



Universiteit
Leiden
The Netherlands

The Palgrave handbook of global slavery throughout history

Pargas, D.A.; Schiel, J.

Citation

Pargas, D. A., & Schiel, J. (2023). *The Palgrave handbook of global slavery throughout history*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. Retrieved from <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3621484>

Version: Publisher's Version
License: [Creative Commons CC BY 4.0 license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)
Downloaded from: <https://hdl.handle.net/1887/3621484>

Note: To cite this publication please use the final published version (if applicable).



The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History

Edited by Damian A. Pargas · Juliane Schiel

The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout
History

Damian A. Pargas · Juliane Schiel
Editors

The Palgrave
Handbook of Global
Slavery throughout
History

palgrave
macmillan

Editors

Damian A. Pargas
Institute for History
Leiden University
Leiden, The Netherlands

Juliane Schiel
Institute for Economic
and Social History
University of Vienna
Vienna, Austria



ISBN 978-3-031-13259-9 ISBN 978-3-031-13260-5 (eBook)
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5>

© The Editor(s) (if applicable) and The Author(s) 2023. This book is an open access publication. **Open Access** This book is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this book are included in the book's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the book's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.

The use of general descriptive names, registered names, trademarks, service marks, etc. in this publication does not imply, even in the absence of a specific statement, that such names are exempt from the relevant protective laws and regulations and therefore free for general use.

The publisher, the authors, and the editors are safe to assume that the advice and information in this book are believed to be true and accurate at the date of publication. Neither the publisher nor the authors or the editors give a warranty, expressed or implied, with respect to the material contained herein or for any errors or omissions that may have been made. The publisher remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.

Cover illustration: narvikk/Getty Images

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by the registered company Springer Nature Switzerland AG

The registered company address is: Gewerbestrasse 11, 6330 Cham, Switzerland

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This publication is based upon work from COST Action CA18205—Worlds of Related Coercions in Work (WORCK), supported by COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology).

COST (European Cooperation in Science and Technology) is a funding agency for research and innovation networks. Our Actions help connect research initiatives across Europe and enable scientists to grow their ideas by sharing them with their peers. This boosts their research, career and innovation. <https://www.cost.eu>.

The publication is co-funded by the Faculty of Historical and Cultural Studies of the University of Vienna.



CONTENTS

| | | |
|---|--|------------|
| 1 | Introduction: Historicizing and Spatializing Global Slavery | 1 |
| | Damian A. Pargas | |
| Part I Ancient Societies (to 500 C.E.) | | |
| 2 | Mesopotamian Slavery | 17 |
| | Seth Richardson | |
| 3 | Ancient Egyptian Slavery | 41 |
| | Ella Karev | |
| 4 | Slavery in Ancient Greece | 67 |
| | Kostas Vlassopoulos | |
| 5 | Slavery in the Roman Empire | 87 |
| | Noel Lenski | |
| 6 | Injection: An Archaeological Approach to Slavery | 109 |
| | Catherine M. Cameron | |
| Part II Medieval Societies (500–1500 C.E.) | | |
| 7 | Slavery in the Byzantine Empire | 123 |
| | Youval Rotman | |
| 8 | Slavery in Medieval Arabia | 139 |
| | Magdalena Moorthy Kloss | |
| 9 | Slavery in the Black Sea Region | 159 |
| | Hannah Barker | |
| 10 | Slavery in the Western Mediterranean | 179 |
| | Juliane Schiel | |

| | | |
|---|--|------------|
| 11 | The Question of Slavery in the Inca State | 195 |
| | Karoline Noack and Kerstin Nowack | |
| 12 | Injection: A Gender Perspective on Domestic Slavery | 215 |
| | Ruth Mazo Karras | |
| Part III Early Modern Societies (1500–1800 C.E.) | | |
| 13 | Slavery in the Mediterranean | 227 |
| | Giulia Bonazza | |
| 14 | Slavery in the Ottoman Empire | 243 |
| | Hayri Gökşin Özkoray | |
| 15 | Slavery in the Holy Roman Empire | 259 |
| | Josef Köstlbauer | |
| 16 | Slavery and Serfdom in Muscovy and the Russian Empire | 279 |
| | Hans-Heinrich Nolte and Elena Smolarz | |
| 17 | Slavery in Late Ming China | 297 |
| | Claude Chevalyre | |
| 18 | Slavery in Chosŏn Korea | 319 |
| | Sun Joo Kim | |
| 19 | Slavery in the Indian Ocean World | 339 |
| | Titas Chakraborty | |
| 20 | Maritime Passages in the Indian Ocean Slave Trade | 359 |
| | Pedro Machado | |
| 21 | The Rise of Atlantic Slavery in the Americas | 379 |
| | Michael Zeuske | |
| 22 | Plantation Slavery in the British Caribbean | 395 |
| | Trevor Burnard | |
| 23 | Injection: Atlantic Slavery and Commodity Chains | 413 |
| | Klaus Weber | |
| Part IV Modern Societies (1800–1900 C.E.) | | |
| 24 | The Second Slavery in the Americas | 429 |
| | Michael Zeuske | |
| 25 | Slavery in the US South | 441 |
| | Damian A. Pargas | |
| 26 | Slavery in the Middle East and North Africa | 459 |
| | Ismael M. Montana | |

| | | |
|---|---|------------|
| 27 | Slavery in Islamic West Africa | 479 |
| | Jennifer Lofkrantz | |
| 28 | Urban East African Slavery | 497 |
| | Michelle Liebst | |
| 29 | Slavery in South Asia | 517 |
| | Emma Kalb | |
| 30 | Slavery in Southeastern Europe | 535 |
| | Viorel Achim | |
| 31 | Injection: The Global Spread of Abolitionism | 553 |
| | William Mulligan | |
| Part V Contemporary Societies (1900–Present) | | |
| 32 | American Slavery Since Emancipation | 567 |
| | Catherine Armstrong | |
| 33 | Slavery in Francophone West Africa | 583 |
| | Benedetta Rossi | |
| 34 | Slave Labor in Nazi Germany | 605 |
| | Marc Buggeln | |
| 35 | State-Introduced Slavery in Soviet Forced Labor Camps | 625 |
| | Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal | |
| 36 | North Korean Slavery and Forced Labor in Present-Day Europe | 643 |
| | Remco E. Breuker | |
| 37 | Modern Slavery in the Global Economy | 661 |
| | Bruno Lamas | |
| 38 | Injection: Modern Slavery and Political Strategy | 681 |
| | Joel Quirk | |
| 39 | Conclusion: Situating Slavery Studies in the Field of Global History | 701 |
| | Juliane Schiel | |
| | Index | 709 |

NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

Viorel Achim is a Senior Researcher at the Nicolae Iorga Institute of History, Romanian Academy, Bucharest. His research fields include the history of the Gypsies (Roma) in Romania, slavery in the Romanian lands, ethnic minorities in Romania between 1918 and 1948, population policies in Romania during World War II, and the Holocaust. He published five author books (one of which was also published in three translations, and another in one translation) and over 100 book chapters and journal articles. His most cited book is *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2004). He also edited three volumes of archives documents and edited or co-edited four collective volumes. In 2007, he was a postdoctoral fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition (Yale University). In recent years, together with a small team from the Nicolae Iorga Institute of History, he has been studying slavery, abolitionism, and emancipation from slavery in the Romanian principalities between ca. 1830 and ca. 1860.

