

**Helots and their masters in Laconia and Messenia:
histories, ideologies, structures**

Edited by N. Luraghi and S. E. Alcock

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Acknowledgments

This volume originates from a workshop held at Harvard University on March 16-17, 2001. The majority of the essays in this book were there presented for the first time, in some cases in a significantly different form from that assumed in the end. In an attempt at countering the isolationist tendencies that so often plague ancient history, the organizers invited scholars from different fields to offer a commentary on the workshop's papers. Orlando Patterson's observations have been transformed into the volume's concluding essay, but the organizers would also like to express their gratitude to Michael McCormick (Harvard University) for his lively and thoughtful contribution to the event's proceedings. The workshop was made possible by the generous financial support of the Arthur F. Thurnau Professorship (University of Michigan) and of the Loeb Fund of the Department of the Classics (Harvard University). The editors are grateful to both their home institutions for this assistance. Ana Galjanic (Harvard University) has also been helpful in the preparation of the manuscript.

One of the workshop's principal goals was to bring together scholars who manifestly possessed different views of many aspects of the history and sociology of Helotage. In the course of the workshop and thereafter, while every contributor has revised her or his positions in the light of our discussions, not surprisingly no consensus has emerged. This volume testifies to a diversity of approaches that open up new avenues of interpretation. The editors are convinced that such provocative variety constitutes an ideal starting point toward future researches. The contributors to this volume have delved deep into the intricacies of the arguments they were dealing—or sometimes struggling—with, and the result is, we think, a series of extremely engaging pieces, that will repay the patient reader.

The last word on the Helots will never be spoken, and it is in the nature of the evidence that whatever is said about them has to be tentative, temporary, indeed controversial. Since scholarly views of the history of their masters have been undergoing radical transformations over the last decades, to an important extent thanks to the work of the scholars assembled in this volume, it is indeed high time to start assembling the materials and ideas for a reassessment of the history of the Helots. Such is the ambition of the present volume.

S. E. Alcock & N. Luraghi

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Eleven

Reflections on helotic slavery and freedom

Orlando Patterson

This rich collection of essays tackles many vexing questions in the study of Spartan helotry and it would be rash of me—a professional interloper—to attempt a comprehensive commentary. I will, instead, focus on three issues which, as the specialists themselves here acknowledge, may benefit from a comparative perspective. These are: the problem of the nature of helotry and, more specifically, its relation to the condition of slavery; that of its origin; and—by way of responding to Professor Raaflaub's critique of my work on the subject—the problem of the origins of freedom and its relation to the Spartan system.

1. The nature and origins of helotry

What really was the condition of helots? Was it truly a status between freedom and slavery, a variant of serfdom, as is traditionally believed, or was it more a variant of slavery, as Nino Luraghi and other revisionists have contended? The answer depends partly on what one means by slavery and serfdom; partly on one's interpretation of the available evidence, both in Greece and other pre-modern societies. I will first, briefly summarize my interpretation of slavery, then examine two comparative cases which I think throw some light on the sparsely documented case of Sparta: that of the interplay of slavery and serfdom in Europe during the period of the late Western empire and early Middle Ages; and that of Korea, especially during the Koryo dynasty (918-1392 CE) and the chaotic Three Kingdoms period leading up to it.

When I wrote *Slavery and Social Death* (Patterson 1982), one of my main objectives was to arrive at a crisp definition of the distinctive attributes of slavery, especially when compared with related forms of domination such as serfdom, peonage and debt bondage. I concluded then that the three elements defining the relation of domination called slavery were the near total power of the slaveholder over his slaves, in practice, if

not always in law; second, their natal alienation, meaning that they had no claims of ancestry, either because they and their ancestors had been aliens captured in warfare, or had been reduced to the condition of slavery because of grievous crimes against their community, or the shameful incapacity to support themselves or repay their debts. As such, they and their progeny did not belong to the community, were not, according to the deepest Indo-European root meanings of the term "free"—*pri-*, suffix form **priy-o*; Germanic **frijaz*; OE *freon*—among the "beloved," the "dear" kin of the household, "as opposed to slaves" (OED vol. 6: 157; Watkins 1985: 53) and could make no independent claims on it. And third, slavery was a peculiarly degraded condition, an extreme state of dishonor which was distinctive in the parasitic way it enhanced the honor of the master and, in collective ways, the status of all non-slave persons "belonging to the loved ones." This last feature is often neglected or misunderstood. Honorific societies are found all over the world, in many cases without the institution of slavery (Patterson 1982: ch. 3). My point was that there was something distinctive about the dynamics of honor in relations with slaves. In non-doulotic honorific systems, honor functioned symbiotically: patron and client both gained by it in the hierarchy of statuses. The client praised and honored his patron or lord, sometimes advanced his interests, and always enhanced his *dignitas*; in return, the patron was also acutely sensitive to the dignity of his client, not only in guaranteeing protection and access, but in the way his—the patron's—*dignitas* enhanced that of the client in the latter's relation with those beneath him in the status hierarchy. It was, in American parlance, a win-win relation.

