REVIEW–DISCUSSION

NEW HISTORIES OF SLAVES AND FREED

The Cambridge World History of Slavery. Volume 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World. Edited by KEITH BRADLEY and PAUL CARTLEDGE. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xi + 620. Hardcover, £116.00/ $192.00. ISBN 978-0-521-84066-8.

Slavery in the Late Roman World AD 275–425. By KYLE HARPER. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. xiv + 611. Hardcover, £85.00/$140.00. ISBN 978-0-521-19861-5.

The Freedman in the Roman World. By HENRIK MOURITSEN. Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. vi + 344. Hardcover, £63.00/$107.00. ISBN 978-0-521-85613-3.

Free at Last: The Impact of Freed Slaves on the Roman Empire. Edited by SINCLAIR BELL and TERESA RAMSBY. London: Bristol Classical Press, 2012. Distributed in the United States by International Publishers Marketing. Pp. xii + 212. Hardcover, £70.00/$130.00. ISBN 978-1-85399-751-8.

The study of ancient slavery is, rightly, of enduring interest. From Wallon to Weber to Marx (Engels, really) to Finley and beyond, ancient slavery has never been neglected, either by ancient historians or by students of comparative slavery. Its study thrives not just because it is a subject where grand theory and tantalizing evidence intertwine; not just because the surviving sources do not allow slaves to speak for themselves, thus posing irresistible challenges to historians; not just because slaves made important economic contributions to their societies. It fascinates, above all, because ancient slavery as a system of human exploitation was a central institution of ancient life that endured for centuries despite the violence, and the instability of violence as a form of control, at its heart; and because, at some point and without voices challenging its existence or necessity, it declined.

The recent books here under review are only components of the most recent wave of ancient slavery studies. One is the first of a four-part world history of slavery, *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* (*CWHS*), with twenty-two chapters by different authors; two are outstanding scholarly monographs, Harper's

and Mouritsen's; and one is a set of collected essays on Roman freedmen. And yet another wave is on the way, the furl of its crest *The Oxford Companion to Ancient Slavery*, rising in 2013. From each of these contributions we can all learn something, and advanced students could well profit from having individual chapters of the *CWHS* assigned in appropriate classes: the quality, and clarity, are high. But here a chapter-by-chapter or even book-by-book survey of this much material is less valuable than the opportunity to contemplate the patterns this work makes together: what is striking, new and old, in this work. Perhaps the major pattern is how often these authors find (or summarize the finding of) new ways of fleshing out, or responding to, issues highlighted or generalizations magisterially presented by Moses Finley in *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* more than thirty years ago: demography, slaves' location in the economy, and work and labor-power are prominent examples. But another is how often these authors are also interested in the social, ideological, and cultural bases (and ramifications) of slavery, and their intersections with status and honor; these approaches in turn deepen our understanding of ancient slavery and broaden Finley's definition of a slave society.

Among the old issues, a basic problem of great importance cannot be solved, and was indeed dismissed as insoluble by Finley. The demographic basis of slavery—numbers, source of supply, distribution by household—in Athens and Rome is still a highly disputed subject. Estimates of numbers in Athens depend on late and unverifiable sources, and even if slave-numbers were known their proportion of the total population of the city would still be in question, or at least subject to argument; estimates range between 15% and 40%. It would probably be at least as important to know how slaves were distributed among owners, but even here two of the authors in *CWHS* disagree on whether most Athenians in the fourth century owned at least one slave (Rihll (49), no; Kyrtatas (98), yes). Seizure of the defeated (often barbarians) and their property in war, along with purchase (of barbarians, in trade for wine), were major sources of both Greek and Roman slaves (although defeated Greeks of the classical period, highlighted by Rihll (53–4), may have been ransomed or sold abroad, since they rarely appear *as* slaves, Braund in *CWHS* (116–20)). Slave-breeding is also a possible source, after the end of the fifth century (Rihll (53)), but its contribution minimal (Kyrtatas (93)) or hard to estimate (Braund (126)). Similar controversy and contradiction characterize the Roman discussion. Numbers of slaves (and of the population in general) have risen and fallen according to ferocious argument and cunning deployment of competing models. Where others had argued for high

