



Peter Hunt

ANCIENT
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— AND —
ROMAN
SLAVERY

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Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery

Peter Hunt

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This edition first published 2018

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Registered Office

John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 111 River Street, Hoboken, NJ 07030, USA

John Wiley & Sons Ltd, The Atrium, Southern Gate, Chichester, West Sussex, PO19 8SQ, UK

Editorial Office

350 Main Street, Malden, MA 02148-5020, USA

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Hunt, Peter, 1961- author.

Title: Ancient Greek and Roman slavery / Peter Hunt, University of Colorado, Boulder, Colorado.

Description: Hoboken, NJ : Wiley-Blackwell, 2018. | Includes bibliographical references and index. | Description based on print version record and CIP data provided by publisher; resource not viewed.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017013713 (print) | LCCN 2017017166 (ebook) | ISBN 9781119421061 (epub) | ISBN 9781405188050 (hardback) | ISBN 9781405188067 (paper)

Subjects: LCSH: Slavery—Greece—History. | Slavery—Rome—History. | BISAC: LITERARY CRITICISM / Ancient & Classical.

Classification: LCC HT863 (ebook) | LCC HT863 .H86 2018 (print) | DDC 306.3/6209495—dc23

LC record available at <https://lcn.loc.gov/2017013713>

Cover image: World History Archive / Alamy Stock Photo

Cover design by Wiley

Set in 10/12 Warnock Pro by Aptara Inc., New Delhi, India

Printed and bound in Malaysia by Vivar Printing Sdn Bhd

An exciting study of ancient slavery in Greece and Rome

This book provides an introduction to pivotal issues in the study of classical (Greek and Roman) slavery. The span of topics is broad – ranging from everyday resistance to slavery to philosophical justifications of slavery, and from the process of enslavement to the decline of slavery after the fall of the Western Roman Empire. The book uses a wide spectrum of types of evidence, and relies on concrete and vivid examples whenever possible.

Introductory chapters provide historical context and a clear and concise discussion of the methodological difficulties of studying ancient slavery. The following chapters are organized around central topics in slave studies: enslavement, economics, politics, culture, sex and family life, manumission and ex-slaves, everyday conflict, revolts, representations, philosophy and law, and decline and legacy. Chapters open with general discussions of important scholarly controversies and the challenges of our ancient evidence, and case studies from the classical Greek, Hellenistic, and Roman periods provide detailed and concrete explorations of the issues.

- Organized by key themes in slave studies with in-depth classical case studies
- Emphasizes Greek/Roman comparisons and contrasts
- Features helpful customized maps
- Topics range from demography to philosophy, from Linear B through the fall of the empire in the west
- Features myriad types of evidence: literary, historical, legal and philosophical texts, the bible, papyri, epitaphs, lead letters, curse tablets, art, manumission inscriptions, and more

Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery provides a general survey of classical slavery and is particularly appropriate for college courses on Greek and Roman slavery, on comparative slave societies, and on ancient social history. It will also be of great interest to history enthusiasts and scholars, especially those interested in slavery in different periods and societies.

Peter Hunt is a professor at the University of Colorado where he teaches a wide variety of courses including Greek and Roman slavery. He has written two books: *Slaves, Warfare, and Ideology in the Greek Historians* and *War and Peace, and Alliance in Demosthenes' Athens*. His previous work on slavery includes chapters in the *Cambridge World History of Slavery* and the *Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Slavery* as well as the slavery chapter in the *Cambridge World History*, vol. 4.

To Isabel and Julia

Dear Isabel and Julia, I am so glad to hear from you and to hear that you are both well and happy. I am sure that you are both very busy with your studies and your work, but I hope that you will find some time to write to me. I am sure that you will both be very successful in your studies and in your work.

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Illustrations

Figures

Figure 1.1 A tablet from Pylos, ca. 1200 BCE, written in Linear B syllabograms.

Figure 3.1 Epitaph of Timothea.

Figure 4.1 Slave auction scene.

Figure 7.1 Greek symposium scene depicted on a vase found in Campania.

Figure 7.2 Letter about rent for live-in *hetaira*.

Figure 8.1 Family tree of Pasion.

Figure 8.2 Columbaria 1 in the Codini Vineyard near Rome.

Figure 9.1 Slave holding chamber pot.

Figure 9.2 Egyptian WANTED poster for runaway slave.

Figure 10.1 Coin commemorating the suppression of the second Sicilian slave revolt.

Figure 10.2 Coin of the slave king Antiochus (originally Eunus).