Not so, the slave relation. Here the master and all non-slaves gained at the expense of the slave's degradation. This was especially the case with the collective honorific gains of the non-slaves who, by virtue of this simple negation, and by virtue of it only, achieved the status of free men, those who belonged, the "loved ones" who alone could claim a *wergeld*—e.g. the non-Slav of the early middle ages, later still, the non-Black, which was all that *whiteness* and its near synonym *freedom* could ever have hoped to mean to the lowly whites of the ante-bellum South. There has never existed a condition of free persons in the pre-modern world except in contradistinction to the condition of slaves or some other degraded category of persons whose condition exemplified what it meant to be unfree. Without such a *pre-existing* category of persons the idea of free persons made no sense, was an inconceivable irrelevance. Hegel, I have argued, had some inkling of this in his discussion of slavery and freedom (Hegel 1961: 228-240; Patterson 1982: 97-101, 334-342). To the degree that he saw a fundamental dialectical relation between freedom and slavery, to that degree must he be credited with being the first to articulate this insight. But what he went on to say about the crisis of honor experienced by the master—the paradox of seeking honor from someone you have degraded

and therefore in no position to confirm honor—is sheer metaphysical nonsense. The simple solution to the "dilemma" lay right under Hegel's nose, given how well he knew his classical history—the class of men who were not masters, but free by virtue of not being slaves. By enhancing their collective honor, by re-creating them as freemen, this class acquired a vested interest in the state of slavery, and a debt of honor to the all-powerful slave-holder class with whom they felt, as freemen, a bond of solidarity. Thus, slavery solved the problem of honor it created for the master by its concurrent invention of the status of freemen. It was the neatest of all social triangulations, and for the West, one of the most portentous. More on this later, when I respond to Professor Raaflaub.

I still believe that this interpretation of slavery, published some twenty years ago is broadly correct and has stood up to critical scrutiny. However, there is one important respect in which my thinking on the subject has evolved, and it is of some relevance to the issues argued in this volume. I noted earlier that *Slavery and Social Death* was motivated by the search for a rather *crisp* definition of slavery. My view of how one defines a social status, or anything else for that matter, has grown to embrace a somewhat more pluralistic philosophy of definition. To put the matter bluntly: I have learned to take seriously Wittgenstein (1953) and the tradition of cognitive psychology he inspired (Rosch and Mervis 1975), to recognize that entities are often better defined, not only in terms of a specified set of criterial attributes, but more by means of prototypes, which are cases viewed as the clearest examples of belonging to a category. Thus I come to know what a bird is, not by first learning, in Aristotelian fashion, the essential attributes of birds, but by learning that the sparrow outside my window is the prototypical bird, and is far more birdlike than exotic entities such as penguins and ostriches.

My first use of this more hybrid approach is directly relevant to the problems discussed in this volume. It was my reconsideration of the relation between slavery and serfdom in Europe between the period of late antiquity and the eighteenth century (see Patterson 1991: chapter 20). The traditional view that serfdom rapidly replaced slavery over the course of the middle ages is no longer tenable. Both coexisted until well into early modern times. Between the period of late antiquity and modern times what occurred was not the replacement of one Aristotelian entity, slavery, by another, serfdom, but a complex, evolving coexistence during which the two institutions reinforced and mutually reconstituted each other. I have called this a recombinant process, because what basically happened was the socio-historical recombination of the three prototypic elements of slavery into different forms of serfdom, and slavery, from one era to another. This made for fuzzy boundaries. It is sometimes not possible to sharply distinguish slavery from serfdom; and at such times it is best to identify given instances as being more or less slave-like, or more

or less serf-like. As Kolchin (1987) has shown, for example, by the mid-nineteenth century Russian serfdom—once so distinctive—had morphed into a mode of domination more like American slavery than what had existed in Russia a century or so earlier.

Between 375 and 975 CE, what I have called a convergent form of serfdom and slavery (Patterson 1991: 352-356) developed in Western Europe. As is well known, several major transitions and recombinations took place during this turbulent era (Bonassie 1985; Brown 1971; Dockès 1982; Ste. Croix 1981; Thompson 1982; Verlinden 1955; Whittaker 1987). Domestically, in late imperial times many slaves “ascended” into the status of tenants attached to the land; at the same time, formerly free tenants descended into what Theodosius called “slaves of the land” although many continued in their former status and, indeed, slavery was on the rise again during the fifth century. These transitions took place in many ways. Many slaves were formally manumitted into hutted status; most seem to have simply arrived at this condition *de facto*. Likewise, some formerly free tenants sometimes became domiciled tenants as a result of debt; others in exchange for protection in what were frightening times; others were first enslaved by the invading barbarians who, however, quickly learned that enslaving a conquered group was not a good idea and promptly “manumitted” them into the statuses of hutted slaves or slave-like, domiciled tenants. In addition, there were those who came from outside with the invaders: some of whom were slaves, who were then domiciled, while others were actually clients and lower order kinsmen of the invaders who rapidly lost claims of kinship in the new, fluid, situation and found themselves reduced to the emerging condition of semi-slaves. In time, all subordinate groups increasingly came to share what had been the most distinctive attribute of classical ancient slavery—the condition of natal alienation. This was a result of the full recognition by the sixth century, that nearly all non-elite persons, whatever their status, were of alien ancestry, including the formerly semi-free *coloni* that had come in with the invaders. However, since many of the new masters were themselves of recent alien ancestry, natal alienation lost its potency as a strong marker of slavery.

The attribute that most distinguished slave from free was honor and name. Non-slaves had an honor price, however meager, payable to them or their kinsmen; slaves had none. The fate of the Latin word, *servus*, nicely illuminates these trends and ambiguities. The old Latin word for slaves increasingly—and accurately—came to apply to all of these converging statuses precisely because they were, in fact, more consistent with the slave prototype than any other status. Nonetheless, people insisted on making distinctions which, though largely honorific, were nonetheless psychologically important: they may have been slaves *de facto*, but they desperately grasped for the empty *de jure* statuses that the clerics and lawyers were busily

inventing or reviving to ease their pride and legitimize their lords’ claims on them. Interestingly, the legal status and term these semi-slaves most preferred was *colliberti* which echoed the old Roman sentimental confraternity of persons who had been manumitted by the same master. But of equal significance was the term not used to describe their status—*libertas*. That would have been taking too many liberties with reality.

