates that explored the position of the ancient Mediterranean *vis-à-vis* modernity.[12] While scholars differed in their assessment of the position of work and labour in Greek and Roman society, the cultural evaluation of labour was a key element in this scholarship, and over the mid-twentieth century the field became increasingly dominated by a school of thought in which, based on particularly literary and philosophical texts, work and labour were often (though not universally) evaluated negatively.

M.I. Finley's *The Ancient Economy* perhaps can be seen as the most elaborate and mature expression of this perspective. Finley argued that Greek and Roman elites kept their distance—practically and culturally—from physical labour, and instead glorified landed property, leisure and political business. Hence, Finley believed, they had a positive view of wealth: 'among the necessary conditions of freedom were personal independence and leisure'. Not having to work was, according to Finley, a good thing; conversely, the key characteristic of poverty (*penia*) was 'the harsh compulsion to toil'.[13] While admitting that there were clear signs to the contrary in some of the evidence, Finley argued that, in the end, the overall judgment was not very positive:

> Skill was honoured and admired to be sure, but pride in craftsmanship is a psychological phenomenon that is not to be confused with a positive evaluation of work as such. Even Plato was a great admirer of workmanship and made innumerable positive analogies to the skilled craftsman, while ranking that skill very low in his hierarchy of values.[14]

While in later scholarship Finley became the figurehead of the negative approach to work and labour by classical scholars, his ideas were deeply rooted in twentieth-century classical studies, and could be connected to a range of statements by Greek and Roman authors at the heart of the classical canon.[15] Here, we want to particularly highlight two: Aristotle's *Politics* and Cicero's *On Duties*.

12 For a more comprehensive historiographical overview of this issue see Flohr and Wilson 2016. Some earlier discussions include Veyne 1987, 117–137; Mrozek 1989, 46–53, 125–132.

13 Finley 1973, 40–41.

14 Finley 1973, 82; Characteristically, Finley gave no references.

15 See on this earlier scholarship Flohr and Wilson 2016.

Aristotle, at various points in his *Politics*, suggests that τὸ βάναυσον ('the artisanate') has an uneasy relationship with citizenship. In Book 3, he argues that either artisans should not be made citizens *or* that the virtue (ἀρετή) associated with citizenship should not extend to all citizens (Arist. *Pol.* 1278a7–11. Trans. Rackham 1944, 197):

> In ancient times in fact the artisan class in some states consisted of slaves or aliens, owing to which the great mass of artisans are so even now; and the best-ordered state will not make an artisan a citizen. While if even the artisan is a citizen, then what we said to be the citizen's virtue must not be said to belong to every citizen, nor merely be defined as the virtue of a free man, but will only belong to those who are released from menial occupations (ἔργα ἀναγκαῖα).
>
> ἐν μὲν οὖν τοῖς ἀρχαίοις χρόνοις παρ' ἐνίοις ἦν δοῦλον τὸ βάναυσον ἢ ξενικόν, διόπερ οἱ πολλοὶ τοιοῦτοι καὶ νῦν· ἡ δὲ βελτίστη πόλις οὐ ποιήσει βάναυσον πολίτην. εἰ δὲ καὶ οὗτος πολίτης, ἀλλὰ πολίτου ἀρετὴν ἣν εἴπομεν λεκτέον οὐ παντός, οὐδ' ἐλευθέρου μόνον, ἀλλ' ὅσοι τῶν ἔργων εἰσὶν ἀφειμένοι τῶν ἀναγκαίων.

Those involved in ἔργα ἀναγκαῖα, Aristotle specifies, include δοῦλοι ('slaves'), βάναυσοι ('handworkers') and θῆτες ('hired labourers'). Later, in Book 7, when discussing the εὐδαιμονία ('happiness') of *poleis*, Aristotle makes the point that no *polis* can be happy unless it is governed by virtuous people. This means that (Arist. *Pol.* 1328b38–1329a2. Trans. Rackham, LCL 264, 575):