Figure 11.1 Grave relief of Hegeso.

Figure 11.2 Terracotta of a comic slave mask.

Figure 11.3 *Lararium* in the House of the Vettii.

Figure 12.1 EID MAR Denarius, Roman silver coin (42 BCE).

Figure 12.2 Metal slave collar.

Maps

Map 1 Mainland Greece and the Aegean.

Map 2 The Roman Empire around 150 CE.

Map 3 The powers of the Mediterranean in 220 BCE.

Map 4 Origins of slaves at Athens in the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

Map 5 Spartacus at large in Italy.

Map 6 After the disintegration of the Roman Empire: Europe and the Mediterranean in 530 CE.

Preface

I wrote this book with two audiences in mind. I hope it will be a useful resource for college courses on Greek and Roman slavery and a supplementary text for more general classes involving ancient social history. But it should also provide a general introduction for any other reader who wants or needs to know more about this fascinating topic, for example, those interested in comparative slave societies or in other aspects of ancient Greek or Roman culture or history. These two intended audiences have determined many aspects of this book.

In particular, within the main text I have preferred what I consider the clearest and most interesting presentations of a topic rather than the most recent. I have kept references to secondary scholarship sparse and unobtrusive, and I have confined myself to works in English whenever possible. Nevertheless, my citations and “Suggested Reading” sections include recent works and should provide a good start for further investigations of particular topics—for the purpose, for instance, of research papers. I have also not hesitated to cite my own scholarly publications when these provide more detailed treatments of topics or arguments I mention. I do not claim to be a particularly important scholar of ancient slavery, but I am the one with whom I most frequently agree.

The book is organized topically rather than having a Greek and then a Roman half. Each chapter sets out a major issue in the study of slavery and considers theoretical approaches, our ancient evidence, and key controversies. Contrasts and parallels between Greek and Roman slavery usually play a role in either the introduction or conclusion of each chapter. The bodies of most chapters are devoted to case studies from classical Greece and Rome – and Hellenistic examples play a role in several chapters. The focus on particular cases allows greater depth and I have been willing to forgo general coverage for the sake of this goal. For example, in Chapter 7, I focus on slave prostitutes in classical Athens but not at Rome and on slave families at Rome without attempting equal treatment for Greek cases. The quantity and richness of our evidence has often determined such choices. And even in the cases for which we seem to have the best evidence, I’ll need to admit our ignorance regularly.

Despite this selectivity, this is not a short book. I begin with two introductory chapters: an overview of classical slavery within the context of Greek and Roman history and a chapter about the challenges historians face studying ancient slavery and the methods they use. The next three chapters (3–5) consider large-scale issues about the institution of slavery: the supply of slaves, the economics of slavery, and its political ramifications. The next three chapters (6–8) treat aspects of the lives of ancient slaves: their culture, sex and family lives; manumission from slavery and its consequences. Chapters 9 and 10

consider the antagonistic aspects of the relationships between slaves and masters: first slave resistance on an everyday and individual level and then open slave revolts. Two chapters (11 and 12) focus on the perspectives of slaveholders: how they represented slaves in literature and art and then the philosophical and legal justifications, critiques, and ameliorations of slavery. I conclude with a discussion of the decline of classical slavery and its legacy extending to the present.

Acknowledgments

In writing this book, I have benefitted greatly from the support of institutions, colleagues, friends, research assistants, editors, and family. I have been lucky to have such fine and supportive colleagues in the Department of Classics at the University of Colorado Boulder. I owe special thanks to Noel Lenski – now at Yale – and to John Gibert for their advice and conversation, and for sharing some of their work with me pre-publication – and to Cathy Cameron in the Department of Anthropology, who did the same. My treatment of Epictetus and slavery owes a great deal to an honors thesis that my student, Angela Funk, wrote on that topic. The University of Colorado has supported my research and my writing with a LEAP grant for associate professors, a sabbatical, a fellowship from the Center for the Humanities and the Arts, and a College Scholar Award. I am also most grateful for the hard work of several graduate research assistants: the meticulous efforts of Stephanie Krause and Wesley Wood contributed a great deal to tightening the manuscript up for publication; they also drafted the maps; David Kear's long experience as an editor greatly improved the first half of the manuscript. John Nebel generously allowed me to use a photo of his own EID MAR denarius and arranged the permission from Gorny & Mosch for the image of the Manius Aquilius denarius.