This mutual constitution of slavery and serfdom was not peculiar to Europe. It is strikingly evident in the one eastern society where large-scale slavery and serfdom co-existed for nearly as long as they did in Europe, namely Korea. There, during the nearly two millennia between the founding of Silla (57 BCE) and the end of the Yi dynasty (1910 CE) we find a similar process of enslavement and enserfment that culminated in what seemed like the large-scale enslavement of a native population by its own leaders, especially during the late Koryo and early Yi periods. Unlike Sparta, there is a relative abundance of data on Korea (including even Census data during the Yi period) and our understanding of how this pattern of indigenous slavery emerged offers important comparative clues in our attempt to understand Spartan helotry.

First, by the thirteenth century the vast majority of the slaves (*nobi*) were locally born, of Korean ancestry, and shared a common language and culture with their masters and other free persons (Salem 1979: 634), as was the case in Laconia and Messenia. Is this an instance of the successful mass enslavement of a conquered people, *in situ*, or, more puzzlingly, the large scale reduction of their own formerly free subjects to slavery by an elite? Actually it was neither. From as early as the fourth century, long before the peninsula was united into a single kingdom, slavery was widespread, the result of territorial wars and tribute payment between what were then very different and often warring peoples (Hatada 1969: 17). By the early Koryo period (918-1392 CE), when the Korean peninsula was finally united into a single state, most of the slaves would have been descendants of persons enslaved during the earlier period when there were three distinct states in the peninsula (Silla, Koguryo and Paekche) that were frequently at war with each other, in addition to repeated conflicts with China. Large numbers of prisoners of war were taken in these engagements especially during the wars leading to the Koryo unification. Then, in what historian Ki-baik Lee calls a virtual “social compulsion” on the part of the aristocratic elites of the period, captives were promptly enslaved and resettled in special slave villages within the captors’ kingdoms known as *hyang* or *pugok* (Lee 1984: 56). The ranks of this basic stock of hereditary slaves were later supplemented by other forms of enslavement, especially punishment for crimes and self-enslavement due to destitution (Unruh 1976). By the early years of the Yi dynasty (1392-1910 CE) when the slave population was estimated at 30 percent of the total (Shin 1976: 4; for the later period see Wagner 1971: 18-19) the main source of new slaves was

"commendation" in which destitute commoners sought refuge from corvée labor and the military draft by enslaving themselves to powerful landlords.

Second, Korean uses of slaves bore remarkable resemblances to those of the Spartan state. As in Sparta, all land, in theory, belonged to the state, its usufruct parceled out to landlords, peasants and tenants. In practice, most land was in the control of private hands, with the crown and large landlords, and the favored Yangban bureaucrats and literati, possessing most of the best lands. During the Yi dynasty, the practice was to assign state land, known as rank land (*kwajon*) to civil and military officers which was returned to the state at the death of recipients. Early in the dynasty so-called merit subjects (*kongsin*) were assigned private ownership of hereditary grants of land, but the theory that all land belonged to the state persisted, and was reflected in periodic state seizure of merit land upon the death of less powerful or "minor merit subjects", the *wonjong kongsin* (Shin 1973: 11-14). A large peasant class of small-holders scraped by on marginal lots. As in Sparta, the elite had little time for the direct management of their farms, so production fell to tenants and slaves in a complex "latifundia-minifundia" pattern which was often under the supervision of slave overseers (Shin 1973). Slaves were either public (*kong nobi*) or private (*sa nobi*). As in Sparta, there were vast numbers of the former, who not only directly served the household of the ruling elite, but farmed its land. Some of these public slaves were given on life-time loans to bureaucrats, military officers and other favored members of the Yangban class residing in the cities. Private slaves, who belonged to individual owners, functioned in all capacities, both in the urban areas where their owners resided, and on their estates, large and small, where they labored under slave overseers. As in Sparta, we find a high level of local absenteeism among the large land-owners combined with partial absenteeism among less wealthy members of the elite Yangbang class (Hong 1979).

A remarkable feature of Korean slavery which may well provide another clue to Sparta, was that slaves were allowed to own land as well as other slaves. Some became quite prosperous. Clearly, there was little prestige attached to the mere farming of land; indeed, the Korean elite seem to have regarded the whole business with as much contempt as their Spartiate counterpart, and was happy to leave it to tenants and so-called "out-resident" slaves, many of whom labored on terms more favorable—such as a fixed fee—than those offered the free share-cropping tenants (Unruh 1976; Lee 1984: 123-124; 188). Slave-holders, and landowners generally, "were either officials or potential officials whose principal aim in life was to rise in prominence and increase their landownings" and this was best achieved by living as absentee landlords in the capital (Hatada 1969: 68).

