INTRODUCTION

Late Antique Studies and the New Polyphony for Slave Studies

Chris L. de Wet

For the past few decades, studies on slavery in late antiquity have been primarily concerned with the question of whether slavery was, in fact, present during the period, or whether late antique slavery slowly declined and transformed into so-called medieval serfdom. For many years the latter proposition enjoyed favour among historians. Now, the picture is quite different. The majority of recent studies on late antique slavery confirm that slavery was alive and well during the period. Foundational studies such as Chris Wickham's monumental analysis of the medieval period, followed more recently by Alice Rio's focused study of early medieval slavery, Youval Rotman's reconstruction of Byzantine slavery, and finally Kyle Harper's extensive survey of late ancient slavery come to similar conclusions: the model or paradigm of 'transition', with its roots in nineteenth-century Marxist economic theory (especially from Marx and Engels), has outlived its usefulness for understanding labour and modes of production in the late antique world.[1] Referring to the shift from the 'ancient' to the 'medieval' world, Wickham aptly remarks that 'the path between them was by no means a straight one, and in the period 400–800, the actual period of the shift between ancient and medieval, the contrast is considerably less useful'.[2] There is no need to rehash the arguments against the transitionary model of late antique slavery – these arguments are to be found in all of the above-mentioned studies. By now, claiming

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[1] Wickham 2005; Rio 2017; Rotman 2004; Harper 2011; see also De Wet 2015; 2018a; Lenski 2008; 2011a; 2017; MacMullen 1987; Ramelli 2016b; Vera 2007, with respective bibliographies.

[2] Wickham 2005, 259.

that late antique slavery slowly declined and disappeared and/or transformed into medieval serfdom is a simplistic and inaccurate scholarly narrative.

Added to the premises in the works of Wickham, Rio, Rotman, Harper, and many others, in favour of a model that complexifies late antique slavery, is the point that the period and study of late antiquity in itself have experienced major changes in the second half of the twentieth century. For many years, late antiquity occupied what might be called a liminal historical space. It was considered, in itself, as a 'non-period' – a transitional placeholder for what some consider the 'great ages' of humanity. Before the 1970s, scholars interested in the period of late antiquity would have mostly been classicists, Roman historians, church historians, and, more specifically, scholars of patristics. For some classicists, late antiquity would have represented the period of early classical 'reception' (similarly, perhaps, to the field of biblical studies). For Roman historians, late antiquity marked the margins of the disciplinary field and the end of an era – this was especially shaped by Edward Gibbon's paradigm of the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. For church historians and scholars of patristics, late antiquity was simply the 'background' or 'stage' on which their key figures and events, the great church fathers and councils, played out.[3]

After A. H. M. Jones, in 1964, laid an albeit conventional foundation for the beginnings of late ancient studies,[4] much of the status quo changed when scholars such as Peter Brown[5] and Averil Cameron,[6] to mention only two of the more influential figures, began to promote the study of late antiquity as a discipline in and of itself. Brown devoted six centuries to what he called 'late antiquity', from 150 to 750 CE. Cameron had a narrower focus, from 395 to 600 CE. Most scholars now understand late antiquity to start around the third century and end somewhere between the seventh and even eighth centuries. This volume follows a similar delimitation for what is late antiquity (ca. 150–700 CE). What is significant of Brown's early start to the period is that it includes part of the history of the High Roman Empire but excludes the rise of earliest Christianity, as embodied in the New Testament and earlier second-century Christian works; significant in the later boundary for late antiquity is the fact that it also includes the formation of early Islam.

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[3] Martin 2005.
[4] Jones 1992 [1973, 1964].
[5] Brown 1971.
[6] Cameron 1993.

But late antique studies did not simply entail delimiting and claiming a specific period in history. The study of late antiquity was also characterized by certain specific methodological shifts. From the perspective of religious studies, patristics slowly gave way to the study of early Christianity in late antiquity, which moved away from traditional approaches to the church fathers and councils often followed at seminaries or at some Christian (especially Catholic) universities. From its inception, late ancient studies has shown a particular affinity towards understanding (differently) the religious concepts and figures of Christianity, Judaism, Manichaeism, and Islam. This is related to the importance of cultural and social history in the study of late antiquity. Both Brown and Cameron have the term 'world' in the titles of their books. For both, 'world' meant more than geography – the term especially encompassed the social and cultural 'worlds' of the period.[7] More recently, there is also what we might call an 'exploded' view of the late antique world, which decentres Europe and the Mediterranean and focuses attention on what was previously known as the 'margins'. There is now a focus on 'the interconnections between the Mediterranean and Africa, Iran, Arabia, the Baltic, Scandinavia, the British Isles, China, India and all of Asia, as well as disrupting the assumed connection between the late ancient/ Christian Mediterranean and modern, western Europe'.[8] In its scholarly profile, this book also subscribes to this more expanded and inclusive approach to late ancient studies, and showcases authors coming not only from Europe and North America but also from Africa and South America.