> … in the most nobly constituted state, and the one that possesses men that are absolutely just, not merely just relatively to the principle that is the basis of the constitution, the citizens must not live a mechanic or a mercantile life (for such a life is ignoble and inimical to virtue), nor yet must those who are to be citizens in the best state be tillers of the soil (for leisure is needed both for the development of virtue and for active participation in politics).
>
> … ἐν τῇ κάλλιστα πολιτευομένῃ πόλει, καὶ τῇ κεκτημένῃ δικαίους ἄνδρας ἁπλῶς ἀλλὰ μὴ πρὸς τὴν ὑπόθεσιν, οὔτε βάναυσον βίον οὔτ' ἀγοραῖον δεῖ ζῆν τοὺς πολίτας (ἀγεννὴς γὰρ ὁ τοιοῦτος βίος καὶ πρὸς ἀρετὴν ὑπεναντίος), οὐδὲ δὴ γεωργοὺς εἶναι τοὺς μέλλοντας ἔσεσθαι (δεῖ γὰρ σχολῆς καὶ πρὸς τὴν γένεσιν τῆς ἀρετῆς καὶ πρὸς τὰς πράξεις τὰς πολιτικάς).

There can be no virtue (ἀρετή) without leisure (σχολή), and if citizens are not virtuous, a city cannot be εὐδαίμων. Labour occurs at the expense of leisure, so it is at odds with virtue and therefore with true citizenship.

Cicero's famous passage close to the end of the first book of *On Duties* to some extent echoes Aristotle's image of those involved in labour as unfit for true citizenship, though he uses freedom rather than citizenship as his marker of status, and contrasts labour that is *liberalis* (or *ingenuus*) with labour that is *illiberalis* (or *sordidus*). *Sordidus* is labour that annoys other people by touching upon their financial independence, such as tax-farming and moneylending, and labour that is done for money, and does not involve any skill: 'for in their case the very wage they receive is a pledge of their slavery'. All *opifices* ('workers') remain on the illiberal side of the divide: *nec enim quicquam ingenuum habere potest officina* ('for no workshop can have anything liberal about it').[16] Particularly *illiberalis* are people who earn money by catering for the pleasures of other people (one could perhaps see this as tacitly including 'emotional labour', see below). Conversely, on the liberal side of the divide are forms of labour that involve intelligence or serve the common good. Trade on a larger scale, particularly when serving the community, can even be lauded—and, as is well known, agriculture tops Cicero's moral hierarchy of labour: 'But of all the occupations by which gain is secured, none is better than agriculture, none more profitable, none more delightful, none more becoming to a freeman.'[17]

Alongside several other texts, these passages in Cicero and Aristotle were fundamental in shaping the mid-twentieth-century idea that labour, and particularly professional labour, was judged negatively by Greeks and Romans. However, it is important to read these passages carefully, both for what they say and do not say about labour, and for the ideological and rhetorical agenda that they serve. In the first place, it is important to note that it is generally not the activities themselves that are being evaluated, but their socio-economic context—thus, it is not the effort of *opifices* that is illiberal, but the fact that they do it at the service of others; it is not the ἔργα of Aristotle's βάναυσοι that set them at odds with citizenship, but the fact that they were ἀναγκαῖα. Secondly, both Aristotle and Cicero have a clear ideological agenda: Aristotle is trying to define what the ideal *polis* looks like, and the political division of labour. He argues that politics is a skill that requires time and practice: involvement in ἔργα ἀναγκαῖα reduces the time and autonomy required to develop political skills.

16 Cic. *Off*. 1.150. Trans. Miller 1913, 153.

17 Cic. *Off*. 1.151: *Nihil est agri cultura melius, nihil uberius, nihil dulcius, nihil homine libero dignius*. Trans. Miller 1913, 155.

Cicero, in turn, is defining the orderly behaviour of the *homo liber*, the (male) Roman elite citizen—people essentially like himself; what he calls *illiberalis* or *sordidus* are practices that he felt did not fit this in-group of citizen-politicians but rather were the domain of a (negatively defined) out-group.