What then, distinguished slave from free farmer—especially better-off, privately owned slaves who possessed land, or the farm slaves of the palace, most of

whom "functioned as small independent farmers in all but name" (Unruh 1979: 634)? Slaves, unlike peasants and free tenants, could be sold or given as gifts, and their status was hereditary, but this was not the decisive factor. In practice this rarely happened. As in Sparta, slave-owners were interested in preserving and increasing their stock of slaves, given the very labor-intensive and unproductive nature of agriculture (Shin 1973: 95-98). And because so many labored on their own in share-cropping arrangements, most absentee owners knew that they were inviting trouble if they sold slaves away from their homes or loved ones. In fact, running away was rampant; and as in Sparta, servile history was dotted with several well remembered major slave revolts (Hong 1983: ch. 8). In Korea, as in Sparta, the decisive factor separating slaves from non-slaves was honor. Ancient Korea was a rigidly stratified social order in which a fundamental distinction was drawn between those who were "good" (*yang*) and those who were "base" (*ch'on*). Baseness was a deep, polluting, and nearly indelible stain, a condition of utter degradation which was not removed in those few cases where slaves were manumitted. In order to become an official, for example, a person had to be able to prove that he was at least eight generations removed from any ancestor who had been a slave (Unruh 1976: 30)!

What do the comparative data on slavery and serfdom in Europe and Korea suggest about Spartan helotry other than what we have already hinted? It is important to note that the question of the origins and status of helots are very closely linked in these papers although both sides of the debate avoid any claim that a conquered group had been enslaved *en masse* and *in situ*. Van Wees (this volume), for example, argues that the helots were primarily a conquered native group who had been enserfed, rather than enslaved. He reinforces this by observing that to the degree that there was intermingling of slaves with serfs in Messenia, the former were brought in from outside. Luraghi (this volume and 2002), on the other hand, insists that helotry was a form of slavery and, as such, could not have originated in conquest. Both agree that there had been intermingling of peoples and statuses, but differ in regard to the primary mode of domination and the main source of the servile population.

Actually, what the comparative data discussed above strongly suggest is that the differences between Luraghi and those holding the traditional view may not be on the "collision course" feared by Professor Alcock (this volume). Let me explain with what may be called a convergent path hypothesis. The argument, derived analogously from the cases discussed above, is that the Laconians had been genuine slaves who had gone through a long process of being huttled up to the status of domiciled, semi-free (or semi-servile) persons. The Messenians, on the other hand, had been free persons resettled in Messenia, who had seen their status gradually reduced to that of semi-free, then virtually enslaved domiciled persons.

Most of the authors here are in agreement that there were striking differences between Laconia and Messenia which recent archeological findings have only reinforced. Van Wees points to several of these differences: the fact that the Laconians had no distinct ethnic identity, in striking contrast with the Messenians; their possibly earlier subjection; their greater loyalty to their Spartan lords, and their continued subjection long after the liberation of Messenia; and the pathetic way in which they were manipulated by the promise of manumission. There is, further, the archeological evidence tapped most vigorously by Hodkinson (this volume): the more dispersed settlement of Laconia, the more direct involvement of the Spartan lords with them, and the strong hints that the Spartans were initially more directly involved in fashioning its agricultural structure, contrasted with the more nucleated settlements in Messenia with its implication of an incorporated, *partly* pre-existing—though not necessarily native—farming population later augmented with slaves from outside. Finally, there is Figueira's important reminder of the greater fertility of Messenia and, most importantly, the Spartan tendency to depopulate conquered lands and repopulate them with more pliant subjects.

The convergent hypothesis more parsimoniously explains these differences than any other. Slavery, although one that was slowly being changed, best describes the condition of the Laconians, and it is difficult to understand why classicists would want to see anything else. The Laconians were loyal to their Spartan masters and evinced no separate ethnic identity for the simple reason that they never possessed a pre-doulotic identity or culture. Their behavior is most consistent with that of prototypical slave populations that had been recruited—as prisoners of war, as booty, as bought chattels—from disparate sources having no common identity until it was painfully forged on the anvil of their enslavement. American scholars, surely, need not look afar for a perfect example of such a process and such a group: they are called Southern slavery, and African-Americans.

There may have been another reason for the loyalty of the Laconians—their gratitude for the slow change in their status to that of domiciled semi-slaves. Precisely because they had previously suffered the social death of slavery, they eagerly grasped the meager, grudgingly incremental, but emotionally gratifying shift in their position to that of semi-slave tenants. It might even have been that the term *helot* served a face-saving socio-linguistic function similar to that played by *colliberti* and *adscripticius* (the more formal, late Latin term for the domiciled tenant) for the transitional era of late imperial and early Dark Age Europe. In much the same way that every realistic Latin observer of the fifth and sixth centuries who took a good, long look at the emerging servile statuses of his times and brushed away all the fancy revived terminology with the gruff aside that “I know a *servus* when I see a *servus*,” so, earlier, might have plain-spoken Greek observers of the

Laconian helots during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE in their insistence (as Luraghi reminds us) on calling a *doulos* a *doulos*.

The case of Messenia is more complicated. The problem the revisionists confront is the widely attested cultural and linguistic unity of Messenians and Spartans and the former's proud insistence on their own Dorian ancestry. This claim, to be sure, cuts both ways. On the one hand, it could be used to defend a pattern of enslavement, deracination and acculturation to the culture of the Dorian master-class similar to that experienced by the Laconians. But this, on the other hand, undermines the otherwise quite attractive second prong of the revisionist argument, advanced by Luraghi, of a rather late, parasitically constructed evolution of Spartan *homoioi* and ritually despised helots (Luraghi 2002: 235).

The solution, offered by several of the authors of this volume (especially Luraghi and Hall), is an ancient instance of the invention of tradition, the deployment of what Hall nicely calls a set of “ancestralizing strategies,” by which means the recently liberated Messenians staked their claim to a place in Hellenic historic glory, ably and perhaps cynically, abetted by Athenian propagandists. As a sometime student of modern ethnic identity formation, I am surely tempted to embrace this “ethnic theory of the origins of the helots” as Luraghi calls it. There is certainly something to it, but it is a temptation that, in the final analysis, I feel inclined to resist. To cite a modern example, the “ancestralizing strategies” of modern WASP Americans is full of bombast and fictitious glory-talk about their Mayflower, freedom-loving English ancestors. We *know* that large numbers of the earliest settlers came here as indentured servants. Nonetheless, it remains true that their ancestors all hailed from Britain. Ethnic claims, however puffed up, are not always lies.