Essentially, then, Brown, Cameron, and others[9] helped us to understand late antiquity less as a period of transition and more one of *transformation* and *complexity* in terms of geographical, anthropological, social, cultural, and religious contexts. This volume is firmly situated in this view of late antiquity, both as one with a particular interest in religious, social, and cultural transformations, and as one that does not have western Europe and the Mediterranean as its only geographical focus. *Slavery in the Late Antique World, 150–700 CE* presents a series of case studies that investigate the settings of slaveholding and representations of slave experience in late antiquity. The chapters in this volume scrutinize the ideological, moral, cultural, and symbolic value(s) of slavery

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[7] Martin 2005, 1–9.
[8] So the description of the academic journal *Studies in Late Antiquity* (first issue, 2017) (https://online.ucpress.edu/sla).
[9] See, for instance, the numerous articles in the two handbook volumes on late antiquity, edited by Johnson (2012) and Rousseau (2012).

as well as the status and living conditions of late antique slaves. The central argument of the case studies is to show that late ancient slavery is culturally and, often, geographically conditioned.

Consequently, like late antiquity *in toto*, late ancient slavery is in itself a complex and polymorphous phenomenon – the volume as a whole will show that it is indeed more appropriate to speak of late ancient 'slaveries'. Rather than painting late ancient slavery in broad generalizing strokes, this volume aims at more focused and specialized studies of the topic, looking at how slavery transformed and was transformed in itself in varying material and literary contexts. These include in-depth analyses of individual authors and works, papyrological and epigraphic evidence, specific geographical locations, and studies that are socially, culturally, and politically specific. The volume is interdisciplinary and transdisciplinary in its methodology. We therefore especially employ comparative and methodologically innovative approaches including studies revisiting and questioning traditionally held assumptions about late ancient slavery.

Furthermore, in regard to geography, while several studies do focus on western Europe and the Mediterranean, including Egypt, a number of chapters focus on the nature of slavery in geographical areas on the so-called 'margins' of the Roman Empire, including late antique Syria and Mesopotamia, late antique Palestine, 'Arabian' contexts, the northern European contexts including Roman Britain and Gaul, and North African contexts, thus even beyond the borders of the Roman world. Some chapters focus on the nature of slavery in rural settings and slavery among late ancient nomadic cultures. Our aim is to include somewhat neglected areas in the study of slavery; such areas were often neglected because they have been considered geographically marginal to the Roman world (like the case of St Patrick) or, especially, because they have not been written in Greek or Latin, but in Syriac, Coptic, or Arabic.

Likewise, this book includes studies on slavery in contexts of social and religious diversity and transformation, for instance slavery and gender, ethnicity, age, and embodiment. There are also chapters on the use of slavery as a metaphor on different levels of religious thought, and on the use of slavery discourse in different contexts of religious practice. A case study of slavery in earliest Islam, and the Quran, is also included, since early Islamic slavery is often discussed outside of its continuity (and discontinuity) with other late antique cultures. Furthermore, this volume also uses late ancient literary sources that have been neglected in previous studies of slavery, especially those not written in Greek or Latin, such as Syriac, Coptic, and Classical Arabic sources.

   Slavery in the Late Antique World, 150–700 CE is divided into four main thematic sections. The first three chapters explore the diverse ideological backgrounds as well as the symbolic and moral values of slavery. The second section extrapolates on intersections between slavery, cultural discourses, and identity. The chapters in the third section discuss social historical perspectives of slavery, both in the eastern and western Mediterranean. The final section examines the social history of slavery on the fringes of the Roman Empire and beyond.