4 Recent Approaches

While Finley's reductionist view on ancient work was provocative from the start, it is only since the turn of the millennium that scholarship has definitively shifted away from his ideas. *The Ancient Economy* has been set aside in favour of a more positive and detailed examination of work in ancient life. This shift has largely taken two forms. The first has been a reassessment of the role of labour in ancient economic systems. The impact of New Institutional Economics on ancient economic studies has drawn scholars to examine questions of labour markets, labour efficiency, the factors driving specialization, the question of wages and 'real' wages, and labour hierarchies.[18] Examination of labour and contract law has also helped define and nuance what labour meant in legal contexts, particularly the complex distinctions between enslaved and free labour.[19] The second part of this shift has been work on specific types of occupations. Where Finley could speak generically of workers and craftsmen, now there are whole volumes dedicated to the specialized work of different kinds of crafts: fulling, baking, woodworking, potting, textile manufacturing—with the list expanding each year.[20] This work has drawn attention to the highly specialized nature of many types of work, particularly during the Roman empire—and the specialized knowledge and division of labour involved in everything from baking a loaf of bread to polishing cloth. This work thus draws into sharper relief the ancients' own preoccupation with skill—particularly specialized skill, the repetitive work needed to attain such skill—but also what they perceived as the more negative aspects of specialization.[21] This work, too, has shifted scholarship away from a dependence on the elite literary sources, as typified by Finley's work, towards other evidence—epigraphy, papyrology and archaeological sources, many of which, while not unknown before, have become increasingly

18 E.g. Ruffing 2008; Scheidel 2010; Tran 2013; Verboven and Laes 2016; Hawkins 2016; Wilson and Flohr 2016.

19 E.g. Cohen 1998; Thomas 2004; Silver 2006; Freu 2022.

20 E.g. Flohr 2013; Ulrich 2007; Monteix 2016, Van Oyen 2016; Hasaki 2021; Gallnö 2013; Larsson Lovén 2013; Harris, Lewis and Stewart 2020.

21 E.g. Bond 2016; Hochscheid and Russell 2021.

available in large databases. As a result, recent scholarship has begun to include something of non-elite perspectives on labour, although the New Institutional framework in which much of this work has been carried out has, perhaps, perpetuated a new top-down kind of analysis, now with the market taking the place of the elite male author.

As already noted by Ian Morris in his still-seminal 1999 introduction to the third edition of Finley's *The Ancient Economy*, the post-Finleyan literature on the ancient economy has disagreed with most with Finley's conceptions of ancient economic performance.[22] Much less discussed have been Finley's notions about ancient economic thinking.[23] As described above, the negative valuation of labour was central to Finley's characterization of a world which assigned no value to work, valued only status, and thus condemned itself to an economy without any particular economic thinking, an overgrown household operating at the level of large elite families and the state. While most of the work of the past fifteen years has rejected the rest of Finley's tenets, the question of what constituted ancient economic thinking, and its attendant and all-important system of values, has not received the same degree of attention.

The present volume addresses this issue at two levels. The chapters immediately following this introduction revisit many of the canonical texts upon which the twentieth century scholars constructed their largely negative view of labour, culminating in Finley's *The Ancient Economy*. They return to them with various apparatus of literary and cultural criticism to understand the political and rhetorical place within which these texts valued work, and unpack what are almost always revealed to be far more nuanced views. In part, that nuance is to be found in the composite definitions of work—of agent, tasks, objects and consumers—which characterize ancient definitions, and thus the contextual framework within which work is valued. It is not enough, these chapters cumulatively argue, to claim that manual labour was bad or that artists were mere craftsmen: more is almost always at stake, and more is almost always being said. Secondly, many other chapters in this volume draw on evidence produced by working people themselves and thus reflect their communities' own value discourse about labour: artists signatures, honorific inscriptions, funerary epitaphs, even grave goods all allow us some insight into how ancient workers valued their own labour, and, like the philosophical and literary sources, provide a composite view of that value via the other value systems operating in their particular cultural contexts—civic, family and philanthropic values.

22 Morris 1999.

23 An important exception are the articles collected in Andreau, France and Pittia 2004 on Roman economic thinking.

This volume, then, contributes to a missing discussion on a subject which has deep implications for ancient economic thought, even though its approach or subject are not necessarily economic. Conversely, it introduces an element of the economic into other ancient values which seem to lack it—human cosmologies and relationship with the gods; the role of the individual in the city or state; debates about how to live the morally good life. Indeed, one of its cumulative findings is that the concept of 'the good' is rarely totally divorced from labour: as Ineke Sluiter shows, the very idea of knowledge as 'good' presupposes labour as a kind of prototype of knowledge—the know-how of the τεχνικός is the prototype of knowledge itself, a know-how which is embedded in repetition and accumulated work. This notion—that things valued as good by ancient thinkers require work to exist—is central to the first chapters of this volume.

