Capitalizing on the rich historical record of late antiquity, and employing sophisticated methodologies from social and economic history, this book re-interprets the end of Roman slavery. Kyle Harper challenges traditional interpretations of a transition from antiquity to the middle ages, arguing instead that a deep divide runs through “late antiquity,” separating the Roman slave system from its early medieval successors. In the process, he covers the economic, social, and institutional dimensions of ancient slavery and presents the most comprehensive analytical treatment of a pre-modern slave system now available. By scouring the late antique record, he has uncovered a wealth of new material, providing fresh insights into the ancient slave system, including slavery’s role in agriculture and textile production, its relation to sexual exploitation, and the dynamics of social honor. By demonstrating the vitality of slavery into the later Roman empire, the author shows that Christianity triumphed amidst a genuine slave society.

Kyle Harper is Assistant Professor in the Department of Classics and Letters at the University of Oklahoma, where he teaches a range of courses on Greek and Roman civilization and the rise of Christianity. He has published articles on social and institutional aspects of later Roman history in the Journal of Roman Studies, Classical Quarterly, and Historia.
SLAVERY IN THE LATE ROMAN WORLD,
AD 275–425

KYLE HARPER
For Michelle, Mom, and the whole family
And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no
man buyeth their merchandise any more: The merchandise of gold,
and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen . . . and
wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and
horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men . . .

(John of Patmos, imagining the fall of Rome, Revelation 18
(Authorized Version))

Lest anymore Africa be drained of its own people, and in herds and
columns, like an endless river, such a great multitude of both men and
women lose their freedom in something even worse than barbarian
captivity . . .

(Augustine of Hippo, watching the fall of Rome, New Letters 10)
## Contents

**List of tables**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Acknowledgments**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Acknowledgments</th>
<th>xii</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part I The Economy of Slavery

1. Introduction
2. Among slave systems: a profile of late Roman slavery
3. The endless river: the supply and trade of slaves
4. *Oikonomia*: households, consumption, and production
5. Agricultural slavery: exchange, institutions, estates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Among slave systems: a profile of late Roman slavery</td>
<td>33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>The endless river: the supply and trade of slaves</td>
<td>67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>Oikonomia</em>: households, consumption, and production</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Agricultural slavery: exchange, institutions, estates</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part II The Making of Honorable Society

5. *Semper timere*: the aims and techniques of domination
6. Self, family, and community among slaves
7. Sex, status, and social reproduction
8. Mastery and the making of honor

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>Semper timere</em>: the aims and techniques of domination</td>
<td>219</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Self, family, and community among slaves</td>
<td>249</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Sex, status, and social reproduction</td>
<td>281</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Mastery and the making of honor</td>
<td>326</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Part III The Imperial Order

9. Citizenship and civil conflict: slave status after the Antonine Constitution

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Chapter</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Citizenship and civil conflict: slave status after the Antonine Constitution</td>
<td>367</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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Contents

10 The enslavement of Mediterranean bodies: child exposure and child sale 391
11 The community of honor: the state and sexuality 424
12 Rites of manumission, rights of the freed 463

Conclusion 495

After the fall: Roman slavery and the end of antiquity 497

Appendixes 511

1 The word οἴκητης in late antiquity 513
2 Slaves in the Codex Hermogenianus 519

Bibliography 524
Index 598
# Tables

1.1 Quantifying the number of slaves in the late Roman empire  
1.2 Maximum prices for slaves in Diocletian’s Price Edict  
1.3 A profile of Roman slavery: structural features of a slave society  
2.1 Demographics of the slave population on Thera  
2.2 Origins of slaves sold in papyri AD 300–600  
3.1 The spectrum of domestic labor  
3.2 The organization of business in the late empire  
3.3 The textile production process  
4.1 Finley’s model of ancient slavery  
4.2 Scheidel’s model of ancient slavery  
4.3 Institutional model of Roman slavery  
4.4 Labor and land-use decisions  
4.5 Styles of land-use in the Roman empire  
4.6 Land and labor at Tralles  
4.7 Land and labor on Lesbos  
4.8 Land and labor on Thera  
4.9 The employees of the Hermonthis estate  
6.1 Obstacles to family life  
7.1 The binary division of female sexuality  
9.1 Causes of disputes involving slaves
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