   The question of slavery as a moral dilemma in late antiquity is a complex and contested matter. The chapters in the first section of this book will showcase this complexity, both in ancient responses to the moral problems of slavery and in the varying scholarly responses. The aim of this section is not to achieve an ancient or modern consensus, but to demonstrate and maintain the emotive tensions in approaches to slavery as a moral and symbolic issue. For instance, on the one hand, Pieter Botha's chapter exhibits how early Christian discourse was complicit, in a very 'Roman' way, in the upholding of oppressive practices of slavery; on the other hand, Ilaria Ramelli illustrates that not all ancient authors were blind to the injustice of slavery, and that justice (in relation to slavery) was indeed a moot matter, especially in early Christian ascetic discourse. While both show that there was no concept of 'abolition' in early Christian discourse, both chapters demonstrate that the idea of the 'naturalness' of slavery, to late antique writers, might not be the most useful concept for understanding slavery as a moral and symbolic dilemma. Botha's chapter asks how and what early Christian slaveholding practices communicate. Starting with Pliny's infamous *Epistula* 10.96 and reviewing some of the information we can gather about Christian slaveholders in the second and third centuries, this chapter explores aspects of the impact of Christianity on Roman slaveholding. Scholars of early Christianity have, in general, told two stories about slavery and the church. The one story is one of golden beginnings among 'equals' with liberal relations between women and men, slaves and slaveholders, followed by a gradual adaptation to Roman hierarchies and internalizing of traditional social structures. The other story depicts a Christianity that eventually triumphs over the social values of the Roman Empire, so that the rise of Christianity leads, over a period of centuries, to the weakening and demise of slave society. What both 'versions' need to explain, or at least account for, is the continuity over centuries that existed with regard to attitudes towards slavery. Over the long course of antiquity, improvements in slave conditions were never made. So, an important question

must be: how does such a 'continuity' stay in place? Building on the work of Bourdieu, Botha proposes that the power of violence lies not in its capacity to harm, but rather in its capacity to communicate meaning, to instantiate power, legitimacy, and history, over those not physically or directly targeted in the act itself. The efficacy of violence is not measured in its casualties, but in its capacity to transform the subjectivities of those indexed in its performance. Hence, the symbolic violence of early Christian discourse facilitated slavery and for all practical purposes excluded any changes in the 'meaning(s)' of Roman slaveholding.

In turn, Ilaria Ramelli discusses individuals or couples who emancipated their slaves and gave up their possessions in favour of the poor upon embracing the ascetic life. She also considers monastic groups who liberated all the slaves who joined their communities. She examines the link between 'spiritual fasting' and 'immaterial self-restraint' (as Gregory of Nyssa called them) based primarily on practising justice, and the renunciation of slave ownership. Asceticism thus turns out to be a matter not simply of self-restraint, but of justice. Spiritual asceticism is abstinence from oppressing others, owning other humans, and 'robbing the poor with injustice' (Gregory of Nyssa, Evagrius, Cassian). Eustathius of Sebaste's and his followers' ideas and practices, as well as monastic resistance to Gangra, clearly questioned established religious and societal norms, concepts, and institutions. The model for asceticism, indeed, was not that of a society on earth, but angelic life. The same opposition is highlighted within Judaism: regulations on slavery in Rabbinic Judaism will be contrasted with earlier Jewish ascetic groups who rejected slavery and social injustice, and embraced poverty.

If we move beyond the moral dimensions of slavery, we might also enquire about the symbolic value of slavery. Late antique slavery also experienced various symbolic and discursive transformations. In this vein, Arkadiy Avdokhin's chapter, on Christ as liberator from satanic debt in late antique Greek homilies and hymns, looks at one particular aspect of the afterlife of the apostle Paul's conceptual framework of the faithful as 'slaves of God', who are at the same time freed from slavery to Satan. Therefore, he explores the discourse of setting the believer free from satanic slavery in late antique hymns and homiletic texts, as well as the interaction between the two. He suggests that in these texts, the legalistic thinking behind Paul's original symbolism would stretch into portraying Christ as a type of 'good brigand', almost a Robin Hood, putting an end to the tyranny of the technically lawful but ultimately inequitable spiritual slavery of the humankind. Avdokhin discusses the homilies of Greek

authors of the fifth and sixth centuries CE from Asia Minor – Proklos of Constantinople, Basil of Seleucia, and Pseudo-Asterios of Amasea, Pseudo-Chrysostom, and others. In them, enthralling images of Christ tearing down the legal certificate of debt leading to slavery are presented. He also discusses sixth-century hymns by Romanos the Melodist. In a number of his *kontakia*, Romanos emphatically presented Christ as destroying the technically correct but metaphysically transgressive documents keeping humankind enslaved to Satan. Most importantly, Avdokhin argues that the nullification of the satanic debt certificate is replaced by a new, yet equally bureaucratic, 'heavenly' system of paperwork that binds the believer into servitude to Christ.