Catherine Armstrong is Reader in Modern History at Loughborough University and Director of People and Culture for the School of Social Sciences and Humanities there. She has recently published a monograph with Cambridge University Press entitled *American Slavery, American Imperialism: US Perceptions of Global Servitude 1870–1914*. She is currently working on a book length project investigating the forgetting and misremembering of chattel slavery in the aftermath of the American Civil War.

Hannah Barker is an Associate Professor of medieval history at Arizona State University. She studies connections between the Black Sea and the Mediterranean during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries, especially the slave trade which flourished during this period and the transmission of plague leading to the Black Death. Her book, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (2019), received the

Paul E. Lovejoy Prize, the ASU Institute for Humanities Research book prize, and honorable mentions for the Mediterranean Seminar's Wadjih F. al-Hamwi Prize and the Middle East Medievalists book prize. Other recent publications include "The Risk of Birth: Life Insurance for Enslaved Pregnant Women in Fifteenth-Century Genoa," *Journal of Global Slavery* 6 (2021) and "Laying the Corpses to Rest: Grain Embargoes and the Early Transmission of the Black Death in the Black Sea, 1346–1347," *Speculum* 96 (2021).

Giulia Bonazza is currently Marie Skłodowska-Curie Global fellow at Columbia University (NY) and Ca' Foscari University (Venice) with a project titled *The Darker Shades of Black. The Value of Skin Colour in the Mediterranean and Atlantic Slave and Labour Markets, 1750–1886*. She is a former fellow at the German Historical Institute in Rome (2018) and a former Max Weber postdoctoral fellow at the European University Institute (Florence) (2016–2017).

Remco E. Breuker is Professor of Korean Studies at Leiden University, the Netherlands. A historian, he has published extensively on Korean and North-east Asian medieval history. Next to his work on historical Korea, he also works on contemporary North Korea, in particular on exile narratives, human rights issues, and DPRK overseas economic activities. A present research focus is the presence of North Korean forced labor and modern slavery in international supply chains. He is (co-) author of among other titles: *Forging the Truth: Creative Deception and National Identity in Medieval Korea* (ANU, 2009), *Establishing a Pluralist Society in Medieval Korea (918–1170): History, Ideology and Identity in the Koryŏ Dynasty* (Brill, 2010), *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale* (edited with I.B.L.H. van Gardingen, LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018), *Invented Traditions in North and South Korea* (edited with Andrew Jackson, Codruța Sintionean, and CedarBough Saeji, Hawai'i University Press, 2022), and *Samguk yusa: Forgotten Legacies of the Three Kingdoms* (with Boudewijn Walraven, Grace Koh, and Frits Vos, Hawai'i University Press, forthcoming 2023).

Marc Buggeln is Assistant Professor at the Friedrich-Meinecke-Institute at the Free University Berlin and Privatdozent at the History Department at Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin. His main research interests are: German and European history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, concentration camps, (forced) labor, National Socialism, social inequality, tax and budget policy, governmentality. His publications include: *Das Versprechen der Gleichheit. Steuern und soziale Ungleichheit in Deutschland seit 1871* [The Promise of Equality. Progressive Taxation and the Reduction of Social Inequality since 1871] (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2022); and *Slave Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014).

Trevor Burnard is the Wilberforce Professor of Slavery and Emancipation at the University of Hull and the Director of the Wilberforce Institute. He is the author of *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His*

Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World; Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650–1820; The Plantation Machine: Atlantic Capitalism in French Saint-Domingue and British Jamaica; Jamaica in the Age of Revolution; and Writing Early America: From British Empire to the American Revolution (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press).

Catherine M. Cameron is professor emerita in the Department of Anthropology at the University of Colorado. She has worked in the northern part of the American Southwest, focusing especially on the Chaco and post-Chaco eras (AD 900–1300). Her research interests include prehistoric demography, the evolution of complex societies, and processes of cultural transmission. She has worked in southeastern Utah at the Bluff Great House, a Chacoan site, and nearby Comb Wash, publishing a monograph on this research in 2009 (*Chaco and After in the Northern San Juan*, University of Arizona Press). She also studies captives in prehistory, especially their role in cultural transmission. She edited a volume on this topic in 2008 (*Invisible Citizens: Captives and Their Consequences*, University of Utah Press). Her single-authored volume on captives was published in 2016 (*Captives: How Stolen People Changed the World*, University of Nebraska Press).

Titas Chakraborty is Assistant Professor of History at Duke Kunshan University. Her research investigates slavery and unfree work and their relationship to colonial state formation in seventeenth-, eighteenth- and nineteenth-century South Asia and the Indian Ocean world. Her work has appeared in *Slavery and Abolition*, *International Review of Social History*, and *Journal of Social History*. She is also the co-editor of *Global History of Runaways: Workers, Mobility, and Global Capitalism, 1650–1850* (University of California Press, 2019). She is currently completing a book titled “Empire of Labor: Hired Workers, Mobility and the Rise of the East India Company State 1651–1817.”

Claude Chevaleyre is CNRS researcher at the Institute of East Asian Studies in Lyon. He is also affiliated to the Bonn Center of Dependency and Slavery Studies. He has a Ph.D. in Chinese history from EHESS (Paris) and an MA in Chinese studies from INALCO (Paris). He has published articles and book chapters on bondage and trafficking in early modern China and is currently heading a project entitled “China Human Trafficking and Slaving Database.”

Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal is a Postdoctoral Researcher and Lecturer in the History of Eastern Europe at the University of Heidelberg. Her research interests include gulag studies, cultures of memory, and the history of terrorism. She has published a monograph on camp newspapers and cultural education in the early Soviet forced labor camps (*Die “inhaftierte” Presse. Das Pressewesen sowjetischer Zwangsarbeitslager 1923–1937*, 2011) and several articles dealing with reeducational tendencies of the camps system, the role of sports, and Gulag economy as part of war preparation.