I also owe thanks to several skillful and meticulous editors from Wiley-Blackwell: Haze Humbert first suggested the idea for this book and supervised the project over the years; Deirdre Ilkson edited early drafts of several chapters; and Louise Spencely edited the final manuscript. The two anonymous readers provided constructive criticism as well as many helpful suggestions and improved the manuscript greatly. Sara Forsdyke and David Lewis generously shared some of their forthcoming work with me; I am also indebted to them for valuable discussions of ancient slavery on several occasions. I am immensely grateful to Susan Treggiari for her astute comments and suggestions on several chapters; and to my wife, Mitzi Lee, who read over the material related to her field of expertise, ancient philosophy, and saved me from several missteps there. Of course, I alone am responsible for the mistakes that remain.

Modern and Ancient References: Abbreviations

References to modern scholarship are by author and date – either in footnotes or parentheses – with the full citations in the References section.

I cite ancient authors, by line numbers in drama and poetry or by book, chapter, and subsections in most prose authors. You may be more used to page citations, but those are only correct for one particular edition or translation of an author, whereas the lines, books, chapters, and section are usually the same across all translations and editions – though some translations of plays and poetry do not follow the original line numbers. “Fr.” stands for “fragment” and I refer to the collection of fragments by author and date, which you can look up in the bibliography – except for the *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker* listed in the abbreviations below.

I have followed the naming and numbering conventions of the Loeb Classical Library whenever possible. I cite the “Attic orators” – Aeschines, Antiphon, Demosthenes, Isaeus, Isocrates, and Lysias – by Loeb speech number alone. As is customary, I cite certain speeches that are probably by Apollodorus as by Pseudo-Demosthenes, [Demosthenes], where the square brackets indicate that the speeches are spurious, that is, falsely ascribed to Demosthenes. I cite other spurious speeches of Demosthenes with square brackets as well as the *Constitution of the Athenians*, falsely ascribed to Xenophon, [Xenophon], and the *Oeconomica*, falsely ascribed to Aristotle, [Aristotle]. I refer to Didorus Siculus, *Library of History*, Herodotus, *The Histories*, Livy, *History of Rome*, and Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* by the author's name alone.

Especially in epigraphy and papyrology there are standard modern collections, typically abbreviated. I use the following in this book:

BGU: *Berliner griechische Urkunden*, 1895–
<https://www.degruyter.com/view/serial/119344>

CIL: *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, 1853–
http://cil.bbaw.de/cil_en/index_en.html

FGrH: *Fragmente der griechischen Historiker*, 1923–
<http://referenceworks.brillonline.com/browse/brill-s-new-jacoby-IG>

IG: *Inscriptiones Graecae*, 1860–
<http://www.bbaw.de/en/research/ig>
<http://epigraphy.packhum.org/>