At the same time, our volume does not posit a simplistic positive view in place of a historiography of negative views. Many of its contributions address the particular context in which labour is denigrated, unpacking its composite elements—agent, activity, remuneration, object and consumer—and interrogating them for their different valuations. Wages are one such aspect: as Freu shows here, the expansion of wage labour under the Roman empire presented a dilemma for Stoic traditions, with some like Cicero viewing the commodification of work as an unmitigated evil, reserving a positive space nonetheless for those engaged in the remunerated work of the mind. At the same time, as Argyriou-Casmeridis shows, the willingness to forgo wages or offer their work at lower prices is a recurring *exemplum* of virtue in Hellenistic inscriptions honouring doctors, philosophers and musicians. In short, this volume collectively describes the many nuances of labour value discourse and proposes a set of methods for unpacking and revealing them.

5 Key Themes

The volume is organized into four major sections, based on some key methodological and thematic issues, on which more below. Throughout these sections, however, runs a set of themes that appear in multiple contributions, and which in themselves deserve some mention, as they represent the major outcomes of the volume. Each theme, in its own way, offers a novel perspective on valuing labour, and labour discourse, in the ancient world.

The first and perhaps most important thematic thread is the non-discrete valuation of labour and its embeddedness in other systems of value, many of which have been taken up in this Penn-Leiden series. Skill, application, expert-

ise and other attributes of labour are valued—or not—in the context of civic belonging, philanthropy, excellence, social status, family, autonomy and other ideals, rather than simply on their own merits. Thus, Argyriou-Casmeridis finds poets and musicians praised for their skill as part of their euergetism to their own or visited cities; Massar finds potters and painters in Athens signing themselves with their demotic or citizenship appellation as a means of 'branding' their wares; Brown notes that the display of working rural bodies relies on images of urban spectacle; Freu's observations about wage labour are embedded in a discourse about autonomy. Even Hochscheid's Athenian metics seem to benefit from a kind of informal adoption by their host city, combined with a valuation of their particular skills as craftsmen. This intersection of labour-value with other kinds of values should again warn us against modern views of labour whose value is abstract and singular, like 'work ethic'. More positively, it should also alert us to the importance of work and labour in the constitution of things like civic belonging, self-sufficiency, religious observance, the rural life and so on. Modern scholars have not always recognized the role of labour—or at least categories of labour discourse—in the social construction of these values; integrating 'labour' into our approaches to ideas about, for instance, citizenship, or piety, allows us to find places for working people in status categories where we have, either tacitly or explicitly, omitted them.

Another important theme concerns the issue of positionality—the overlap and difference in how labourers valued themselves, and how others, particularly elite intellectuals, assigned value to labourers, their work or their products. In this volume, the elite perspective is addressed most pointedly in the first section, which takes up some of the paradigmatic philosophical and literary texts that were used to construct the Finleyan paradigm. These top-down assessments of labour's value stress ontologies and dissect most plainly the composite nature of labour's value. However, thanks to the extension of our sources outside this corpus, we can also now get a sense of how labourers thought about themselves—through graffiti, signatures, art-historical analysis and archaeological data. These not only provide a bottom-up perspective but, in part due to the nature of the sources, the language and nature of labour-value in these sources are different. More truncated signatures and graffiti rely on appellatives (like origin) and adjectives (e.g. positive or negative descriptions of products or customers) to gesture to value. In Brent and Prowse's study of grave goods, these values are conveyed through a symbolic language—tools symbolize the labour they were used for and thus the deceased's economic–social role or lifetime of effort. This bottom-up evidence is distinct in important ways from the literary and philosophical corpus and should be recognized as such: that is, it constitutes a distinct vernacular which is not simply a shorthand version of the

intellectual perspective. As part of this series on ancient values, the recognition of this vernacular marks an important step forward. There is more to values than elite literature.

