

BOOK REVIEW

I confini della salvezza: Schiavitù, conversione e libertà nella Roma di età moderna, by Serena Di Nepi (Rome: Viella, 2022; pp. 250. €28).

Serena Di Nepi's book (the title of which translates as 'The Boundaries of Salvation: Slavery, Conversion and Freedom in Early Modern Rome') identifies and explores important new aspects of the problem of slavery and conversion in Rome from the sixteenth century to the nineteenth. The focus is on the special Roman mechanism of emancipation and citizenship that was available to enslaved people once they had undergone conversion in the conservatories of Campidoglio. This mechanism started in 1566, when Pope Pius V published *Dignum et Rationi*, which resumed an ancient Roman custom that had been established by the Edict of Caracalla. The enslaved could plead on their knees for their emancipation in a public ceremony and a notary, after evaluating the individual's conversion and his behaviour as a Catholic, had the option of not only freeing the slave but also giving him citizenship. For this reason, captives and slaves from the Mediterranean tried to escape and reach Rome, a cosmopolitan city offering potential freedom. Using a rich array of documentation (the *restitutiones ad libertatem* as well as sources from the Holy Office and Propaganda Fide), Di Nepi explores on one hand the manumission of 917 former slaves between 1617 and 1797 in Rome, while also considering the conversion of slaves and people of colour far from Rome (in Malta, the Congo and Korea) but living under Roman Catholic rules. Di Nepi makes clear that these were very different histories, and the book deals with minority religious groups, slaves, people of colour and conversion. The author, however, makes brilliant connections across time and space, between religion and slavery and between Rome and the wider world.

The book is structured into five chapters plus a conclusion. The first chapter focuses on the exceptional Roman practice of emancipation in the context of global slavery, both within and outside the Papal States. It concentrates on the problem of galley slaves in Civitavecchia. The second chapter focuses on the evolution of the norms of Caracalla under Paul III and Paul V in response to the crises of the sixteenth century, including the Italian wars, the expansion of the Ottoman Empire, the Protestant Reformation and colonial expansion. The third chapter analyses in detail the sources of *restitutiones* and the process of obtaining citizenship in quantitative and qualitative ways. In particular, we are familiarised with the actors, the enslaved, and the relevant documentation. We learn the names, religion, and geographical and ethnic origin of the enslaved. Occasionally, there is a physical description available, of skin colour or distinctive marks, for example. The average age of the enslaved documented was 28/29 years old. Information is provided on extra-European slaves who arrived in Rome through many different trade routes. In a few cases, the prices paid for the enslaved are recorded, and property ownership changes are reconstructed. Catholic faith was a fundamental element in securing freedom and citizenship once an enslaved person was in front of the notary.

Chapter Four examines the use of language and the importance of linguistics in Di Nepi's sources. Notaries used a specific linguistic formula and special methods for identifying slaves. For instance, if the slave was previously hosted in the House of Catechumens of Rome, the rector would have to testify about his good Christian conduct. Only then would the notary grant restitution to the slave, as in the 1697 case of *Iohannes Baptista Masculus qui antea vocatus Osman filius quondam Ali turca di Helvena in Bosnia*, who was described as being of *iuxta statura* (right stature) (p. 145). Among other liberated slaves, Alonsus africanus' hair was described as being curly chestnut. In this case, 'africanus' refers to skin colour rather than geographical origin (p. 148). Di Nepi shows how the limitations of geographical knowledge in Rome at the time meant that notaries were often unacquainted with the name of the place of origin of the enslaved. Sometimes they generalised and sometimes they attempted a spelling that proved incorrect. The last chapter, 'Salvati altrove' ('Be saved elsewhere'), covers inquisitions on Christian slaves in the colonial world or in other geographical spaces outside the Italian peninsula, and reflects on the elaboration of *In Supremo apostolatus* (1839) and on the emerging racist tropes of the nineteenth century. In her conclusion, Di Nepi addresses the question of tolerance and intolerance of minorities in Rome and in the Catholic world in general. Even if restitution seem outwardly at least to have been an instrument of tolerance toward slaves, Di Nepi portrays the reality that, as strangers, the formerly enslaved could be tolerated only as Catholic and by denying their past life. So, these were in fact practices of intolerant coexistence.

To conclude, this book sheds new light on the problem of slavery and salvation in Rome in the early modern period, and its rich documentation brings out many hidden facets of the lives of the enslaved and their strategies to obtain freedom. For this reason *I confini della salvezza* is highly recommended.

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