P.Oxy.: Oxyrhynchus Papyri, 1898–
<http://www.papyrology.ox.ac.uk/POxy/>

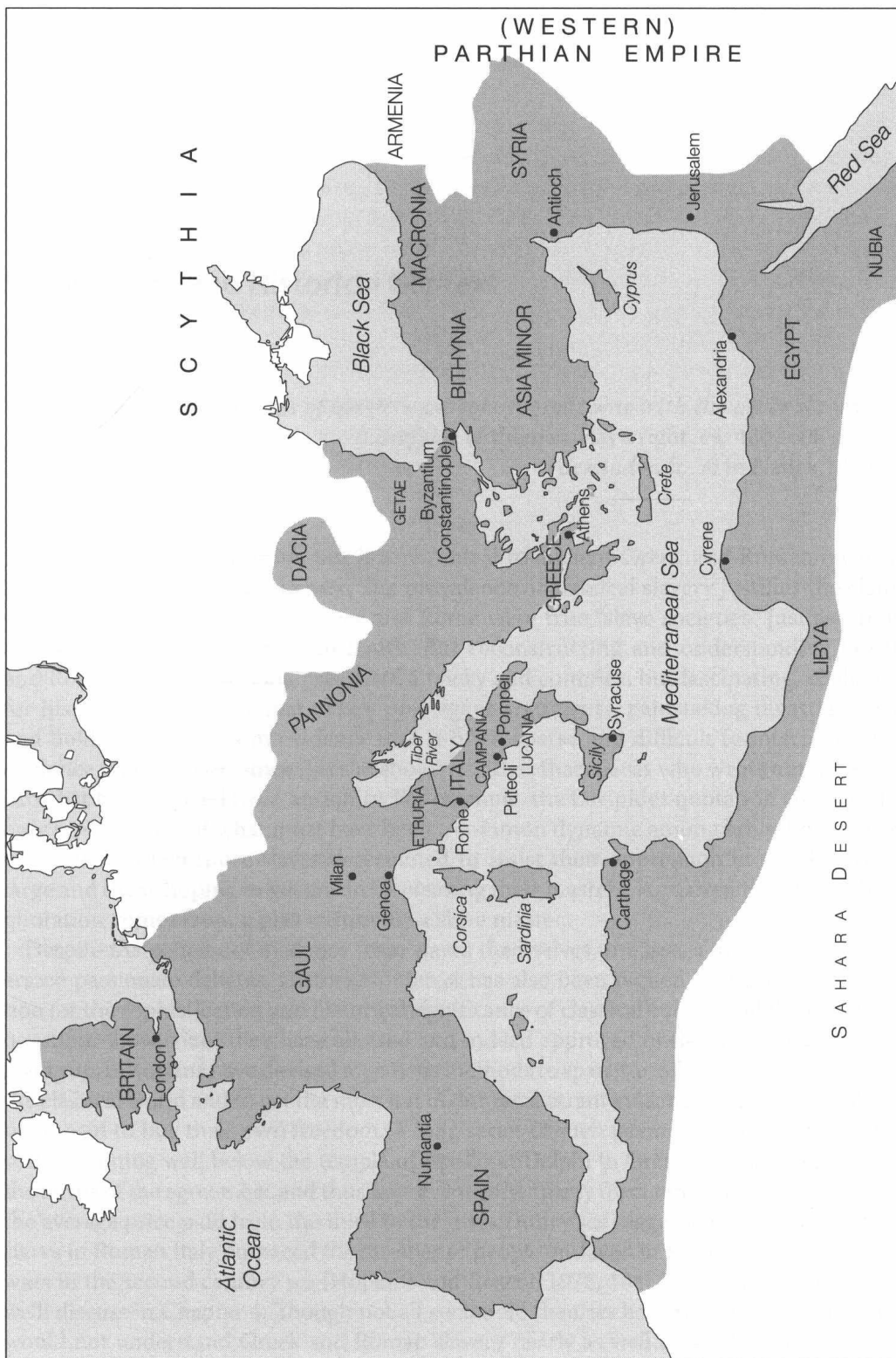
SEG: *Supplementum Epigraphicum Graecum*, 1923–
<http://www.brill.com/publications/online-resources/supplementum-epigraphicum-graecum-online>

Some of these collections are complicated multi-volume collections with publication dates spanning a century and various publishers and editors. Online versions are sometimes available. There's no hiding the fact that these are not easy to use, especially for students getting started. Wikipedia has articles on each of these sources and is often a good place to start. I have also provided helpful web addresses either for online versions or for the current publisher.

For the sake of clarity and ease of use, I have otherwise avoided abbreviations.



Map 1 Mainland Greece and the Aegean. Source: Courtesy of Stephanie Krause.



Map 2 The Roman Empire around 150 CE. *Source:* Courtesy of Stephanie Krause.

Contents

List of Illustrations *vii*

Preface *ix*

Acknowledgments *xi*

Modern and Ancient References: Abbreviations *xiii*

1 Introduction and Historical Context *1*

2 Definitions and Evidence *17*

3 Enslavement *31*

4 Economics *49*

5 Politics *67*

6 Culture *83*

7 Sex and Family Life *99*

8 Manumission and Ex-Slaves *117*

9 Everyday Conflict *137*

10 Revolts *155*

11 Representations *173*

12 Philosophy and Law *191*

13 Decline and Legacy *209*

References *221*

Index *239*

1

Introduction and Historical Context

Slaves who love the class of masters provoke a great war with the other slaves.

Euripides (Athenian playwright, ca. 480–406 BCE),
Alexander, fr. 50 in Nauck 1889

Slavery is a cruel institution, but it was central to ancient Greek and Roman civilization for around a thousand years. The prevalence of classical slavery justifies the claim that, during some periods, Greece and Rome were true “slave societies” just as surely as the pre-Civil War American South. But reconstructing and understanding Greek and Roman slavery has long presented a tricky and complex, but fascinating, challenge for historians, who have had to rely on elegant arguments, painstaking investigations, and bold inferences from evidence that is often sparse and difficult to interpret. That evidence is also biased since it is slaveholders rather than slaves who wrote almost every text that has survived from antiquity. For example, the Euripides quotation above is the only hint we have of what must have been a common dynamic among household slaves: conflicts between those slaves determined to resist their oppression in small ways or large and those hoping to get ahead by pleasing their masters. And even this single short quotation comes from a play written by a slave master.