Given the heroic tradition of resistance of the Messenians, rightly celebrated in this volume by Cartledge, given the hatred they must have felt for their former Spartan overlords who had so spitefully used and ritually degraded them, I find it hard to understand why they would have wished to do so Tom-like a thing as appropriate the history of these unrepentant and cruel overlords, except for the simple reason that it was true. Data from the ancient world, especially this corner of it, is simply too sparse and precious for us to play social constructionist games with, especially when it is more consistent with other explanations.

The comparative data on early Korea might offer some clues to the origins of the Messenians. It seems unlikely that they were a conquered native population—this appears more true of the *perioikoi*. They were, rather, perhaps in good part an early wave of the migrating Dorians—as the linguistic evidence, and their own traditions suggest—who lost out in the land-grabbing turmoil and military struggles of early state formation during the invasion period. Whatever their reasons for coming, it seems reasonable to surmise that something similar to what evolved in early Korea

took place. Waves of primitive warlords—barely more advanced than chiefs and headmen—would have set up petty war-lordships, in the process sometimes killing, sometimes simply politically decapitating then absorbing, sometimes bartering off to other petty chiefdoms prisoners of war taken from their own language group and other peoples. In the struggle for land and power, different groups and waves of invaders would have been treated as the enemy and fair game for take-over as much as earlier indigenous peoples. It is anachronistic to think of the incoming Dorians as a single group with any sense of ethnic identity. The idea that people sharing a common language must have some sense of ethnic identity, and are somehow less loath to slaughter, conquer and enslave each other, is a self-fulfilling late eighteenth and nineteenth century myth, initiated by Johann Herder and his romantic-nationalist followers. Eventually the large number of warring units would have been reduced in a bloody shake-out through alliances and conquests of each other, leading to a single, dominant state. In the process, the losers would have suffered a variety of fates: some, like the *perioikoi*, ended up as semi-dependent, satellite peoples; others, like the Messenians, may have been defeated enemies, but they could just as likely have started off as allies who were later subjected, or independent chiefdoms that had been lured into ill-fated confederations; or prisoners of war; or groups from several petty states and chiefdoms that were incorporated as subject peoples and slaves. And some may even have voluntarily commended themselves to servile statuses to avoid worse fates in the unsettled times. All these outcomes are attested in Korea during the turbulent years of the Three Kingdoms Period leading up to the Koryo unification. They are also found in the Ancient Near East. Indeed, the most famous people of the Ancient Near East—the Hebrews of Egypt—suggest one common mode: a subjected collection of peoples within a state, most of whom had been forcefully resettled there, but a significant number of whom had come voluntarily, who acquired a common identity as a result of their common subjection, and who retroactively constructed an ethnic myth of a pre-existing common identity, as well as an unusual ancestralizing claim of mass enslavement.

All the evidence used by the traditionalists to argue against the slave-like condition of the helots actually does just the opposite. Thus, Paul Cartledge (this volume) notes the frequently cited evidence that the helots were collectively, rather than individually, owned. Let us assume that contemporaries such as Strabo and Pausanias were correct in their observations. There are numerous cases on record of slaves being collectively or publicly owned. We can start with the public slaves of Rome, although it may be protested that their numbers were proportionately small. For most of Korean history, however, as we have already seen, the various dynasties claimed public ownership of all land and a large proportion of slaves. Practice, however, was something entirely different. Some means had to be found for getting nominally public slaves to produce

and the best way of doing this was to distribute them to individual masters in varying numbers, depending on their power and status. This, as we have seen, is what happened in Korea. Luraghi and the revisionists are not “finessing” anything in claiming that helots must have been individually controlled and largely owned; they are simply being socio-historically realistic. Until the invention of the modern state in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries with its vastly more efficient reach and organizational capacity, state ownership could exist only as an ideal, and a pretty weird one which everyone must have quietly winked or rolled their eyes at. If Sparta was the exception, if it indeed had the organizational capacity to give its ideal of state ownership of individuals in so cussedly demanding a sphere as agriculture any but sentimental meaning, then it is necessary to re-write the history of communism and organizational behavior. The Soviet Union, it had always been thought, was the first state to seriously attempt to do so. Yet, for all its totalitarian might and bureaucratic reach, its agricultural policy was a disaster.

The argument, revived here by Cartledge, that Sparta practiced state manumission, really proves nothing. Every large-scale slave system that I know of—including even the ante-bellum U.S. South for all its mean-spirited prohibition on manumission—occasionally resorted to state manumissions. In the Caribbean, which also had relatively low rates of manumission, the British drafted large numbers of slaves to fight the French and Spanish during the eighteenth century and by 1795 almost all the important British islands had corps of slave soldiers. In 1807, in what must rank as one of the most spectacular mass manumissions in the history of slavery, Whitehall manumitted some 10,000 of them (Buckley 1979).

Nothing better attests to the emerging slave-like condition of the Messenians than their ritualized humiliation. As we saw in the case of Korea and early medieval Europe, it is precisely where slaves have acquired a shared culture with their masters due to long centuries of common existence, and where masters do not directly control them, that the compensatory need to ritually humiliate them arises. Rituals of degradation thus become the main markers of the boundary between slave and free: the “base” and the “good,” as was said in Korea. Further, the master class parasitically enhanced its collective honor and sense of superiority through these highly ritualized acts of debasement.