Emma Kalb completed her Ph.D. in South Asian Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago in May 2020 and is currently a postdoctoral researcher at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies at the University of Bonn. Her current book project is entitled “Unequal Intimacies: Gender, Slavery and Servitude in the Mughal World.”

Ella Karev is a Postdoctoral Teaching Fellow in the Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations at the University of Chicago, an Egyptologist and papyrologist whose research focuses on the social and economic aspects of enslavement and bound labor throughout Egyptian history with a particular focus on the Late and Ptolemaic Periods. She additionally investigates body modification for both enslaved and unenslaved persons, and is preparing a book on scars as an identifying feature in Graeco-Roman papyri.

Ruth Mazo Karras is Lecky Professor of History at Trinity College Dublin. She is the author of five monographs and editor of three volumes as well as author of dozens of articles and book chapters on a variety of topics in medieval social history and the history of gender and sexuality. She has discussed medieval slavery in *Slavery and Society in Medieval Scandinavia* (1988) and in *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (2012).

Sun Joo Kim is Harvard-Yenching Professor of Korean History in the Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations at Harvard University. She has a broad range of research interests in social and cultural history of Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910) including regional history of the northern part of Korea, popular movements, historical memory, micro history, history of emotions, law and society, slavery, and art history.

Josef Köstlbauer is a historian based at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (University of Bonn). His publications cover a broad range of topics, from historical semantics of dependency to slavery in early modern Europe, colonial borderlands, the history of digital games, and baroque allegorical painting. Together with Rebekka von Mallinckrodt and Sarah Lentz he recently published a volume titled *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850* (DeGruyter 2021).

Bruno Lamas an architect by training, worked in the fields of urbanism and urban and regional planning between 2004 and 2017. He is currently a fellow of the FCT, the Portuguese national funding agency for science, research, and technology, and a Ph.D. student in Economic and Organizational Sociology in UL-ISEG, Lisbon School of Economics and Management, developing the dissertation “The Metamorphoses of Modern Slavery: Labour, Self-ownership and the Problem of Slavery in the History of Capitalism.”

Noel Lenski is the Dunham Professor of Classics and History at Yale University. His previous scholarship includes *Failure of Empire: Valens and the Roman State in the Fourth Century AD* (Berkeley 2002), *Constantine and*

the Cities: Imperial Authority and Civic Politics (Philadelphia 2016), and the co-edited volume *What is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective* (Cambridge 2018).

Michelle Liebst is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow and historian of East Africa specializing on the themes of religion, labor, humanitarianism, gender, and citizenship. She is the author of *Labour and Christianity in the Mission* (James Currey, 2021), and based at UCL, she works on the ERC-funded project, “African Abolitionism: The Rise and Transformations of Anti-Slavery in Africa” (AFRAB).

Jennifer Lofkrantz is an Associate Professor of History at Gulf University for Science and Technology, Kuwait. She specializes in the history of precolonial West Africa and the contemporary history of northern Nigeria, particularly on Muslim West African debates on legal and illegal enslavement, the ransoming of war prisoners, and historical and contemporary jihadism.

Pedro Machado is a global and Indian Ocean historian with interests in commodity histories, labor and migratory movements, and the social, cultural, environmental, and commercial trajectories of objects. He is based at Indiana University, Bloomington, and is the author of several works, among which are *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1850* (Cambridge University Press, 2014); “Views from Other Boats: On Amitav Ghosh’s Indian Ocean ‘Worlds,’” *American Historical Review*, Vol. 121, No. 5 (December 2016); *Textile Trades, Consumer Cultures and the Material Worlds of the Indian Ocean* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2018); and *Pearls, People and Power: Pearlring and Indian Ocean Worlds* (Ohio University Press, 2020). He is currently at work on a global history of pearl shell collection and exchange while also developing research on eucalyptus and colonial forestry in the Portuguese empire in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Ismael M. Montana received his Ph.D. from York University in Toronto. He is an Associate Professor of History at Northern Illinois University. Montana is the author of *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunis* (Gainesville, 2013) and a co-editor with Paul E. Lovejoy and Behnaz M. Asl of *Islam, Slavery, and Diaspora* (Trenton, 2009). His research interests include the social and economic history of slavery, culture, and citizenship in Northwest Africa and the Western Mediterranean Basin from the eighteenth century to the present.

Magdalena Moorthy Kloss is a researcher at the Austrian Academy of Sciences’ Institute for Social Anthropology specialized in Yemen, slavery, marginalized groups, historical anthropology, and gender. She holds a Master’s degree and Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of Vienna, and a Master’s degree in anthropology and development from the London School of Economics and Political Science. Her latest article is entitled “Eunuchs at the Service of Yemen’s Rasūlid Dynasty (626–858/1229–1454)” and was

published in *Der Islam* (Vol. 98/1 (2021)). She previously worked for the United Nations and GIZ in Yemen and Egypt.

William Mulligan is a Professor in the School of History at UCD. He has held visiting fellowships at the Institute for Advanced Study, Princeton, and the Wissenschaftskolleg, Berlin. He has published widely on international history in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and is editor, with Maurice Bric, of *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the Nineteenth Century* (Palgrave, 2013).

Karoline Noack holds a Ph.D. and habilitation in cultural anthropology (Freie Universität Berlin). Since 2009, she has been Professor of Anthropology of the Americas at the University of Bonn and Director of the BASA Museum (Bonn Collection of the Americas). Her focal points include research on social and cultural phenomena in the Andes in the *longue durée*, museum and collection research, also with “source communities.” She conducts dependency research in the Inca state and is currently researching on Cochabamba in Bolivia, a hotspot of mobilization and production strategies in the late Inca state, within the framework of the Bonn Center of Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS), of which she is one of the deputy speakers. Her most recent book publications, together with other colleagues, include “From ‘Bronze Rooster’ to Ekeko. Impulses for Ethnological Provenance Research in University Collections and Museums” (2020), “Global Turns, descolonización y museos” (2020), “Digitization of Ethnological Collections. Perspectives from Theory and Practice” (in German) (2021), and various articles on the above-mentioned topics.

Hans-Heinrich Nolte is Emeritus Professor of Eastern European history at the University of Hannover. His work has focused primarily on Eastern European history and the history of the USSR, but Nolte is also considered a pioneer of global history. He is the author of numerous articles and nine monographs, including *Weltgeschichte des 20. Jahrhunderts* (2009) and most recently *Kurze Geschichte der Imperien* (2017).

