

Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism

Paul Veyne

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Paul Veyne : Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Bread and Circuses: Historical Sociology and Political Pluralism:

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The phenomenon, known as "euergetism", is one of the most striking features of the ancient world. It can be seen as a form of altruism, civic pride or wealth redistribution, a means of buying honour, prestige or political power, yet one thing is clear: it was long regarded as a duty and privilege of the wealthy to benefit their fellow citizens. To understand why, suggests Professor Veyne, we need to forget about abstract theories and modern economics. Rather, we should examine what really happened before the Christian era in Hellenistic Greece and the Rome of the Republic and the Emperors.

From Library JournalVeyne, a distinguished French scholar and editor of A History of Private Life, Vol. 1: From Pagan Rome to Byzantium (LJ 2/15/87), explores in this monumental and prodigiously learned work acts of patronage--gift giving in the ancient world--from the time of the Greek city-states to the coming of Christianity. Veyne defines individual giving to the community as "euergetism," and he focuses on three types: by wealthy, influential

notables; members of the Roman senatorial aristocracy; and the Emperor, who gave the populace bread and circuses. Why did they give? Not for purposes of power--to control the less fortunate through bribery; nor to conceal the exploitation of the proletariat, as Marxists would argue; nor to avoid taxation; nor because of moral guilt. Rather, and here Veyne offers a new non-economic theory of economic history, they gave out of a sense of privilege and duty. Veyne calls for a return to this sense of public responsibility. For larger libraries. --Bennett D. Hill, Georgetown Univ., Washington, D.C. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. Language Notes Text: English (translation) Original Language: French