2. Slavery, helotry and the invention of freedom

Kurt Raaflaub's interesting paper raises the issue of the relation of helotry to the development and institutionalization of freedom consciousness and the culture of freedom among the Greeks. He notes that contemporary commentary on the Messenian helots and their struggles for liberation was exceptional for the interest

shown in a servile population. He wonders whether the experience of the Messenians prompted the development of freedom consciousness and whether this proved that the simple desire for the negation of slavery was "sufficient impulse" for the construction of freedom. He claims that my view of the origin of freedom implies just such a simplistic, direct causal relation between the experience of slavery and the development of freedom, and he takes issue with it. He sums up his thesis and his disagreement with me as follows:

By focusing on the perspective of the free, my approach differs starkly from that of Patterson who pays much attention to the point of view of the slaves themselves and considers it crucial for the formation of freedom consciousness in society at large. My reason—and at the same time my thesis—is that slavery as such was able to trigger high consciousness of the value of liberty in a society only if the free, and especially those among them who mattered because they controlled power and set the tone in the community, adopted such consciousness themselves and integrated it into their value system. (above, p. 175)

Anyone who finds himself at odds with a scholar of Professor Raaflaub's eminence must pause and reconsider. In my case the urgency is acute in view of the fact that I relied heavily on Professor Raaflaub's own meticulous earlier studies in the development of an important part of my argument on the origins of freedom (Raaflaub 1981; 1983; 1985). Happily, it turns out that he has misunderstood me, and while a few areas of disagreement certainly exist, we are far more in agreement on the central issues than he allows. In what follows, I will first note the important areas of agreement between us, then I will attempt to show that most of our apparent disagreements are based on a misunderstanding of what I said.

First, and foremost, Raaflaub fully agrees with me that slavery was a *necessary* element in the development of freedom consciousness, and second, that in ancient times only the Greeks "raised their consciousness of the value of freedom to a level that enabled them to create an explicit concept of freedom with a differentiated terminology and political emphasis." What's more, in being the first to do so, they can be said to have invented freedom as a cultural system.

It is important to understand that in these post-modernist, multicultural times, such claims immediately make us allies in what is strongly rejected by many as a historically reactionary and philosophically insupportable position. One of the great intellectual ironies of our times is that the very success of the West at diffusing and globalizing its cherished ideal of freedom has led to the situation where intellectuals in many parts of the non-Western world who have come to embrace the ideal now deny its Western ancestry and, along with their Western supporters, are

prone to dismiss those who acknowledge its Greek invention as ethnocentric, racist, or (in my case) pathetic dupes of a perverse Western historiography.¹

Political and other social theorists attack our position from a different, universalist perspective. They begin with the assumption that the desire for freedom is universal—is "written in the hearts of men," as Locke would have it—and that it is a waste of time to even attempt to find its historical origins. If there is no freedom in Booga-Looga, it is only because the Booga-Loogans have not removed the socio-economic and political constraints on their inherent propensity to be free. Remove these constraints with good public policy and free markets and the Booga-Loogans will be no less passionate about freedom than Americans or Britons.

In such a hostile terrain it is important that the dwindling members of the camp to which Professor Raaflaub and I belong do not end up in fratricidal skirmishes, especially when these skirmishes are based on misreadings of each other. The first of these misreadings is Raaflaub's assertion that I hold the mere existence of slavery to be necessary and *sufficient* for the rise and institutionalization of freedom. This is incorrect. *Slavery and Social Death* had already established that slavery, even sometimes large-scale slavery, was found all over the world. Freedom, on the other hand, was until the twentieth century, almost entirely a Western cultural complex. If slavery alone generated freedom we would have expected to find it all over the world. We do not. Explaining why was the whole point of the first part of *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture*. Like Raaflaub, my problem was to identify those factors which, in conjunction with slavery, sufficiently accounted for the rise of freedom as a central value, and explained the paradox that, as I earlier put it, a set of values "with so degraded a pedigree, and so manifestly dangerous in its propensities" could "come to conquer the culture and consciousness of a people" and a civilization.

First and foremost among these factors was the rise in Greece of large-scale slave society—"genuine slave societies" as Sir Moses Finley called them—for the first time in world history. Second, was the emergence in Athens of an enfranchised farming population that had come close to revolt due to mass debt bondage and the threat of reduction to slavery. Third, was the skillful leadership of renegade members of the Athenian aristocracy—retroactively maligned as Tyrants—who astutely negotiated a substitution of participative political benefits, sweetened with a contradistinctive, solidaristic ideology of shared, Athenian superiority *vis-à-vis* the unfreedom of aliens and metics, for the redistribution of land which was what the

¹ See, for example, the hostile review by Martin Bernal of my *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* in the *American Journal of Sociology*; cf. the more balanced responses to the work by specialists on Asia in Kelly and Reid 1998: chs. 1, 5, 8.

mass of their post-Solonic, debt-relieved, but still land-hungry followers had originally really wanted, in the process creating the first male, mass democracy. Fourth, there was the development of an ancient dual economy in which a "modernized" farm sector of fruit farms and vineyards and an urban and mining sector, both largely manned by slaves, co-existed with a traditional, small-scale economy of own-account, farmer-citizens. Which, fifthly, permanently relieved the mass of small farmers from the economic demands of its elite. All of which, sixthly, eventually created a dynamic urban social space for a large number of manumitted slaves and other skilled, entrepreneurial aliens.² Finally, there was the wholly contingent threat of Persian external domination, the successful repulsion of which had three major consequences: mass euphoria about Greek freedom and independence, the likes of which were not to be witnessed again until the revolutionary era of America; the conflation of collective Greek freedom with individual freedom (given that Persian conquest had been identified with mass individual slavery); and the elite ideological appropriation of the triumphalist rhetoric of freedom surrounding the war, by conflating it with their traditional honorific notions of power, glory, valor in warfare, athletic prowess, in short, *aretê*—all that "the free heart displays" as Pindar, the poet of this conflation, eulogized³—which, in their view, had inspired their noble leadership and made victory possible.

