

BOOK REVIEW

Greek Slave Systems in their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c. 800-146 BC. By DAVID M. LEWIS. Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2018. Pp. xii + 372. Hardback, \$98.99. ISBN: 978-0-19-876994-1.

The traditional view of ancient slavery maintains that Greek and Roman cultures were the only legitimate slave societies in the greater Mediterranean region.¹ The designation of “slave society” denotes that slavery was integrated into economic life to a high degree, and the traditional view asserts that pre-Greek (and early Greek) regional polities did not meet this threshold and were merely “societies with slaves” (1, 7–8). David M. Lewis argues that this well-worn position is overly reductionist, and his book provides a radical reassessment of ancient Greek slavery by considering the Greek slave system (ca. 800–400 BCE) within its broader Mediterranean context.

This book—the first to consider Greek slavery in relation to non-Greek slavery systems in the eastern Mediterranean—consists of an introduction, four parts and an appendix. The Introduction briefly describes the historiographical and theoretical foundation of the subject and summarizes the contents of the subsequent parts. Part I, “Prolegomena,” sets the stage for the rest of the book. In order to refute the purported uniqueness of the Greek slave system, Part I provides a comparison of slavery in Greek and Near Eastern cultures. It focuses primarily on the legal similarities and differences of slave status (Chapter 1), conceptions of freedom (and their cultural, social and economic ramifications—Chapter 2), issues related to status distinctions (Chapter 3) and the relative importance of slavery to ancient economies (Chapter 4).

Part II, “Epichoric Slave Systems of the Greek World,” examines the regional slave systems in the Greek world. The traditional view of Greek slavery holds that Greek polities did not evolve into full-fledged slave societies until the 6th century BCE (in response to the broader implications of Solonian reforms) because,

¹ E.g., Moses I. Finley. 1981. *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*. London, 114–115.

prior to that point, slavery's impact on the economy was minimal. This position is challenged in Chapter 5, which argues that the role of slavery in the Archaic Greek world was far more significant than previously believed. Likewise, the common conception that Sparta and Crete were mere "serfdoms," as opposed to slave societies, is also questioned. To establish that Sparta and Crete were indeed slave societies, Lewis describes the slave systems of Sparta (Chapter 6), Crete (Chapter 7) and Attica (Chapter 8). In particular, he expounds upon the idiosyncrasies of each system and the respective roles that each form of slavery played in their regional economies.

In order to provide broader contextualization for Greek slave systems, Part III, "Slave Systems of the Wider Eastern Mediterranean World," shifts to the detailed discussion of manifestations of slavery in the ancient Near East. In various ways, slavery in Iron Age II Israel (ca. 10th to 6th centuries BCE; Chapter 9), Assyria (ca. 7th to 8th centuries BCE; Chapter 10), Babylonia (ca. 7th to 5th centuries BCE; Chapter 11), three satrapies (Anatolia, Egypt and Fars) of the Persian Empire (ca. 6th to 4th centuries BCE; Chapter 12) and Punic Carthage (ca. 7th to 2nd centuries BCE; Chapter 13) closely resembles aspects of the Greek slave system. Indeed, like Greece, Israel and Carthage also fit the economic criteria for "slave societies," proving, at least in the case of Israel, that there was a pre-Greek precedent.

Finally, Part IV, "Why Slavery?," consists of a concluding chapter (Chapter 14) that systematically and succinctly summarizes his reinterpretation of ancient Mediterranean slave systems. Most notably, it itemizes the ten significant ways in which Lewis' findings detract from orthodox views on Greek slavery. Part IV is followed by an appendix that discusses the meaning of the word *oikētēs* in Classical Greek. Lewis maintains that the word is often mistranslated as "household slave" or "domestic slave," and provides literary evidence to support a broader application of the word. He finds that *oikētēs* is used to refer to any individual who is legally enslaved, and it is not limited to those laboring in the domestic sphere.

This book, with its comparative and integrative methodological approach to Greek slavery, will prove useful to all scholars of Mediterranean social history. It is a rich and critical resource not only for specialists in the Greco-Roman past, but also for those who study the ancient Near East and the Levant. Thus, through his careful and detailed cultural contextualization of Greek slavery, Lewis has

produced the definitive work to date on the economic role of ancient Greek slave labor.

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