



Francqui Foundation Conference

Long-Term Quantification in Ancient Mediterranean History

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Several attempts have been made recently to estimate the GDP (and more specifically per capita GDP) of the Roman Empire, after the pioneering work of Keith Hopkins (1981 and 1995/96) and Raymond Goldsmith (1984 and 1987), notwithstanding the unavoidably conjectural nature of most of the data on which the estimates are built. We will discuss in more detail these new attempts by Peter Temin (2006) and Angus Maddison (2007), looking at their internal logic, the methods they adopted in their choice and assessment of the data and in the techniques of calculation, and the final results they achieved. We will also analyze other recent attempts made by Milanovich, Lindert and Williamson (2007) and by Scheidel and Friesen (2009) to measure distribution of income and inequality in the Roman Empire. By this revision we intend to achieve what seems to us a better-founded and more realistic appraisal of the performance of the Roman economy, in comparison with other pre-modern advanced agrarian economies.