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978-0-521-19861-5 - Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275-425

Kyle Harper

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SLAVERY IN THE LATE ROMAN WORLD,
AD 275–425

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*.

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*For Michelle,
Mom, and the
whole family*

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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)

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