What emerged as a result of these historical conjunctions over the course of the sixth and early fifth century was a complex tripartite cultural complex—freedom—which I have likened to a chordal triad: freedom as personal, individual liberation; freedom as the participative democracy of free male citizens; and freedom as the power to realize one's wishes, both for oneself and for, as well as in, one's state. Although the historical path to its development was unique, there was nonetheless a remarkable internal coherence to the cultural chord that all Athenians came to call freedom by the fourth decade of the fifth century. At its core, paradoxically, was the notion of power: freedom meant liberation from the absolute power, or threat thereof, of another (archetypally a slave master); it also meant the exercise of power, including power over others (and there was no paradox here, as Raaflaub [1983] himself has shown elsewhere); and it meant sharing in the collective power of the state.

These three notes of freedom emerged at different times before their final convergence around the middle of the fifth century—a convergence that was most powerfully articulated in the funeral oration, as Nicole Loraux (1986) has so brilliantly shown. Each was promoted initially mainly by different groups, but eventually

all three notes were embraced by all, though with different classes emphasizing one or other notes. Personal freedom—raw primal freedom as simple liberation from another's absolute control—was initially an obsession of slaves, abetted by masters who found this a perfect way to motivate them. Freedom as democracy was primarily the work of the farmer-citizen. Freedom as power and exaltation was primarily the construction of the aristocracy and slave-holder class. But however great the emphasis, the chord was always acknowledged.

Two distinctions are neglected by Raaflaub in his summary of my position: that between the mere discovery of freedom and its institutionalization; and that between slavery's role as the foundation of the system that made freedom possible and as generator of the very idea of freedom itself. Most classical historians, including Raaflaub, now agree that large-scale slavery was the economic foundation of this entire transformation. There is still sharp disagreement, however, regarding the more radical claim that slavery also initiated the idea and celebration of freedom. Sir Moses Finley (1959, 1976), for example, while forcefully arguing that slave labor was the foundation of Greek civilization, was not of the view that it generated the idea of freedom. Here, however, Raaflaub like Max Pohlenz (1966)—who greatly influenced us both—shares my view that slavery was at least initially generative of the idea of freedom. Raaflaub appears to believe that there is a major difference between us in the claim that slavery accounts for the *institutionalization* of freedom consciousness, in its extraordinary emergence as a dominant value in Greece but, as I indicated above, there is no such disagreement. It would have violated every professional sociological impulse in me to have argued that the mere discovery of an idea was enough to explain its persistence and institutionalization.

I will not get here into the vexed philosophical issue of whether something can exist without having a name, except to note, once again, that my position is not that different from Raaflaub's. Of course, there will be a lag between the socio-historical construction of a new cultural pattern—especially one as complex and contentious as freedom—and the name that finally settles on it; Raaflaub could hardly disagree with this. Nor with the established fact that terms are often contested, and worse, appropriated, in the process seriously distorting the original meaning and content of the cultural phenomena to which they were originally applied. Consider what Plato did with the previously constructed idea of, and word for, freedom (*Republic* 561D-562C; *Laws* 693B, 701B). Nonetheless, I wholly agree with Raaflaub that, in the long run, if a term does not exist it is very likely that the concept or cultural pattern to which it applies elsewhere also does not. Indeed, one of my main sources of evidence for the non-existence of freedom in the non-Western world is the simple linguistic fact that

² Another first; throughout the Ancient Near East, for example, skilled slaves and those belonging to the elite usually saw no advantage in becoming free.

³ Cf. Pind., *Pyth.* 2.57 (transl. Bowra).

no word for the idea existed in most of the major non-Western languages until Western contact.

One genuine area of disagreement between us concerns my claim that women were very involved with the original discovery of freedom. The disagreement, however, may be due to Raaflaub's failure to appreciate my distinction between the discovery and institutionalization of freedom. My argument was that women must have been among the first to discover freedom as value, and in conceding that slaves were the first people to discover freedom as an existential imperative of their social condition and their desperate desire to escape it, Raaflaub has no choice but to accept the implication that women were the first to discover it. For it is indisputable that the vast majority of the earliest slaves, in the world of Odysseus as elsewhere, were women. The freedom that women discovered, however, was only the primal, personal note of the triad—the desire for escape from the dread horror of what the free women in Aeschylus' *Seven Against Thebes* could easily imagine as “the house of death, a spear-booty, a slave, in crumbling ashes, dishonorably sacked . . .” They were entirely excluded from the discovery and institutionalization of democracy. And, of course, they were hardly in a position to conceive of, let alone experience, freedom as power over others.

There still remains the question, however, of how far women were able to take the primal discovery of personal freedom. Was the idea still-born among Greek women as was true of women and men all over the non-Greek world? By and large, yes. The institutionalization of personal freedom, it was argued, had to await the full development of the urban slave economy with its enabling social space for freedmen and other members of the metic class, and this came long after the discovery and institutionalization of freedom in the note or form of democracy and the exercise of power. What was first discovered was last institutionalized, precisely because it was first discovered by women and had to await the institutional pressure of successful male metics.