numbers and a high proportion (up to 40%) of the population of Roman Republican Italy, Scheidel (in *CWHS* and elsewhere) argues for lower slave numbers in a lower Italian population overall, and a proportion between 15% and 25% at its peak, falling to between 7% and 13% of the population under the Empire (and empire-wide; also Bradley (251 and 263), but Morley at one point (265) ventures 35%; both in *CWHS*). Scheidel also argues that the exposure of free infants (who became slaves when picked up) and slave-breeding were far greater contributors to the Roman slave supply under the mature empire than others have thought, contributing perhaps as much as 80% biological replacement (298, 306-8): as he notes, this argument "has met with criticism but no plausible alternative" (308). Reducing numbers and re-evaluating sources should not, however, soften our view of the phenomenon: he estimates that during the millennium of Rome's history, at least 100 million people were seized or sold as slaves, "one of the darkest chapters of human history" (309).

So, with twists of the kaleidoscope, the numbers, proportions, sources, and distributions change. An insoluble problem, yes, but even these twists and turns matter. Once they mattered because a proportion of slaves between 20% and 35%, accompanied by a hefty representation in the agricultural sector, was thought essential to identifying a "slave society." Now, these factors matter because their combination lays some foundation for how representative all the scattered references to slaves are; and because an appreciation of numbers and scale has always affected (despite protestations) how we think about the impact and dynamic of ancient slavery, no doubt one reason why Scheidel ended his essay on the grim note he did. We are far beyond the point at which we prefer to deny extensive Athenian slave-holding merely in order to maintain an unstained view of Athenian democracy. But small numbers and wide distributions of small holdings of slaves nonetheless encourage the view that Athenians had servants rather than slaves, as small purchases push the dirty acquisition of captives into the hands of unnamed middlemen, away from the Athenian markets, and Athenian inclinations, that made such trade profitable. It is possible, with smaller numbers, to imagine, and teach, an Athens without slaves. On the Roman side, high volume and concentrated, plantation-style usage were never disputed, but the extensive focus (in both ancient and modern sources) on the single great source of slaves—the slave-taking enabled and justified by immense military victories—produced an entire theory of how Rome became a slave society that in turn necessitated Rome's disintegration as a slave society when Rome, in the third centu-

ry, ceased to win wars. How could there be slaves, when there were no victories? The logic seemed clear: slavery had to disappear, and perhaps then Stoicism and Christianity contributed to its decline. But as Kyle Harper shows, emphatically and impressively, slavery in the long fourth century AD (275–425) neither disappeared nor diminished, and indeed he demonstrates (3-10) how trivially easy it was to assume only one real source of slaves and, for decades, to construct theories on its basis, in the face of clear evidence to the contrary.

To be alert to the consequences of adjusting the size and dynamic of the demographic bases of slavery—to watch colors and patterns change—thus adds another dimension, a heuristic tool, to our understanding: sometimes to great effect, as in the dismissal of the conquest theory as central to the entire history of Roman slavery. But scholars long troubled by the unreliability of numbers, by simplifying assumptions, and by the airy plausibilities of modeling had already given considered thought to how to measure slavery's impact and significance without relying on demographic certainties, and it is the newer assessment of slavery's economic impact *without* any reliable economic data that these works showcase most impressively. Archaeological evidence and careful logic construct a growing consensus that chattel slavery, long-distance trade, markets, and economic complexity are linked: archaic Chios with its wine trade, classical Athens with its port and markets, and the Black Sea; the coastal plains and harbors of Republican Italy, the city of Rome, and Gaul beyond Provence; Rome, Delos, and peoples to the east of the Roman protectorates in Asia—these are all prominent points in networks of trade, production, and consumption in which not just grain and wine and cloth but also thousands of slaves are moved, by multiple, small-scale dealers (Rihll (71); Kyrtatas (94-96); Braund (113, 121); Bradley (249)). Indeed, the unequal development of interconnectedness and complexity may explain why some classical city-states (Athens, Corinth, Aegina)—at least allegedly—came to have many more chattel slaves than other city-states, and why coasts and river-valleys and territories within easy reach of Rome became more thickly encrusted with slave labor than other areas in Republican Italy. Markets, such as big cities, create hinterlands of production that can use slaves. Under the empire, this phenomenon probably extends itself to other coasts within easy sailing distance of Rome (Gaul, Spain, Africa), places where we can see thriving exports and deduce intensified investment in a slave labor force (Morley (274)). And Harper convincingly argues that it was not late Rome's reduced slave-taking in war but its loss of economic complexity—"bulk exchange, mid-

dling consumers, the integration of markets, currencies, and laws" (15)—that in the fifth century AD caused Roman slavery to recede, especially in the West.