Maijastina Kahlos looks at how late antique writers dealt with the enslavement of foreigners, that is, non-Roman and non-Greek people outside the frontiers of the Roman Empire, conventionally called 'barbarians'. In her analysis of the late antique authors (Christian and non-Christian alike), she considers their views on the social background of slave trade and frontier wars. Furthermore, the voices of the late Roman writers Synesius, Augustine, Gregory of Rome, Ambrose, and Basil of Caesarea are set in the context of the Graeco-Roman ideas of slaveholding. Moreover, she examines late antique Christian writers who confronted the issue of slavery by discussing the biblical exempla of Ham and Esau. Kahlos shows that ethnicity continued to play a role in the production of slave stereotypes and presuppositions in late antiquity. Kahlos's findings are also important for the chapters in the next section in the book, which deals with slavery in relation to culture and identity.

Late antique slavery was not, however, only related to moral and symbolic issues and dilemmas. As the chapters by Botha and Kahlos, in the first section, show, slavery was also a very potent cultural discourse, and one that always had concerns in the transformation of an individual's or group's identity. This point is especially demonstrated by Chris de Wet. His chapter analyses the Syriac (possibly) fifth-century *life of Euphemia and the Goth*, which recounts the tale of a young woman, Euphemia, who is deceived and manipulated into marrying an unnamed Gothic soldier. The theme of the deceived and abducted bride is a common one in the literature of the time. De Wet shows how slavery functions as a constant yet complex theme in the Syriac ascetic literature of late antiquity, and *Euphemia and the Goth* is no exception. In this narrative, slavery intersects with discourses of cultural identity and ethnicity (especially Syriac identity), law and warfare (and displacement), and morality and asceticism. De Wet investigates closely these discursive dynamics in *Euphemia*

and the Goth. The analysis gives us a glimpse not only into the compli-
cated dynamics of slavery, displacement, and freedom on the margins of
the Roman Empire, but also reveals the complicated dynamics of slavery
as an ascetic discourse in the late ancient Christian cultures of Syria and
Mesopotamia.

While De Wet explores the dynamics of slavery in Syriac Christian
discourse, Catherine Hezser's chapter asks a basic yet fundamental ques-
tion: what was Jewish about Jewish slavery in late antiquity? She explores
attitudes, rules, and practices towards slavery mentioned in ancient Jewish
literary sources and analyses them within the Graeco-Roman context in
order to determine whether a specifically Jewish or rabbinic approach to
slavery existed. A related question she ponders is whether certain attitudes
expressed in the sources simply constituted an ideal or whether they can be
considered to have been practised by at least some Jews in antiquity.

After analysing late antique Syriac and Jewish sources, this section
proceeds to late antique Egypt with Christine Luckritz Marquis's chapter,
in which she argues that the study of slavery in early Christian Egyptian
monastic thought remains underdeveloped for multiple reasons. At the
semantic level, the range and variety of words that were used to denote
a slave both in Coptic and Greek are so numerous that no easy survey of
extant literature is possible and indicates that late ancient Egyptian society
did not systematize types of enslaved people in the ways modern scholars
might expect. Furthermore, she demonstrates how Christian scripturaliz-
ing of slavery in Egypt in particular (where the Israelites were purportedly
enslaved) further muddies access to historical slaves. Especially in the
monastic writings of Shenoute (but also figures like Paul of Tamma) one
finds slavery language theologically deployed, even as it seems plausible
that slave labour was required of Shenoute's church-building project.
Luckritz Marquis shows that the only clear place where slaves emerge is
in papyrological documentation, but that even there one finds little more
than traces of names, rare glimpses of violence, and boundary policing
between enslaved and free persons.

Finally, this section of the book concludes with critical literary glimpses
of slavery in late antique Gaul. Uiran Gebara da Silva's chapter examines
rural slavery in late Roman Gaul in the fourth and fifth centuries, as
described in Gallo-Roman literary evidence. His discussion addresses
the methodological and theoretical challenges offered by literary sources,
discussing the way ideology and literary genre frame the representations
of rural slaves. In particular, he analyses the writings by Ausonius, Salvian
of Marseilles, and Paulinus of Pella, as well as *Querolus*, a late Roman

comedy, and highlights the permanence of more intense forms of rural labour exploitation in the countryside.

