



Malta
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Association

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The Social Status of Roman Land Surveyors

by Levente Takács

István Hahn Lecturers vol. IV (ed. G. Németh). Budapest, Department of Ancient History, Eötvös Loránd University, 2013. ISSN 2061-7348. Paperback, 104 pp., 13 X 20cm.

Prof. Levente Takács, recently established as an authority on Roman Land Surveyors, has been awarded with the István Hahn Prize in 2011, and this work of his is the fourth in the series in honour of the same Late Professor István Hahn, the first three monographs having been written by Professors Thomas Köves-Zulauf, Ádám Szabó and Zsolt Simon. As Prof. Dr György Németh, Head of the Department, writes in the foreword, István Hahn lived from 1913 to 1983, was Head of the Department of Ancient History of Eötvös Loránd University, full member of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, and an internationally acknowledged expert of several areas of ancient history.

Plots of land in the Roman Empire were parcelled out among individuals on the basis of their measurements according to surveyors who were either slaves or freedmen. These *agrimensores* were also asked to survey lands to help define boundaries when disputes on property occurred. These people were the authors of inscriptions which, because of their low status, could carry some erroneous pieces of information. However, their profession was also shared by soldiers and veterans and, consequently, the authorship of these inscriptions remains open, while their status could be raised to the level of the privileged class. State control and administration institutionalized this profession and helped to engage these poor land surveyors into imperial bureaucracy. These inscriptions and manuscripts of land surveying have survived to this day and prove that its practice was efficient in Roman Imperial times.

This work, based on the consultation of some 89 books and articles, starts with the account of land surveying with Cicero's comments on the subject, and continues through the administration of Augustus,

the Early Empire and Late Antiquity. This presentation is preceded with an Introduction and followed by a Conclusion. It abounds in footnotes referring to epigraphical and literary sources, including Classical ones like Plautus, Lucilius, Cicero, Varro, Horace, Livy, Ovid, Plutarch, Velleius Paterculus, Columella, Persius, Lucan, Pliny, Statius, Martial, Tacitus, Hyginus, Frontinus, Suetonius, Siculus Flaccus and Vegetius.

This small book, without index, is itself a history of the Roman Empire seen through the historical branch of land surveying and the social estimation of slaves, freedmen and the military personnel. For its size, it is easy to carry in one's pocket while travelling, and into the classroom.

Horatio Caesar Roger Vella