Nonetheless, I did suggest—and here is where we genuinely differ—that something more than mere still-born idea took hold of some Greek women during the late seventh century. Before it was nipped in the bud and they were finally shut out of what Vidal-Naquet (1986: 206) called the male “citizens’ club” of classical democracy, marked by its “double exclusion” of women and slaves, something that seems very much like a brief episode of female assertiveness took place in parts of Greece. My main evidence for this comes from outside Athens: Hesiod's notorious misogyny. It is not so much its gratuitous viciousness that is so revealing, as its very expression. It demands explanation, because men in normally patriarchal societies where women are properly in their place find no need to comment on women.

Silence is the normal fate of women in normally functioning patriarchal systems. Only when women are acting out of their place—in other words, not simply imagining, but acting free—do we find men publicly venting their misogyny. There may be a better explanation than this for Hesiod's insistent misogyny, but I am yet to find it.

What does all this have to do with Sparta and its helots? Actually, a good deal more than even Raaflaub suggests. Raaflaub correctly observes that “the helot issue did not automatically trigger conscious concerns about liberty,” but he incorrectly concludes that “the slave-free contrast was traditionally viewed at a low level of consciousness or assigned low significance.” When we talk about the existence of freedom in any given society, it is important that we distinguish between its structural significance and the extent of its social permeation. Freedom may be highly institutionalized and of great political and ideological importance even though it is restricted to the elite. Indeed, with the exception of fifth and fourth century Athens, this was true of the history of freedom right down to the twentieth century in Europe. To take a few examples, freedom was alive and fully institutionalized in eighteenth century Britain and nineteenth century America but it would take another century before women were truly free, and another century and a half for black Americans. Or consider the extreme case of Apartheid South Africa where freedom was cherished and fully institutionalized among the white elite though denied to the black majority.

Now, as I have argued, what was unique about Athens was that the peculiar conjunction of historical and socio-economic forces, mentioned earlier, led to the revolutionary development and conflation of all three elements of freedom. There is no reason to believe, however, that a more truncated process did not take place elsewhere in Greece, involving, say, only two elements of freedom, and extending to a much more restricted segment of the population. Just such a development may have taken place in Sparta. Indeed, as several of the authors in this volume have observed, for all its peculiarities, Sparta may well have been more typical of Greece in certain respects than Athens.

Luraghi (2002) has tantalizingly suggested that, had it not been for the Solonic reforms the Spartan system, or something more like it, may well have been the course taken by Athens. We know how much certain famous members of its conservative elite admired Sparta. I want to suggest that it is as erroneous to claim that institutionalized freedom and its celebration did not exist in Sparta as it is to argue that it did not exist in Apartheid South Africa, or eighteenth century Britain or the ante-bellum and Jim Crow South. Let us not forget the most famous comment from a contemporary observer of Sparta: that the free there were more

free and the slaves more slave-like than in any other part of the Greek world.⁴ What developed in Sparta were two, rather than three elements of freedom. First and foremost was the master class' view of freedom as absolute power over oneself (that internal self-discipline and control over one's internal "slave impulses" and base passions, that Plato modeling on Sparta, celebrated) and over inferior others. But Sparta also developed and fully institutionalized a distinctive form of elitist, totalitarian democracy—what the world later came to call *Herrenvolk* democracy. As others, most notably Sir Karl Popper (1962) have shown, it has been the model of this version of democracy throughout the ages of Western Europe, both directly, and indirectly through the malign political "spell of Plato."

Modern Apartheid South Africa and the Ante-Bellum and Jim Crow South instantiate the Spartan model in ways that are often missed. There is really no comparison between the inefficient, absentee farming and land policy of the Spartans and the highly capitalistic, residential farm management of South Africa and the Southern U.S. Where the comparison holds is in the vicious degradation and ritualized humiliation of the mass of South Africans and African-Americans by the white elite, as an integral element of their own *Herrenvolk* conception of freedom as white power and democracy. Sparta's annual declaration of war against the helots; the minstrel-like use of drunken helots as models of negative identification; the Gestapo-like *krypteia*, are all echoed in the modern rituals of debasement practiced in Apartheid South Africa and the ante-bellum and Jim Crow South. Consider the following declaration of a freedom-loving South Carolinian, in 1822, long before the abolitionist movement was taken seriously:

[Negro slaves] should be watched with an eye of steady and unremitting observation . . . Let it not be forgotten, that our Negroes are freely the JACOBINS of the country; that they are the ANARCHISTS and the DOMESTIC ENEMY; the COMMON ENEMY OF CIVILIZED SOCIETY, and the BARBARIANS WHO WOULD, IF THEY COULD, BECOME THE DESTROYERS OF OUR RACE.⁵

If this sounds all too familiar to every student of Spartan helotry, it is because modern slaveholders were quick to see the parallels between their own versions of freedom and *Herrenvolk* democracy and those of the ancients, especially Sparta. What Luraghi wrote of the "set of practices of ritualized contempt by which the Spartiates' produced a despicable collective identity for the helots," holds exactly

true of modern *Herrenvolk* practices: that it was "a mirror image of the Spartiates' image of themselves." The most important reason for the study of ancient helotry, then, may well be the fact that the exalted, contradistinctive self-fashioning engendered by the Spartiates' treatment of their helots was the historic prototype of what, until the early decades of the twentieth century, would remain the dominant model of Western freedom.

⁴ Critias 88 B 37 Diels-Kranz.

⁵ Cited in Franklin 1956. Uppercase in original.

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