

Cambridge University Press

978-0-521-84066-8 - The Cambridge World History of Slavery: The Ancient Mediterranean World, Volume I

Edited by Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge

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## THE CAMBRIDGE WORLD HISTORY OF SLAVERY

Most societies in the past have had slaves, and almost all peoples have at some time in their pasts been both slaves and owners of slaves. Recent decades have seen a significant increase in our understanding of the historical role played by slavery and wide interest across a range of academic disciplines in the evolution of the institution. Exciting and innovative research methodologies have been developed, and numerous fruitful debates generated. Further, the study of slavery has come to provide strong connections between academic research and the wider public interest at a time when such links have in general been weak. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery* responds to these trends by providing for the first time, in four volumes, a comprehensive global history of this widespread phenomenon from the ancient world to the present day.

Volume I surveys the history of slavery in the ancient Mediterranean world. Although chapters are devoted to the ancient Near East and the Jews, its principal concern is with the societies of ancient Greece and Rome. These are often considered as the first examples in world history of genuine slave societies because of the widespread prevalence of chattel slavery, which is argued to have been a cultural manifestation of the ubiquitous violence in societies typified by incessant warfare. There was never any sustained opposition to slavery, and the new religion of Christianity probably reinforced rather than challenged its existence. In twenty-two chapters, leading scholars from Europe and North America explore the centrality of slavery in ancient Mediterranean life from diverse perspectives and using a wide range of textual and material evidence. Non-specialist readers in particular will find the volume an accessible account of the early history of this crucial phenomenon.

KEITH BRADLEY is Eli J. and Helen Shaheen Professor of Classics at the University of Notre Dame. A Fellow of the Royal Society of Canada and a Fellow of the Society of Antiquaries, he held a Killam Research Fellowship in Canada from 1996 to 1998. His principal interests are in the history of Roman society and culture, on which he has published widely. He is the author of *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (1991) and *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge 1994).

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Volume I: The Ancient Mediterranean World

Edited by Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge

Volume II: AD 500–AD 1420

Edited by David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman

Volume III: AD 1420–AD 1804

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VOLUME I

The Ancient Mediterranean World

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## SERIES EDITORS' INTRODUCTION

This is the first volume of *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, dealing with the major slave societies of classical Greece and Rome. Slavery has been among the most ubiquitous of all human institutions, across time and place, from earliest history until, some would argue, the present day. Yet its durability and ubiquity are not widely recognised and, where they are, they seem poorly understood by the general public and scholars alike. A central aim of these volumes, which cover many different times and places, is to help to place the existence and nature of slavery against the backdrop of the broader human social condition.

Slavery has appeared in many different forms and is not always easy to separate from other forms of coerced labour. Nevertheless, there are basic similarities that emerge from the contributions that follow. Most critical of these is the ownership of one human by another, and the ability to buy and sell the human chattel such ownership creates. A second common characteristic is the fact that chattel status is a heritable condition passed down through the mother. Such characteristics are not to be found in the more general category of 'coerced labour', as normally practised. The latter typically involves a general loss of citizenship rights, but not necessarily ownership of one person by another and inherited status. Some scholars regard slavery as part of a spectrum of coerced labour and dependency, but the institution has maintained a distinctive legal existence in almost all societies.

Slavery evolved independently in the Americas, Africa and Asia, but Greece and Rome were the first major slave societies. The legal patterns, social practices and attitudes established there had a large impact on the cultures that came after. Even more important, it was Greece and Rome that first had to confront the basic dilemmas that slavery raised. These included the nature of freedom and the mix of coercion and freedom that is a central element of the lives of everyone whatever their formal status, the impossibility of having complete control over another human being, and, of course, the moral implications of ownership. This first volume of the series not only provides much new evidence on Greek and Roman slavery but also introduces the reader to key issues that will be further explored in subsequent volumes.



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