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MDS2/3 TGW

Ancient Greece  
Slavery I

Gillian Shepherd

# Sources for slavery

## Textual Sources including:

- Drama (especially comedy)
- Law court speeches
- Xenophon (*Oikonomikos*)
- Aristotle (*Politics* Book 1)
- Plato (esp. *Laws*)
- Athenaeus *Deipnosophistae*

## Archaeological Sources including

- Inscriptions (e.g. building accounts; manumissions)
- Vase paintings (also sculpture)
- Burials, housing, mines
- Artefacts specifically related to slavery (e.g. shackles)

# Chattel Slavery vs Serfdom

## 1. Chattel Slavery (e.g. Athens)

- Personal ownership of slave by a master ie “property”
- i.e. as property can be bought or sold
- Permanent condition (i.e. no condition to be fulfilled by which slave can claim freedom)
- Cf. here “debt bondage”
- Can involve violence
- Issues of:
  - Domination (must do as told)
  - Alienation (lack of birth rights, foreign)
  - Dishonour

# Chattel Slavery (Athens) cont'd...

## Slaves in Homer (*Iliad*, *Odyssey*)

- Acquired as war booty; through purchase, gifting; through piracy/slave traders
- Greek and foreign

Cf Eumaios (Homer, *Odyssey* 15. 403-84): son of the Greek ruler of Syros, but taken away when his nurse (a Phoenician slave woman, who herself was kidnapped by pirates) eloped with Phoenician traders who sold him to Odysseus' father (ruler of Ithaca) as a slave (Odysseus' father treated him well)

# Chattel Slavery (Athens) cont'd...

## Reforms of Solon:

I brought back to Athens, to their home which the gods established,  
Many men who had been sold, some unjustly,  
Some justly, and some forced to flee because of debt  
Who were not longer speaking Attic,  
As they had been wandering in many places.  
Others, who were suffering shameful slavery here,  
Trembling at their masters' moods, I set free.

Solon 36. 8-15

When he gained control of affairs, Solon set the people free for the present and for the future, by forbidding loans on the security of the person; he also passed laws, and caused a cancellation of debts, both private and public, which the Athenians call *seisachtheia* (“shaking off of burdens”) since they have shaken off the weight which oppressed them.

Aristotle(?) Constitution of Athens 6.1

NB *Hektemoroi* “sixth partners”

# Chattel Slavery vs Serfdom cont'd...

## 2. Serfdom (e.g. Sparta)

- Required to live on, and work, land
- And pay services to landowner
- Immutable, inheritable status
- Helots (Messenia)
- *Perioikoi*
- Spartiates
- Serfs/helots better off?

Most Spartan institutions in relation to the helots have always been organised with a view to security. They made a proclamation to [the helots] to choose those of their number who claimed to have proved themselves excellent fighters for the Spartans in the wars, as they (ie the Spartans) were going to set them free; they did this as a test, thinking that those who claimed themselves to be the most worthy of being set free would also be those possessing the greatest spirit to attack them. When they had selected up to 2000, those helots put garlands on their heads and went around the shrines as if they had been set free, but the Spartans, not long afterwards, made them disappear, and no one found out by what means each of them was destroyed

Thucydides 4.80

Fragment of Apulian  
red-figure vase  
(Circle of the Sisyphus  
Painter) c. 420 BC

London, BME 509

Through poverty some men steal,  
or burgle, or become slavers

Xenophon *Symposion* 4.36

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I showed [my wife] also the women's area, divided by a bolted door from the men's area, in order that nothing should be carried out from the inside which should not be, and in order that the slaves (*oiketai*) should not breed without our approval. Good slaves are generally more loyal if they have children, but if bad ones cohabit together, then they are more resourceful at devising mischief.

Xenophon *Oikonomikos* 9.5

... We should also let [slaves] have children to serve as hostages [for good behaviour.]...

Aristotle (?) *Oikonimika* 1.5

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## Thorikos, ancient mine head and galleries

Those of us who are interested in the subject will have heard a long time ago how Nikias the son of Nikeratos owned a thousand men who worked in the silver mines and hired them out to Sosias the Thracian\* on condition that he paid him a clear obol a day a man and always maintained the number of workers at the same level... Hipponikos also had 600 slaves whom he leased out in the same way, which brought him an income of one mina a day before tax. Philemonides owned 300, which brought him half a mina, and I suppose other people's incomes were in proportion to their means. But why do I have to talk about days gone by? Even today there are many men in the silver mines who are leased out in this way.