Kerstin Nowack obtained her Ph.D. in Cultural Anthropology of the Americas at the University of Bonn. Nowack is an independent scholar, working on the ethnohistory of the Inca and of early colonial Peru. Her main research interests are the politics and history of the Inca empire, war, religion, and knowledge in the Inca imperial system, Inca elites before and after the Spanish conquest, and sources on the Inca, on which she has published numerous articles. She is currently preparing the publication of a book about the Inca civil war.

Hayri Gökşin Özkoray is Assistant Professor of Early Modern History at the Aix-Marseille Université (France). He deals mainly with the history of slavery and labor in the Ottoman Empire (fifteenth to seventeenth centuries).

Damian A. Pargas is Professor of North American History at Leiden University as well as Director of the Roosevelt Institute for American Studies. Specialized in the history of slavery, he has published numerous articles and is the author or editor of six books, including *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (Cambridge University Press, 2014) and most recently *Freedom Seekers: Fugitive Slaves in North America* (Cambridge University Press, 2021). Pargas is also the founder of the *Journal of Global Slavery*.

Joel Quirk is Professor of Politics at the University of the Witwatersrand. His work focuses on enslavement and abolition, work and mobility, social movements, gender and violence, historical repair, and the history and politics of Africa. Joel is the author or co-editor of eight books, and has also co-edited special issues of *Social & Legal Studies*, *Review of International Studies*, *The Anti-Trafficking Review*, and *Slavery & Abolition*. He is a founding editor of openDemocracy's *Beyond Trafficking and Slavery*.

Seth Richardson is a historian of the ancient Near East who focuses on Mesopotamia's Old Babylonian period (ca. 2000–1600 BC) and the specific problem of the Fall of Babylon in 1595 BC. His work addresses political-economic questions of state sovereignty such as legitimacy, territory, rebellion, membership, and community practices of violence. He is an Associate at the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago and the Managing Editor of the *Journal of Near Eastern Studies*.

Benedetta Rossi is Professor of History at University College London. She is author of *From Slavery to Aid* (CUP, 2015) and editor of *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories* (LUP, 2009, 2016); *Les Mondes de l'Esclavage* (Seuil 2021, with C. Vidal, dir. P. Ismard); "Developmentalism, Labor, and the Slow Death of Slavery in Twentieth-Century Africa," Special Issue, *ILWCH* 92 (2017); and "Slavery and Marriage in African Societies," Special Issue, *Slavery & Abolition* 43 (2022, with J. Quirk). She holds the ERC Advanced grant "African Abolitionism: The Rise and Transformations of Anti-Slavery in Africa" (AFRAB, grant agreement no. 885418).

Youval Rotman is a social historian of the Byzantine Mediterranean world, and teaches history in the department of Jewish history at Tel Aviv University. His scholarship focuses on social and cultural processes in the Mediterranean and Near East in the first Millennium. He is the author of *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World* (Harvard University Press, 2009), published first in French (Les Belles Lettres, 2004), which contests the idea of the decline of ancient slavery, ascribing a central role to slavery in the medieval transformation of the Byzantine world. His second book *Insanity and Sanctity in Byzantium: The Ambiguity of Religious Experience* (Harvard University Press, 2016), analyzes religious forms of abnormality as a motor of social change. His third monograph (ARC Humanities Press, 2021), is a study of comparative history of slavery. It narrates the formation of the Middle Ages from the point of view of slavery, and challenges the traditional dichotomy between

ancient and medieval slaveries, revealing the dynamic, versatile, and adaptable character of slavery to changing circumstances. Prof. Rotman is the co-editor of the *Mediterranean Historical Review*.

Juliane Schiel is Associate Professor for Economic and Social History in Late Medieval and Early Modern Times at the University of Vienna. She has published widely on the history of slavery in the Mediterranean as well as on the history of labor and coercion. Her work is informed by a micro historic approach, the methods of historical semantics and global history perspectives. Since 2019, she is chairing the COST Action CA18205 “Worlds of Related Coercions in Work” (WORCK), assembling about 150 social and labor historians, anthropologists, and sociologists from about 40 countries worldwide (<https://www.worck.eu>).

Elena Smolarz is a postdoctoral researcher at the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies. As a research associate of competence network “Crossroads Asia,” funded by the German Ministry for Education and Research (BMBF), she conducted studies on coerced mobility and slave trade networks in Central Asia in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Her main research interests include serfdom in the Russian Empire, representations of freedom and dependency in archival documents and narrated sources as well as transformation of autochthonous societies in Southern borderland regions under Russian imperial influence with special focus on spatial and social mobility.

Kostas Vlassopoulos is Associate Professor of Ancient History at the University of Crete and collaborating member of the Institute for Mediterranean Studies (IMS-FORTH). He is the author of *Unthinking the Greek Polis: Ancient Greek History beyond Eurocentrism* (2007); *Politics: Antiquity and its Legacy* (2009); *Greeks and Barbarians* (2013); *‘My whole life’: Stories from the Daily Lives of Ancient Slaves* (2020); *Historicising Ancient Slavery* (2021); and *Greek and Roman Slaveries* (2022). He has co-edited *Communities and Networks in the Ancient Greek World* (2015) and *Violence and Community: Law, Space and Identity in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean World* (2017).

Klaus Weber wrote his Ph.D. thesis on German merchants in eighteenth-century Atlantic trade at Hamburg University. He was a research fellow at the National University of Ireland (Galway), at The Rothschild Archive (London) and at the Institut für die Geschichte der deutschen Juden (Hamburg). Since 2011, he has been Professor of European Economic and Social History at the European University Viadrina in Frankfurt (Oder). Among his research interests are labor regimes and welfare regimes in modern Europe and the Atlantic world, and the transnational connections of Central Europe’s early modern proto-industries.

Michael Zeuske was educated at the University of Leipzig and obtained his two German doctorates (Ph.D. and habilitation) at Leipzig in 1984 and

1991, respectively, with works on revolutionary elites and hegemonial groups in Latin-American independence movements. He taught as full professor at the University of Leipzig (1992–1993) and as professor at the University of Cologne (1993–2018). At Universität zu Köln (University of Cologne/UoC), he was for 25 years professor of Iberian and Latin-American History. Zeuske is a leading expert on global slavery; Alexander von Humboldt's American journeys; the revolutionary elites of the *independencia*-movements in Spanish America (Simón Bolívar, Francisco de Miranda, etc.); the history of the Caribbean (especially second slavery), as well as slaveries in Cuba, Santo Domingo, Venezuela and Colombia; and is most widely known for his studies on slavery and slave trades (as the author or co-author of 20 books; editor/co-editor of 30 books and special issues of journals; and some 220 articles and chapters). Since March 2018 Zeuske is professor emeritus of Iberian and Latin-American history at the University of Cologne. Since August 2019 he is senior professor and PI of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS) at the University of Bonn. Zeuske is currently doing field research in Cuba, island Caribbean, Venezuela, Colombia, ports of the Atlantic, and archival research in Spain, Portugal, USA, UK, France, Germany, Cuba, Cape Verde Islands, São Tomé, Dakar (Senegal), and at many small archives over the Atlantic world. In 2007 he was a research fellow at the Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition (Yale University, New Haven). In 2015, his research took him to Beijing, where he was a fellow at the BeiDa University (Peking University).