The majority of chapters up to this point focus mainly on literary texts from the late antique period. However, to get a fuller picture of the complexities of late antique slavery, one should also appreciate the papyrological and epigraphical evidence of slavery in the period. Papyri and epigraphy are especially crucial for reconstructing the social history of slavery. But as chapters in this next section show, it is by no means a simple and straightforward reconstruction. Arguing from the Petra Papyri, Marja Vierros, for instance, shows us how some of the basic terminology related to slaves is not always as clear as one would hope and imagine. Vierros provides a detailed and contextualized study of actual evidence of slaves in the documentary papyrological material, thus providing an important basis for the general socio-historical discussions (and, implicitly, some important caveats) on slaveholding in late antiquity. She also sheds light on slavery on another boundary of the Roman Empire, namely Palestine. Papyrological evidence from the area of Palestine is scarce, but the recent publication of the Petra Papyri gives us more information about slaves in this province of the eastern Roman Empire. So far, the only other papyrological dossier from the Palestine region, the Nessana Papyri, mentions slaves only in passing. Therefore, the Petra Papyri give us some long-awaited information on onomastics of slaves, their prices, their position in the elite households, and, on the whole, their existence in the Christian community of Petra.

While Vierros examines slaves more generally in papyri from the area of Palestine, the chapter of Pudsey and Vuolanto takes us back to Egypt, but in this account, searching for enslaved children. They examine the visibility, activities, and agency of slave children and adolescents in the city of Oxyrhynchus, in Roman Egypt. This case study, in turn, provides us with abundant documentation of matters relating to the lives of young people, including slaves. Therefore, the chapter adds to the recent research into slave children across the Roman world based largely on literary sources and inscriptions. Among other issues, Pudsey and Vuolanto discuss household connections and their permanence; travel and agriculture; and working and learning conditions. They also take up the question of how to identify child slaves, as 'child-vocabulary' is also used to denote (adult) slaves. The chapter is based on the database of young persons in the city collected by Pudsey and Vuolanto, for which they have systematically examined the over 7,500 published documentary and literary papyri, material objects, inscriptions, and literary texts preserved to us

from Roman and early Christian Oxyrhynchus. Those texts that can be connected both to slavery and children, together some seventy, cover one tenth of all the cases in the database.

Late antique inscriptions recording slaves have received much less scholarly attention than earlier ones. In order to address aspects of this lacuna in scholarship, Mariana Bodnaruk examines the epigraphic representation of the late Roman slavery from 260 CE until the sixth century, thus engaging in a wide-ranging analysis of late Roman epigraphic practice registering slaves both in the imperial centres and in the rural periphery, as well as on the borders of the Roman Empire. She further elaborates on what the epigraphic monuments and concomitant imagery reveal about late antique slavery and its further decline, and consequently re-examines traditional assumptions about late Roman slavery. As she brings into focus both Latin and Greek epigraphic evidence, the chapter is able to provide new insights into the persistence and spread of slavery in late antiquity.

The last section of this book takes the step of crossing the boundaries and exploring slaveries beyond the Roman Empire. The section begins with Noel Lenski's analysis of slavery in the Visigothic kingdom. The kingdom of the Visigoths endured for nearly three centuries, from 418 until the early 720s, moving its capital from Gaul to Spain after 507. It has left distinctive traces in the source record, particularly in normative sources such as the Laws of the Visigoths and the Acts of the Visigothic Councils. In addition, the Visigothic kings issued a separate code (*Breviarium Alaricianum*) for their Roman subjects that preserves and elaborates many Roman laws implemented for the management of slaves. Lenski examines this vast evidence synoptically in order to explore what was distinctive about Visigothic slaveholding and what represented inheritances from the Roman system that preceded it. According to Lenski, the Visigoths offer clear evidence for a robust slaveholding culture in the sixth and seventh centuries that corresponded with a period of relatively weak central state authority but relatively strong overall economic performance. Assembled from an admixture of Roman and Germanic customs and norms, Visigothic society hosted a unique but highly intensified slaveholding culture worthy of study unto itself.

Judith Evans Grubbs then focuses on a somewhat unconventional yet quite rich source for the experiences of the enslaved beyond the borders of the Empire: the Roman Briton Patricius, known today as 'St Patrick'. The freeborn son of a decurion and slaveowner, Patrick was born in Britain around the turn of the fifth century, shortly before or just around the time