The present volume also distinguishes itself from earlier scholarship on work and labour because it includes chapters on both (agricultural) work in the countryside and on the occupations taking place in urban contexts, thus obliterating the traditional, almost disciplinary divide between city- and country-oriented scholarship. This is a direct consequence of the fact that our focus is on value discourse, in which both the countryside *and* the city are inescapable—and directly comparable: rural and urban labour were part of the same value discourse. Thus, the mosaic with rural scenes discussed by Nicole Brown was found in an *urban* context, on the outskirts of the Roman city of Vienna in Southern Gaul. In some texts, rural and urban labour also were weighed directly against one another—as happens in Horace's second epode on the landowning moneylender Alfius discussed in the chapter by Faber—or described in similar terms—as the chapter by Mulhern suggests, a word like πονέω can be used for all categories of effort, independent of their aim or location. For Aristotle, as quoted above, it also did not matter whether the work that kept people from leisure was urban or rural: in both cases, the result was that people had no opportunity to develop the necessary political experience. While earlier scholarship has often emphasized the difference in valuation between rural and urban work, the chapters of this volume suggest that this distinction should not be overemphasized: other distinctions mattered more, particularly the distinction between dependent and independent work, and between skilled and unskilled work.

A fourth recurring theme concerns the circumstances under which both effort and skill—in many respects the key components of work/labour—could be positively evaluated, highlighting that there was no intrinsic bias against work/labour. Thus, Socrates uses analogies derived from the everyday practices of craftsmen in building up moral or philosophical arguments. As Sluiter argues, the fact that craft knowledge could be used as 'prototypical knowledge' suggests that it was evaluated positively. Rosen's chapter highlights how Galen's foregrounding of the hand as the body part that is most emblematic of human nature and purpose also implicitly identifies (hand)work as not only something quintessentially human, but also as *good*. The literary images of glassmaking discussed by Reitz-Joosse equally show how the skill and effort of a craftsman could become part of a poetics of marvel. Mulhern's analysis of πόνος in Aristotle reveals that in the Aristotelian worldview, good things like ἀρετή, τὸ δίκαιον and εὐδαιμονία can only be achieved through sustained labour. Faber highlights how the omnipresence of work in the countryside was fundament-

ally important to the literary construction of *loci amoeni*. This does not mean that work/labour was *always* evaluated positively, but rather that its moral evaluation was context-dependent, not intrinsic. In the right contexts, skill and work could be very much appreciated—and the case studies brought together in this volume suggest that, actually, many contexts could be 'right'. One could also add the signatures discussed by Massar, and the funerary reliefs analysed by Opdenhoff: these genres of expression were even directly rooted in a positive evaluation of skills and labour.

A final thread addresses the question of gendered labour and its value. Women remain underrepresented in all of the source corpora on labour in the ancient world. These lacunae have meant that the elite source corpus and its few canonical discussions have particularly shaped our interpretations of the place and value of women's work. The weaving Lucretia waiting at home becomes thus not just a particular image, but stands for a whole set of values presumed, in the absence of other evidence, to be relatively all-encompassing.[24] Thus, women's labour has traditionally been presumed to have been domestic: remunerative activities were limited to weaving and wet nursing, and the value of these activities lies particularly in their home-based, family associations.[25] While recent scholarship has already begun to move away from this traditional idea, this volume opens up a whole new set of approaches to gendered labour and its valuation.[26] On the one hand, although they often remain a minority in the professions they occupy, this volume highlights women doing things that fall outside the domestic value paradigms: the poetess praised for her *eusebeia* and devotion to Apollo; the occasional women buried with tools and bearing the arm fractures of manual labour; the female devotees of poetry whose careful listening is embedded in Theocritus' *Idylls*. These women and their work fail to conform to the model of domestically centred female labour. Neither, though, do they completely stand outside that model, and, as with the intersection of value systems described above, gendered values centred on domestic life remained important: Levin-Richardson's sex workers, male and female, deliberately cultivate the appearance of supporting and caring for their clients, while Groen-Vallinga reveals the positions held by women and children in the labour-systems of the great elite households.