LIST OF FIGURES

- Fig. 5.1 Grabstein aus Nickenich bei Mayen (etwa 50 n. Chr.):
Das Relief zeigt einen Sklavenhändler, der zwei Sklaven
an einer Kette führt, um sie zu verkaufen. Es ist im
LVR-Landesmuseum in Bonn zu sehen. In regard to the use
of pictorial material: use of such material in this press release is
remuneration-free, provided the source is named. The material
may be used only in connection with the contents of this press
release. For pictures of higher resolution or inquiries for any
further use, please contact the Press office publishing this
directly. [https://idw-online.de/en/image?id=274118&size=](https://idw-online.de/en/image?id=274118&size=screen)
[screen](https://idw-online.de/en/image?id=274118&size=screen) 91
- Fig. 5.2 Bronze image of a nude ephebe from Xanten. The
boy, who would have carried an actual tray, is shown
long-haired and garlanded with his nude body right
at the end of prepubescence. Berlin, Staatliche Museen,
Antikensammlung, Sk. 4. Bildarchiv Preussischer
Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY 99
- Fig. 5.3 Tombstone of Capua depicting the sale of an enslaved person,
stripped and standing on a catasta with auctioneer (winged,
to the right) and buyer, late first century CE. G. Fittschen
Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1983VW1305) 100
- Fig. 38.1 Benchmarking contemporary practices against transatlantic
enslavement 685

LIST OF TABLES

| | | |
|------------|---|-----|
| Table 34.1 | Main groups of foreign workers in Germany 1939–1945 | 607 |
| Table 34.2 | Rate of survival by type of labor | 607 |



Introduction: Historicizing and Spatializing Global Slavery

Damian A. Pargas

INTRODUCTION

Slavery has been a common—if often fluid and complex—condition in most world societies throughout history. Only very few societies became so economically, politically, and culturally dependent upon slavery as to ultimately develop into what Moses Finley famously dubbed “slave societies”—a category he reserved for ancient Greece and Rome, and the plantation regions of the Americas from the sixteenth through the nineteenth centuries. It has been precisely the latter societies, however, that have long dominated static popular images and the historical literature on slavery.¹ That has begun to change. The study of global slavery has grown strongly in the last few decades, as scholars working in several disciplines have actively cultivated broader perspectives on enslavement. Not only has interest in slavery among scholars working on the Atlantic world reached a high point, but scholars have also intensified their study of slavery in ancient, medieval, North and sub-Saharan African, Near Eastern, and Asian and Pacific societies. Practices of modern slavery and human trafficking from South Asia to Europe and the Americas are also receiving more academic attention than ever before, and are now being integrated into historical paradigms of slavery. More importantly, scholars are increasingly looking across borders—temporal, spatial, and disciplinary—to better understand slavery and slaving throughout world history. The recent

D. A. Pargas (✉)
Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands
e-mail: d.a.pargas@hum.leidenuniv.nl

surge in slavery studies has led to a greater appreciation of slavery as both a *global* and a *globalizing* phenomenon in human history.²

First, scholars increasingly underscore slavery as a *global* practice that has existed in innumerable world societies. Historians and anthropologists working on communities as far apart in time and space as ancient Babylonia, medieval Venice, Chosŏn Korea, the nineteenth-century American South, and twentieth-century West Africa have devoted considerable ink to illuminating local and regional case studies of slavery in extremely diverse settings. To be sure, practices of slavery differed widely across time and space, and categorization in some settings has proved difficult—scholars indeed continue to disagree on what constituted “slavery” in some localized settings. Most studies of slavery, however, converge on situations throughout world history in which human beings were (or are) treated as property that could be bought, sold, or transferred; held captive for indefinite periods of time; subordinated to others in extremely dependent and exploitive power relationships; denied basic choices (including potentially rights over their bodies, lives, and labor); and compelled to labor, provide services, or serve various personal, cultural or societal functions against their will.³

Second, scholars now more fully appreciate the *globalizing* effects that slavery has had on world societies. From antiquity to the present day, slavery has by definition connected societies through forced migrations, warfare, trade routes, and economic expansion. Slaving blazed both maritime and land routes around the globe. Slave-trading routes crisscrossed Africa; helped integrate the Mediterranean world; connected China to the Indonesian archipelago; and fused the Atlantic world. Global and transnational approaches to history focus heavily upon the global movement of people, goods, and ideas, with a particular emphasis on processes of integration and divergence in the human experience. Slavery in various settings straddled all of these focal points, as it integrated various societies through economic and power-based relationships, and simultaneously divided societies by class, race, ethnicity, and cultural group.

Both of these developments—the remarkable expansion of slavery scholarship in various settings throughout world history and the greater appreciation of slavery’s role in connecting societies—have led to new understandings, definitions, and approaches to the study of slavery. The inevitable cross-pollination of slavery studies from such diverse and global perspectives has greatly influenced the ways in which historians and anthropologists talk and think about slavery around the world. Long dominated by scholarship on the early modern Atlantic and classical Graeco-Roman case studies—which created the very framework for slavery studies, from its terminology to its theoretical approaches—slavery scholarship has in recent years been enriched with new insights into how slavery was understood in various settings, including how it functioned, how it was meant to function, how and why people moved in and out of conditions of slavery, how experiences of slavery were characterized, and how practices of slavery affected regional and interregional power

relationships. Understandings of slavery have moved beyond static snapshots and abstract definitions. There is now more focus on situating practices of slavery along a broad continuum of coercion and extreme dependencies; understanding the constantly developing and changing nature of slavery practices across time and space; and appreciating what conditions of slavery meant for real people, both the enslaved and slaveholders.

Put simply, the recent surge in slavery studies has helped scholars to *historicize* and *spatialize* slavery in world history. Historicizing slavery has entailed moving beyond linear stories that trace slavery from the Graeco-Roman context directly to Atlantic slavery and abolition, and embracing a broader appreciation of how widespread and interlinked diverse practices of slavery were and continue to be around the world, as well as how systems of slavery have arisen and fallen in localized settings. Spatializing slavery has entailed recentering the geography of slavery, appreciating for example just how exceptional and atypical Atlantic slavery was and what made it so, and illuminating regional contexts of slavery around the world.