Another newer element prominent in these chapters and books is the recasting of our understanding of work, both slave and free. Where we in the twenty-first century can assert that what we *do* is not what we *are*, which identifies work conceptually as an independent activity, ancients thought not so much in terms of "work" but "work for": work was not an activity separable from the person doing it, nor from the person for whom you were doing it. A free man worked for himself, his *familia* members for him and for the family. A slave's work, as Finley had emphasized, belonged to his master. But where Finley had drawn a distinction between property and labor power in order to "locate" slavery in the economy, the emphasis is now on how this understanding of "work" as a social relationship—one of domination, and studied in ancient works on politics or ethics, not economics—prevails over economic thinking (Kyrtatas (106)). For example, it explains why no Athenian would be surprised to find slaves doing all sorts of work, and for the same pay as free men: that a slave was a slave, not the "work" he did, was the defining element, and masters had every reason to want slaves, i.e. the master himself, recompensed at the same level as free workers, as indeed we see in the Athenian Erechtheion accounts. Nasty work, like mining, was done by slaves, but because free people did not care to do it. But while this attitude released slaves to do all sorts of "work," slaves also worked in a world in which a countervailing tension could arise, since at Athens, famously, one could not (by sight) tell slaves apart from free men. This might prompt both ostentatious performance of free and citizen status (in assembly and gymnasium) and, if possible, avoidance of activities visibly and often performed by slaves, as well as some "hostility to craft and service work" (Rihll (50)). This tension over work existed at Rome as well, where the perhaps inevitable next step was taken (at least at the highest levels, represented by Cicero in particular, of course) of deeming virtually all work servile because of the relationship of dependency (Bodel, in *CWHS* (312, 314-15, 317)), while not identifying any type of work as "peculiarly" servile. Yet Harper provides numerous references to specific types of work contemptuously referred to as servile in late-antique authors. Are we in fact seeing expansion over time not only in the fact that "work" was considered servile, but in the specific categories of work deemed servile, indexed to levels of wealth and social hierarchy and (as always) who was writing? This would again suggest a growing com-

plexity, but this time of status gradations and attitudes rather than of the economy.

Another way of responding to the exiguities of hard economic data has been the increasingly sophisticated assessment of the social, legal, and imaginative impact of slavery: the frank adjustment of the law to acknowledge slave status, the dominance of the idiom of slavery and freedom, and the necessity of slave ownership for social standing and the economy of honor are all subjects well treated in these books. Thus although slaves were important members of the *oikos* and the *familia*, making important contributions to the functioning of the household as well as making the lives of the "families" to which they belonged "very much more complicated" (Edmondson (360), also Golden (151), both in *CWHS*), slaves were also implicated in the honor of their families, both by keeping secrets (Golden (140)) and as escorts in public and servers within the house (Edmondson (354-5)). Indeed, as Harper emphasizes, the relationship of slaves to (others') honor was one of the deep structures of Roman society: slave-ownership, the practice of mastery, and the display of both generated honor and status for the master, while the institutionalized accessibility of slaves' bodies preserved the honor of the women of a slave-holding family (281-348). This whole way of seeing slavery discards the "productive/unproductive" and "cruel/benevolent" dichotomies once used to evaluate Roman slave and master roles—the first an economic distinction, again—and replaces them with a more unified-field theory of Roman slavery that privileges ancient concepts and practices. This must be right. Just as Greek ideas of "work" moved the heuristic usefulness of the term out of the economic realm, so—when it comes to defining a slave society or assessing the impact of slavery—what Romans thought most important about slaves and slavery, especially their fundamental implication in Roman dominance, honor, and status, should supersede abstract economic judgments.

One status-gradation that appears only rarely in *CWHS* is that of the freed, although manumission is mentioned frequently, if in passing, and the role of manumission as an incentive to good behavior is often acknowledged. In contrast, Mouritsen[1] and several of the essays in *Free at Last* make compelling arguments for the centrality of manumission and freed status for our understanding of Roman slavery itself. In particular, Mouritsen argues that Romans thought that slavery, by inflicting dishonor, damaged slaves morally, some irreparably. Yet a

[1] Which I have reviewed more fully elsewhere: http://www.sehepunkte.de/2011/07/19593.html.