Xenophon *Revenues* 4. 14-15

\*"Nikias son of Nikeratos is said to have paid one talent for an overseer for his silver mines" (Xenophon *Memorabilia* 2.5)

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Plan of Ergasterion C, Agrileza. From F. Hugh Thompson,  
*The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery* (London, 2003) fig. 46

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Pick found at Kamariza. From F. Hugh Thompson,  
*The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery* (London, 2003) fig. 48

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Fetters (with ankle bone) found at Kamariza. From F. Hugh Thompson,  
*The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery* (London, 2003) fig. 47

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Fetters from T. 1771, Pezzino Necropolis, Agrigento, Sicily  
(mid 5<sup>th</sup> cent. BC)

His father left him an estate which anyone else would have found sufficient to provide a liturgy; but he wasn't even able to keep it for himself... [and] nine or ten slave craftsmen who were skilled at producing shields, each of whom brought him an income of two obols a day, while the manager of the workshop brought in three. In addition there was a woman who was skilled at weaving flax...

*Aeschines I . 97 Against Timarchos*

The size of my property is clear from the witnesses' statements... you will see even more clearly how great this estate was if you listen to the details: for my father, men of the jury, left behind two workshops: , each with highly skilled craftsmen. One had 32 or 33 knife-makers, each worth five or six minae, and even the least skilled of them were not worth less than three minae; they provided him with annual income of 30 minae before tax. Then there were 20 couch-makers who had been given to him as security for an outstanding debt of 40 minae; they brought him 12 minae before tax.

*Demosthenes 27.9 Against Aphobus*



Photo © Gillian Shepherd

Erechtheion building accounts for 409-6 BC (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 474-9*):

- 22% citizens
- 50% metics
- 28% slaves
- citizen, metic and slave workers received identical wages

After that we showed to the slaves (oiketai) who would use them where they should store the various utensils which they would need daily for baking, cooking, woolworking and so on , and handed the utensils over, telling them to keep them safely.

Xenophon *Oikonomikos* 9

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[http://2.bp.blogspot.com/\\_7p7KDLU881Y/TR1At-lmRJI/AAAAAAAAA7c/p97t7UBI2zQ/s1600/hegeso\\_stele.jpg](http://2.bp.blogspot.com/_7p7KDLU881Y/TR1At-lmRJI/AAAAAAAAA7c/p97t7UBI2zQ/s1600/hegeso_stele.jpg)

Stele of Hegeso  
Late 5<sup>th</sup> cent.

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Cf. Athenaeus 569d-f; Aristotle  
*Constitution of the Athenians* 50  
on keeping prices down

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[http://1.bp.blogspot.com/KDwijHPPsTM/TtPW9Y6jE7I/AAAAAAAAAFwE/lu9gekCSx8kc/s1600/Symposium\\_scene\\_Nicias\\_Painter\\_MAN+madrid.jpg](http://1.bp.blogspot.com/KDwijHPPsTM/TtPW9Y6jE7I/AAAAAAAAAFwE/lu9gekCSx8kc/s1600/Symposium_scene_Nicias_Painter_MAN+madrid.jpg)

... if you are going to be a good farmer you must make your workers cooperative and willing to obey you... it is just as necessary for a farmer to give his workers frequent encouragement as for a general to encourage his troops. Slaves have no less need of something good to hope for than do free men – if anything, more, so that they may stay with you willingly.

Xenophon *Oikonomikos* 5.14-16

Image Source Page:

[http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/schools/primaryhistory/images/ancient\\_greeks/home\\_life/g\\_athenian\\_black-figure\\_amphora\\_showing\\_olive\\_gathering.jpg](http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/rmhttp/schools/primaryhistory/images/ancient_greeks/home_life/g_athenian_black-figure_amphora_showing_olive_gathering.jpg)

In the third book, [Timaios of Tauromenion] says that the Corinthians were so rich they owned 460,000 slaves (douloi)... Kteslikles says that at Athens ... Demetrios of Phaleron took a census of everyone who was resident in Attica and found that there were 21,000 Athenians, 10,000 metics and 400,000 dependents (oiketai)... Aristotle, in his work on the Constitution of Aegina, says that amongst them too there were at that time 470,000 slaves (douloi)...

Athenaeus 272b-c

... first of all those slaves working in agriculture and in the silver mines and elsewhere in the country, who were more than 150,000, and then those who were in debt to the state treasury and those who had lost their civic rights and those who had been disenfranchised and the resident aliens...

Hyperides fr. 29

The Athenians suffered greatly; they were deprived of the use of the whole of their countryside; more than 20,000 slaves deserted (and a substantial number of these were skilled workers; and they lost all their herds and draught animals.

Thuc. 7.27