Despite the paucity of evidence from slaves themselves, the issues involved have generated passionate debates. Historical interest has also been piqued by a general admiration for the sophistication and historical significance of classical culture and the inevitable question, “how could they have allowed and indeed approved of slavery?” So, instead of giving up, historians have devised ingenious methods to span the millennia between us and the classical world and to get the most out of our recalcitrant evidence. For example, slaves often paid to buy their own freedom. A long series of such payments was recorded on a stone retaining wall below the temple of Apollo at Delphi in Greece, in part to publicize the terms of the agreement and thus to prevent either party from reneging. The increase of the average price paid from the third to the first century BCE suggests that the demand for slaves in Roman Italy outpaced the number of people enslaved in Rome’s almost constant wars in the second century BCE (Hopkins and Roscoe 1978, 134–71) – a surprising result we’ll discuss in Chapter 4. Though not all such bold theories have withstood scrutiny, we would not understand Greek and Roman slavery nearly as well as we do were it not for historians willing to try new approaches and to push against the limits of our evidence.

An understanding of Greek and Roman slavery is important for several cultural and historical reasons. First, students interested in the culture of the classical world, ancient Greece and Rome, need to understand its system of slavery, one of its central institutions. In classical literature, for example, you find slaves wherever you turn. Their presence is often obvious: Achilles and Agamemnon quarrel over captive slave women in Homer's *Iliad*; near the beginning of Aristotle's *Politics*, we find his infamous doctrine of natural slavery; witty, scheming slaves often drive the action of Roman comedies; powerful ex-slave administrators play a large role in Tacitus' history of the reign of the emperor Claudius. Less obviously, slavery permeated Greek and Roman thinking, as evidenced by their frequent use of analogies to slavery. When the orator Demosthenes appealed to the Athenians not to submit to *slavery* to Macedonia, he was not saying that the Athenians were in imminent danger of actual slavery – being sold away from their families or whipped for refusing an order. Nevertheless, his metaphorical use of *slavery* evoked a concrete, everyday, and violent institution familiar to his audience.

Second, classical slavery has had profound effects on modern slave societies, not just in the American South, but also in Brazil, the Caribbean, and elsewhere – some of which we'll explore in the final chapter. From the seventeenth through the nineteenth century, the study of the Classics played a huge role in Western education and thus Greek and Roman models were constantly present in the minds of slaveholders in the New World. They were deeply influenced, for example, by the Roman law of slavery. George Fitzhugh, in his infamous defense of slavery in the US South, *A Sociology for the South* (1854), drew on Aristotle's doctrine of Natural Slavery to justify slavery based on race. Classical models often shaped the way that modern slaveholders conceived of and justified slavery.

Third, classical styles, ideas, and values have remained important to Western culture in general, so understanding the role of slavery in ancient Greece and Rome can yield insight into ideas and debates important to the modern period. In the nineteenth century, at the beginning of the *Communist Manifesto*, Karl Marx uses the opposition of slave and master in antiquity as his first example of the class struggle between oppressor and oppressed: "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles: Freeman and slave, patrician and plebian, lord and serf . . ." (Marx and Engels 1955 [originally 1848], chapter 1). Following his lead, several modern communist groups have named themselves after Spartacus, the leader of a great slave revolt against the Romans. The philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche in *On the Genealogy of Morals, A Polemic* condemned Christianity as a slavish religion in contrast to Greek and Roman paganism (Nietzsche 1994 [originally 1887], I.8–10). Finally, the West's cherished ideal of political freedom had its origin in a slave society, classical Greece, where the opposite of freedom was a vivid and concrete reality: slavery.

So far, I have been treating Greek and Roman slavery as if they constituted a natural unit. This may at first appear arbitrary. Linking together ancient Greece and Rome as the "classical" civilizations is arguably an artifact of post-Renaissance Western cultural history and of the important role both Greek and Roman literature, art, and philosophy has played in that history. In fact, the culture and society of the thousand-odd Greek city-states of the classical period or of the later and larger Hellenistic kingdoms was quite different from that of Rome and the enormous empire it eventually controlled. Nevertheless, historical links and cultural similarities justify treating the slavery of Greece and Rome together. Even the contrasts between Greek and Roman slavery – of which there are many – often prove to be illuminating of both.