24 On weaving Lucretia see Caldwell 2021, 55. On wet nursing, Manca Masciardi and Monetevecchi 1982.

25 E.g. Groen-Vallinga 2013, 295; Larsson-Lovén 2016, 218.

26 See also Holleran 2013, Swetnam-Burland 2021.

6 In This Volume

The chapters following this introduction are organized into four major sections, corresponding to major methodological interventions, as well as particular kinds of labour. The first section, 'Revisiting the Canon', addresses the major literary and philosophical texts which underlie the older paradigms on ancient labour. Ineke Sluiter addresses Plato's consideration of *technê* in the *Dialogues*. She interprets the use of *technê*-knowledge as proto-knowledge_a kind of intuitive archetype for what knowledge is. Socrates' constant use of 'shoemakers, fullers, cooks and doctors' to make his points thus not only depends on craft as an archetype of knowing, but as such, *technê* further takes on the implicit attributes of a virtue. John Mulhern, in turn, takes up Aristotle's many uses of πόνος. He observes that Aristotle consistently frames the concept of labour with one or more of six qualifiers—the agent, the object or beneficiary, the instrument used, its purpose and how the work is performed. Aristotle uses these contextual frames to determine the value of labour in a particular circumstance. Depending on the context, Aristotle regards both physical and intellectual labour as capable of being excellent. Ralph Rosen pays close attention to Galen's foregrounding of the hand at the beginning of his monumental *The Function of the Parts of the Body*. Hands for Galen, Rosen argues, are the instrument of human reason, and what makes humans uniquely human is their capacity to work with their hands. Bipedalism, another human quality, is linked to hands, and likewise enables this human activity of work. Finally, Lauren Petersen addresses the valuation of Roman artists—not only in their own time, but by the history of art as a discipline. She observes that since Roman historians like Pliny dismissed Roman artists as mere copyists of things Greek, modern art historians since Vasari tended to follow suit. More contemporary considerations, uncomfortable with the Roman artist as mere copyist, have substituted an attention to subject—particularly biographical assessments of imperial subjects—in place of the working artist as the fulcrum around which the discipline has turned. Absent artist biographies, artists and their labour are thus continually elided and erased.

The second section, 'Pushing the Boundaries of Labour', groups papers which, in various ways, ask us to reconsider the nature of labour and thus how it is valued both by workers and literary elites. These papers, too, offer new methodological and theoretical approaches, as well as new sources. Sarah Levin-Richardson's analysis of the graffiti from the purpose-built brothel in Pompeii reveals the other work that sex-workers engaged in—emotional labour. Praise, mourning, and other kinds of emotional support can be seen in these graffiti as an adjacent type of labour alongside sex itself. Levin-Richardson uses fem-

inist economic theory to unpack why emotional labour might have been used by sex workers to better their situation. Bettina Reitz-Joosse introduces the concept of 'madeness' in her analysis of glassmaking and how it was perceived in Roman antiquity. The particular nature of glass as a substance, together with the particular actions required to craft it—from melting to blowing—merged into an activity-substance in Roman thought, a composite idea in which the object and the work to produce it became one. Christel Freu unpacks one of the most complex and fraught categories of ancient labour—wage labour. Following Marx' observation on the relationship between wage labour and specialization, she argues that an increasing division and specialization of labour during the late Republic and early Roman empire produced a concomitant increase in interchangeable labour in support of these new specialized crafts, a group paid largely in wages. Stoic thinkers were divided in their valuation of this development. Cicero's famous condemnation of the wage labourer as a slave in *On Duties* (mentioned above) marks the beginning of the concretization of this group as an almost wholly negative one, while other Stoics dwelled less on wage labourers' lack of autonomy and more on their penury and the aim of their labour, namely to support luxurious excess. Finally, Miriam Groen-Vallinga draws our attention to the neglected networks of women and children who staffed the great elite *domus*. Using both columbarium inscriptions of the first century CE and some sixteenth-century English household accounts as a comparative case, she underlines the invisibility of such labour in both life and death.