slave could show his potential for moral rehabilitation through good behavior, and manumission could then reward that gradual progress, placing the freed slave, now a citizen, in a patron-client relationship in which this moral education could continue. The primary Roman axis of understanding freedmen, and therefore also slaves, is therefore (anticipating Harper) one of gradated (dis)honor and morality: this is why self-purchase and testamentary manumission, both leaving the slave without a supervising master, were actually unusual *and* legally of great (and often hostile) interest to the jurists; why the *peculium* was an incentivizing nest-egg that stayed with the slave after freedom rather than a savings-account for freedom (Mouritsen (180-183)); and why imitation of the master's manners and morals, and even of his sculptured likeness (as Borg argues in *Free at Last*), was, in this calculus, to be expected. The point of manumission was a continuing close relationship, not freedom as the twenty-first century valorizes it. One consequence of this was, as Verboven points out in an essay in *Free*, pugnaciously entitled "The Freedman Economy of Italy," that manumission created "trust networks" for both patrons and freed, generating social capital, creditworthiness, and business potential (98), and suggesting the pay-off for the training of at least some slaves in which we know Roman masters invested (94). Thus although manumission, like slavery itself, could be economically profitable to Roman masters, such profitability in either case "was not their main interest" (Bodel (315)): the social relationship was. Again, an appreciation of the primacy of social over economic ways of thinking illuminates the lives not only of the freed but of slaves as well.

Manumission thus appears as a crucial node in Roman slavery: not merely an incentive or a vehicle by which an investment was amortized, but a moral and political act with significant honor consequences. It was therefore deeply implicated in Romans' views of themselves and of how the relationships that constituted their society worked, and therefore in the success of slavery as an institution. It must also have been crucial, one would speculate, in slavery's longevity. Did attitudes toward it change in Late Antiquity? Harper emphasizes the absolute domination of the master and the reinforcement of that domination that the gift of manumission represented; it was, on the darker evidence he provides, merely one stop "on a spectrum of punishments and rewards" (238-46 at 242) and "fundamentally rooted in disciplinary practices" (485). Given the apparent withering of Junian Latin status (which gave the former master the entire estate of the freedman upon his death)—perhaps attributable to economic decline

(467)—and new laws that permitted the re-enslavement of the freed (487-9) for slight offences, there were indeed significant, harsh changes starting with Constantine. This momentous and as-of-yet unexplained shift suggests an abandonment of the world-view so fundamental to the smooth functioning of Roman slavery in the classical era. Given its timing, it also suggests that this new harshness contributed to the demise of slavery as a working system, rather than serving as a consequence of it: a harshness, and inflexibility, that helped to bring down the longest-lasting slave system known. But this would repay further study.

A volume like *CWHS* cannot hope to do everything, and we are fortunate that Mouritsen's monograph complements it and that Harper's, treating in 610 magisterial pages what *CWHS* had to cover in twenty-seven, expands it. But *CWHS* also offers one last opportunity for thought. It proceeds chronologically and, within those divisions, topically, with many intentionally balanced pairings such as chapters on slavery in Greek (Hunt) and Roman (Joshel) literary culture, in the Greek (Golden) and Roman (Edmondson) family, in Greek (Morris) and Roman (George) material culture; and on Greek (McKeown) and Roman (Bradley) slave resistance and the Greek (Braund) and Roman (Scheidel) slave supply. These chapters invite comparisons; other works, by contrast, have combined the study of Greek and Roman slavery into the topical study of ancient slavery (most recently, J. Andreau and R. Descat's *The Slave in Greece and Rome* (2006; Engl. trans., 2011)). But what has not yet been attempted, to my knowledge, is a study of the historical interaction of the "systems" of Greek and Roman slavery. *CWHS* provides many of the pieces but does not put them together; the chapter that could probably have done this the best, "Slavery in the Hellenistic World" (194–213), tracks the introduction of chattel slavery into the East following Alexander's conquests but otherwise opts for a static approach, and concentrates on Egypt (194). To undertake an historical approach one would have to be convinced, of course, that enough difference existed for the interplay to be significant, and that such interplay happened. But surely this should be the case? Slave training, manumission practices, manumission rates, domestic slavery roles, slave burial, and slave laws are all areas in which the two societies, or at least Rome and Hellenistic Greek cities, were markedly different, and where the possibility of cross-cultural influence should be explored. Thanks to these works, we now can see that they can be.

ELIZABETH A. MEYER

University of Virginia, eam2n@virginia.edu