The *Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History* aims to introduce students and scholars to the study of slavery across time and space. Its intention is to historicize and spatialize slavery, providing both emerging and established researchers with a comprehensive understanding of the current state of the field, as well as serve as a unique reference work for developing further lines of inquiry. Providing chapter-length analyses of the most prominent and widely researched systems of slavery around the world—from antiquity to the contemporary era—it integrates various strands of slavery studies and encourages readers to uncover connections, similarities, and differences between various manifestations of slavery throughout history.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES OF SLAVERY

How do scholars understand slavery, and how do they approach the study of slavery in light of recent developments in the field? It can be difficult to find cohesion in the various strands of global slavery research. Different case studies have necessitated different approaches to establish what exactly constituted (or constitutes) slavery or slavery-like practices in various settings. They have necessitated different approaches to the centrality of labor to conditions of slavery. They have necessitated different approaches to slavery's relationship to "freedom" or other conditions of non-slavery. As scholarship moves to global views of slavery as a human condition, the danger arises that academic understandings of slavery will ultimately encompass virtually all forms of oppression and thereby seem so nebulous as to become meaningless. Kostas Vlassopoulos recently underscored this in an article on the consequences of global approaches to slavery: "If slavery has an essence, but its historical manifestations differ substantially across time and space, how can we study slavery as a global phenomenon?"⁴ What indeed can be said about slavery from

new global perspectives, and what parameters can be said to constitute the framework from which most scholars of slavery operate?

Upon closer inspection most approaches to the study of slavery around the world differ by degrees rather than fundamentally. There are exceptions, to be sure, but most new global slavery research does reveal common understandings and approaches that provide a basic framework from which to analyze slavery across time and space. Three interrelated themes stand out in particular, all of which are characterized by calls to both broaden our understanding of slavery in light of its diversity in world history and clarify its position in relation to conditions of freedom and unfreedom.

First, as stated above, new global slavery scholarship has gone to great lengths to *situate slavery at the most extreme end of a broad spectrum—or continuum—of unfree and dependent conditions in various settings*. This has led to a further clarification of what distinguishes slavery around the world from serfdom, debt bondage, various forms of indentured servitude, imprisonment, peonage, forced labor, and related asymmetrical dependencies. Scholars of slavery in various settings agree that the condition of slavery, in virtually every world society in which slavery existed, transferred to the slaveholder unlimited and potentially permanent power over the enslaved person, including powers related to life, reproductive capabilities, entitlements, and all other attributes. This differed from all other dependent conditions. It is important to note that, from a global perspective, slavery has *not* always constituted a clearly defined category or institution, the way it ultimately did in the slave societies of the Atlantic or Graeco-Roman worlds, for example. Indeed, as Vlassopoulos recently argued—partly in an attempt to move beyond more static models such as Finley’s “slave societies” versus “societies with slaves” conceptualization—approaching slavery from a global perspective entails understanding it as a collection of “practices and processes” in various contexts. This view is reinforced by Joseph Miller’s call for understanding slavery and slaving as “historical strategies,” or rather temporally and spatially changing processes, instead of static institutions.⁵ The practices and processes that constituted slavery were everywhere, however, to quote Vlassopoulos, rooted in “two conceptual tools: the tool of property in human beings, and the tool of domination in which one human being can exercise theoretically unlimited power over another.”⁶ Unlike all other forms of dependency, enslaved people were denied by their enslavers most—indeed virtually all—rights and privileges associated with personhood, which were instead conferred upon the slaveholder, a situation which Orlando Patterson—one of the first to produce a global comparative study of slavery—famously referred to as “social death.”⁷ The utility of Patterson’s conceptualization has been highly contested by some scholars of global slavery, partly because in practice enslaved people around the world most certainly *functioned* as persons, demonstrated agency, and were sometimes even relatively well integrated into local communities. The practice of domination and the attempts at dehumanization never resulted in the enslaved person internalizing their dehumanized status or condition,

and everywhere both the theory and practice of slavery were riddled with holes and inconsistencies. Frederick Cooper, a historian of African slavery, for example, has criticized the model for ignoring slave agency and focusing too much on slaveholders' ideas on how they thought slavery *should* work, rather than how the system actually played out in specific settings.⁸ And indeed, enslaved people could find themselves with certain rights and privileges associated with personhood in certain contexts—when contractually or legally promised manumission at a future date, for example (such as with *coartación* in Spanish America, or gradual abolition laws in the northern United States).

In essence, however, “social death” does not refer to a loss of personhood or social interaction in any absolute sense, but rather a *loss of the rights and privileges associated with personhood* during the condition of slavery, and in this sense there are more similarities than differences across time and space. Enslaved people were political and social outsiders—the most extremely marginalized people in any given society, completely subordinated to the will of their masters.⁹ The condition of slavery almost everywhere entailed no legitimate claim to the fruits of one's own labor; one's own offspring, family, or community; one's own body or the reproductive capabilities of one's own body; one's own life. All such power rested with the slaveholder (or higher cultural or political authorities that governed the slaveholder), who could either grant or withhold such “privileges.” Crucially, the enslaved person was denied the rights and privileges associated with personhood for an indefinite—potentially permanent and even intergenerational—period of time. No action by the enslaved person *guaranteed* a release from the condition of slavery—no repayment of debt, no expiration of term—except as agreed upon by the slaveholder or, in some cases, the state or other institutions of authority (as with legal abolition in the modern period, or cultural dictates regarding manumission in Islamic law, for example). Entry into the state of slavery was also almost always coerced, usually through violence (especially capture in wars) or birth—and in the latter case the condition was *maintained* through violence or the threat of violence. Few people in world history volunteered themselves for enslavement, although there are rare examples of people enslaving themselves to a more powerful person—usually people in desperate and impoverished circumstances who opted for bondage for purposes of physical sustenance or protection. In short, most scholars approach slavery as a collection of practices and processes that fell at the most extreme along the spectrum of unfree and dependent conditions, one that distinguished itself in its reduction of human beings to a state of property, subjected to the theoretically unlimited power of other human beings.