The third section reconsiders one aspect of ancient labour which has almost always been positively valued—agricultural labour—providing greater nuance to what has often been a somewhat flat 'farming is good' assessment. Rural work is most radically rethought by Amelia Bensch-Schaus, who posits listening as a kind of work in Theocritus' rustic *Idylls*. Active and attentive listening is combined with non-elite labour as Theocritus' shepherds, herdsmen and housewives are asked to set aside other work to 'listen' to in-text performances. The metapoetical demands on the internal audience, together with the identity of the protagonists, not only emphasize listening as labour but cast that labour in an insistently rural, non-elite labouring guise. Riemer Faber revisits another set of fundamental 'positive' texts, the bucolic construction of rural pleasure, or the *locus amoenus*. Using Theocritus, Vergil and Horace together with aspects of eco-critical theory, he notes how each poet diminishes the nature/culture binary by describing the mutual entanglement of labour and leisure, work and rest. Liana Brent and Tracy Prowse's contribution takes us back to rural workers themselves, their communities, and how the archaeology of the grave might shed some light on how these workers regarded their

own labour. Examining the grave goods and human remains from the imperial estate at Vagnari in southern Italy, they find a particular use of tools—sickles, hooks, punches and blades—left in or next to graves, seemingly as a symbolic indicator of work done by the deceased. The particular gender and age patterning of these finds—mostly but not consistently found with adult men, and often found together with more plentiful grave assemblages—point to the symbolic status of labour and its changing valuation over the life course. Finally, Nicole Brown's analysis of the so-called Rustic Calendar mosaic from Saint-Romain-en-Gal reveals a subtle tension between seasonal time and the cycle of human work which harnesses it, pressing the latter into a kind of spectacle of labour. The control over the body of workers is glorified, not only through repetition and form, but also by the very fact that the elite owner treads those bodies underfoot.

The fourth and final section contains papers which, in different ways, find labour at the heart of different kinds of civic values. Citizenship, euergetism, attentiveness to the gods and attachment to one's birthplace—these chapters find each of these values mutually implicated in labour of different kinds. Helle Hochscheid suggests how this might have been true even of those set, by definition, outside citizenship status—the metics of Athens. In examining the long history of large construction projects, culminating under Pericles, and foreign workers' important role in them, she suggests that the city came to assign metics a value by virtue of both their craft and their contributions to *polis* life. Metics not only were prominent in large building projects but also had also fought in the Persian Wars and had a place in religious festivals, their skill in labour thus contributing to their positive integration in urban hierarchies more generally. Turning to Greek artists, Natacha Massar uses craftsmen's signatures on objects from pots to sculptures to understand the particular values with which these craftsmen identified. The addition of ethnic, demotic or other information to their names emphasized craftspeople's particular relationship with the deity in question, their citizenship when working abroad, or their excellence as being from a place famous for that craft. Geographic, civic and religious identity are thus entangled with craft to produce a particular kind of valued labour. Antiopi Argyriou-Casmeridis examines inscriptions from Hellenistic cities that honour individuals explicitly named as having a profession. Looking particularly at artists and educators, she notes that these people—men and women alike—are praised for their *aretê* which amounts to a kind of civic benefaction. She also notes the other virtues—generosity, good conduct, promotion of civic history—associated with these kinds of labour, while being attentive, too, to the discrepancies in what professions attracted the most honours. Finally, returning to craftspeople's vision of themselves, Fanny Opdenhoff

looks at how Gallic craftsmen commemorated themselves or their family members in funerary sculpture. Departing from a careful study of the Bordeaux monument of the sculptor Amabilis, who is shown sculpting his own funerary niche, she sets this monument in the context of Gallic craftsmen's funerary commemoration more generally, finding Amabilis both adopting a shared language of civic status and also bending it to emphasize sculpture as a particular labour.

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How did ancient Greeks and Romans regard work? It has long been assumed that elite thinkers disparaged physical work, and that working people rarely commented on their own labors. The papers in this volume challenge these notions by investigating philosophical, literary and working people's own ideas about what it meant to work. From Plato's terminology of labor to Roman prostitutes' self-proclaimed pride in their work, these chapters find ancient people assigning value to multiple different kinds of work, and many different concepts of labor.

Contributors are: Antiopi Argyriou-Casmeridis, Amelia Bensch-Schaus, Liana Brent, Nicole Brown, Riemer Faber, Christel Freu, Miriam Groen-Vallinga, Helle Hochscheid, Sarah Levin-Richardson, Natacha Massar, John Mulhern, Fanny Opdenhoff, Lauren Hackworth Petersen, Tracy Prowse, Bettina Reitz-Joosse, Ralph Rosen, Ineke Sluiter.

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