



Francqui Foundation Conference

Long-Term Quantification in Ancient Mediterranean History

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Modern attempts to quantify aspects of life in the ancient world tend toward pessimism about the extent to which the ancients themselves engaged in such quantification or were interested in and maintained statistics. Taxation is the main exception: Governments were obviously interested in knowing how much revenue they could hope to collect and had in fact collected. There is plenty of evidence for processes by which administrations collected data connected with taxation. There are also signs, however, that at least the later Roman empire did collect statistics not transparently connected with taxation. I will look at the price declarations by guilds and related official documents from the fourth- and fifth-century papyri to try to determine the chain of data collection, its origins, its purposes, and the degree to which we can generalize from this process.