Second, and very much related to the first theme, global slavery scholarship has underscored the need to *understand practices of slavery from perspectives that move beyond paradigms of “labor” and that embrace broader views of the various purposes and functions of slavery in diverse settings*. Long identified as the most extreme solution to labor shortages in societies where productive resources were available and power relationships made coercion of laborers

possible—a theory that goes back to H.J. Nieboer’s important thesis on this subject in the early twentieth century, and the adaptation of that thesis by Evsey Domar in 1970—slavery has often been equated with forced labor, especially forced labor in profit-seeking economic activities.¹⁰ Global labor historians, who by definition deal with questions related to work and labor, continue to approach slavery first and foremost as a form of highly controlled or coerced labor, one that was at least comparable to (and on the same spectrum as) peonage, debt bondage, indentured servitude, and exploited wage earners in modern industrial and post-industrial societies. Marcel van der Linden has indeed called for more comparative studies of all forms of coerced labor (including slavery) by “dissecting” them into three “moments”: *entry* into coerced labor, *extraction* of labor, and *exit* from coerced labor conditions.¹¹ This approach comes out of a need to escape a longstanding binary between slave and free labor. Labor historians correctly argue that non-slave labor was not necessarily free labor, and that the work experiences of enslaved laborers often resembled those of other marginalized laborers and oppressed working classes. Global perspectives of slavery, however, remind us to take a closer look at the nature and centrality of slave labor in societies in which it existed. First, it is important to remember that slavery was not—or at least, not only—a form of labor. Its rootedness in the conceptual tools of property in human beings and total power over another, as stated above, set it analytically apart from all other labor systems. To be sure, the extraction of labor and the acquisition of resources usually lay at the root of enslavement in most world societies, and work was a central aspect of virtually all enslaved people’s lives. But the condition of slavery went beyond work and labor. It applied to non-productive people, including the very young, very old, injured, and handicapped. It could not be redeemed through any amount of work or self-purchase, except as agreed upon by the slaveholder or higher authorities. It accrued not only material wealth and resources to the slaveholder but also (and sometimes only) immaterial benefits such as prestige, privileges, and power.¹² Even in societies in which slavery unequivocally served to produce commodities for capitalist markets and thereby enrich the master class, such as in the Atlantic world, slavery entailed more than simply a labor system. And second, slavery studies remind us to broaden our definition of what slave “work” entailed, as labor historians have indeed long argued. Global perspectives of slavery underscore the fact that enslaved people performed a wide variety of functions that went beyond productive economic activities and included everything from wet-nursing and childbearing to soldiering to performing rituals to civil service in the upper echelons of government. In short, global perspectives of slavery necessitate an understanding of its specific purposes in various settings and an acknowledgment of its similarities but also fundamental differences with various coerced labor systems.

A third theme that has arisen in light of new global slavery scholarship has been the call for a *reassessment of the relationship between slavery and freedom, considering not simply what we mean by such categories but also what they meant*

to the enslaved. Two trends are notable in this regard. The first is a tendency in the scholarship to underscore that non-slavery in various world societies did (and does) not necessarily constitute *freedom* in the sense of a person exercising the power to act and make decisions without constraints. Much like global labor historians' efforts to escape the traditional binary between slave labor and free labor, scholars of slavery around the world have undertaken similar efforts to escape binary thinking about slavery and freedom. Instead, as stated above, they place slavery at the extreme end of a broad spectrum of dependent conditions, and they underscore the fluidity between various conditions of unfreedom. The conceptual language of freedom was indeed largely absent in many contexts of slavery, and even where it did exist, it did not always constitute the opposite of slavery.¹³ In many societies in which slavery existed, various dependent and coerced conditions could morph into slavery—debt bondsmen in the Indian Ocean world could eventually become enslaved, for example, as could ransom captives taken by corsairs in wars in the early modern Mediterranean. People could move in and out of conditions along the spectrum of dependency. Manumitted African Americans in the nineteenth-century American South—whose condition and legal status fell far short of the legal condition of “freedom” enjoyed by most white southerners, and whose forced poverty and marginalization often resulted in new dependent relationships—could be reenslaved as a punishment for crime or vagrancy. Such cases demonstrate that slavery was not always entered into from a state of “freedom” and that exiting slavery did not always result in a condition of “freedom,” unless that term refers exclusively to non-slavery. A second trend in the scholarship has been an effort to qualify the above by considering how enslaved people *understood* non-slavery, and how they strove to attain it. In other words, enslaved people everywhere understood their condition and understood the differences between their condition and other conditions and statuses in their respective societies. For most, exiting the slave status was an act of personal liberation, even if doing so did not result in considerable improvements in their daily lives. Exiting slavery may not have necessarily resulted in radical changes in people's working conditions, for example, nor afforded them many rights or privileges, nor even led to a detachment from their former owners. Everywhere, however, the boundary between slavery and non-slavery was perceived as enormously important. Relative to slavery, most conditions of non-slavery appeared “free” to most enslaved people, even when they constituted conditions of what scholars would categorize as unfree or dependent.

Scholars of slavery around the world continue to debate and disagree on various aspects of slavery in different contexts, and consensus is unlikely given the enormous variety of its historical manifestations across time and space. Global slavery scholarship does in a very general sense converge with respect to certain themes, however. It understands slavery as a temporally and spatially changing collection of practices and processes, situated at the most extreme

end of a broad spectrum of unfree and dependent conditions, whose root-ness in theories of property in human beings and the exercise of unlimited power over another person's body and life set it analytically apart from all other forms of unfreedom. It acknowledges that slavery cannot be strictly equated with coerced labor, and seeks to understand the similarities and differences between slavery and other forms of coerced labor in various contexts. It seeks to reassess the relationship between slavery and notions of freedom, acknowledging that people did not always enter into conditions of slavery from a state of "freedom," nor exit slavery into a state of freedom, and exploring human experiences of living and moving within and across statuses and social hierarchies. All of these themes provide an analytically rich way forward in the years to come.

THIS HANDBOOK

The *Palgrave Handbook* is designed to encourage global perspectives and simultaneously provide a coherent understanding of slavery as a practice in a wide variety of settings throughout world history in a single volume. A number of editorial decisions have been made in order to enhance coherence and readability.

First, the volume is divided into 5 chronological "parts" that highlight the development of slavery over time. Part I contains chapters on specific case studies of slavery in Ancient Societies (to 500 C.E.), examining the earliest written sources on systems of slavery in the Mediterranean and Near East. Part II continues with case studies of slavery and slave-trading in various Medieval Societies (500–1500 C.E.), from the Arabian Peninsula to the Mediterranean and even South America. Part III deals with Early Modern Societies (1500–1800 C.E.), a period of unprecedented global interactions and long-distance slave-trading throughout the world. Part IV delves into practices of slavery in the Modern Societies (1800–1900 C.E.), characterized as an age of revolutions and emancipation but also significant expansion of slavery in some parts of the world. Part V explores Contemporary Societies (1900–present), an era defined by the expansion of human rights and ultimately the universal illegality of slavery. Each part is prefaced by a very short introduction by the volume editors.

This chronological division is intended to provide the volume with a coherent structure, highlight developments over time, and encourage comparisons of slavery practices across space within specific time periods. It should be noted, however, that in practice world history is not easily divided into neat periods with clear beginnings or ends. The years given in parentheses in each section title are rough indications, not hard boundaries. For this reason, the editors decided to title each section with both a name *and* a rough indication of the years in a given period. Chronological periodizations also do not always apply neatly to all world societies. If the Medieval Period (ca. 500–1500 C.E.)

is largely defined as the period following the breakdown of empires and disruption of long-distance trading in the Mediterranean and Near East, for example, it is known as a period of expansion and consolidation of empires in parts of the Americas. Moreover, the danger exists that the chosen periodization for this volume may be interpreted as adopting Eurocentric understandings of world history. The volume editors are aware of these shortcomings. In the end, the decision was made to follow the scholarship in the field of global slavery and of world history in general, in which the same 5-pronged periodization is widely used as a frame of reference. Indeed, most scholars of slavery, including scholars whose case studies fall well outside of European influence, identify with these periods and situate their case studies in relation to other practices of slavery around the world in the same period.

Second, the volume is subdivided into 32 thematic chapters by both established and emerging scholars that illuminate specific case studies of practices of slavery in different parts of the world, providing readers with the broadest geographic scope possible. Each chapter constitutes a brief introduction to slavery in a particular region and context; annotation is necessarily light, and each chapter ends with a Further Reading section for those who wish to learn more about a specific case study. A condition as common in world history as slavery does not allow for a complete or definitive geographic representation in a single volume, of course, and many potential case studies were necessarily left out. The volume editors made a selection based on a number of factors. First, each chronological part contains chapters that zoom in on case studies from around the world *insofar as they are reflected in the scholarship*. The latter constitutes a major challenge for any handbook on global slavery—practices of slavery in some regions or time periods are simply not yet well studied or remain unstudied due to a lack of sources. The editors did go to great lengths to offer as broad a selection as possible, from both the Global North and the Global South. Second, the volume contains chapters on the most prominent and studied cases of slavery but also a smattering of chapters on case studies that may be less familiar to students and scholars who are new to the field, such as for example slavery in the early modern German Reich, asymmetrical dependencies in the Inca empire, and state-sponsored slavery systems adopted by totalitarian states in the twentieth century. The intention is to expose readers to the latest scholarship in the main areas and time periods on which global slavery studies focus, but also identify some relatively new directions that are currently being explored and integrated into the field. Third, the editors deliberately limited the number of chapters that deal with Atlantic slavery to four; these explore the rise of slavery in the Americas; plantation slavery in the British Caribbean; slavery in Latin America (especially Cuba and Brazil) during the “second slavery”; and slavery in the antebellum US South. The voluminous and exciting scholarship on Atlantic slavery easily surpasses that for all other case studies, and this volume could have contained many more chapters on various parts of the Americas, but the editors ultimately limited the space reserved for the Atlantic in order to help readers place Atlantic slavery—which

was in many respects atypical and exceptional—within a wider global context and to allow more space for other case studies.

In order to enhance coherence and comparability, each contributor was asked to explore or shed light on three themes in their respective chapters, insofar as they are relevant and applicable to their respective case studies. The three themes are inspired by historian Marcel van der Linden’s three-pronged approach to “dissecting coerced labor”—which for this volume has been modified to account for slavery not being strictly equitable to forced labor, namely:

- a. *Entry* into slavery (how people became enslaved, including from other conditions of dependency and coercion);
- b. *Experiences* of the enslaved during slavery (how people lived and worked as “slaves,” and the nature of exploitation, coercion, and violence in their lives); and
- c. *Exits* from slavery (methods by which people ceased to be “slaves,” including cases in which their new status or condition was one of dependency or coercion).¹⁴

The authors were free to interpret and incorporate these three themes in ways that made sense for their respective cases. Some cases did not lend themselves to one of the themes, for example. The second theme—experiences of the enslaved—also gave contributors considerable leeway to briefly discuss the most important or pressing challenges or aspects of enslaved people’s lives. Many chose to focus on issues related to work, while others included other aspects of enslaved people’s social lives. Authors were also free to determine their own internal chapter structure, so that not all of the chapters are necessarily structured according to the three themes in turn.

A third editorial decision that was made in order to enhance coherence and provide more general reflections on slavery as a global phenomenon was to include a thematic *injection* at the end of each of the five chronological parts. The *injection* is a short essay (roughly half the length of a chapter) that discusses an overarching theme or cross-cutting question that highlights the connections between slavery practices in different settings, or how scholars approach the study of slavery in different settings. Catherine Cameron’s injection essay to Part I, for example, examines how archaeologists identify “invisible” or marginalized people in world history, and how archaeological methods are helping historians understand the lives of the enslaved. The injection essay to Part II, by Ruth Karras, explores the theme of sexual exploitation of enslaved people from a gender history perspective. Part III concludes with an injection essay by Klaus Weber about the interconnected global commodity chains involved in the development and sustenance of early modern slave systems. William Mulligan’s injection essay for Part IV examines the development of global abolitionist networks and movements in the

nineteenth century. Finally, Part V concludes with an injection essay by Joel Quirk about modern anti-slavery and human rights movements, and the ways in which these movements affect how scholars think about slavery as a historical phenomenon. The injection essays encourage readers to zoom out and consider a theme that helps bring place the specific case studies in each part in a wider context.

The structure and approach of this handbook make it a unique addition to the literature on global slavery in the English language.¹⁵ Indeed, this handbook complements other recent handbooks and anthologies of global slavery and provides certain features that others do not. Perhaps most well-known is the excellent four-volume *Cambridge World History of Slavery* (4 vols., Cambridge University Press). Like the *Palgrave Handbook*, the Cambridge history is divided chronologically and offers short essay overviews of slavery in various contexts throughout world history. Unlike the Palgrave handbook, however, it is divided into four separate (and lengthy) books, all of which can be purchased or read separately. This allows readers to delve into a wealth of case studies on specific time periods and regions, but does not encourage or facilitate a clear understanding of the development of slavery over time, from antiquity to the present. The *Routledge History of Slavery* (2012), edited by Gad Heuman and Trevor Burnard, offers a more concise and accessible overview of global slavery. Unlike the Palgrave volume, however, it is relatively short and heavily dominated by essays on Atlantic slavery. The recently published volume *Writing the History of Slavery* (2022), edited by David Stefan Doddington and Enrico Dal Lago, provides readers with an excellent historiographical and methodological overview of global slavery scholarship, but is intended to introduce readers to historical approaches to slavery rather than provide an overview of case studies on slavery in specific settings. The *Palgrave Handbook* complements these other handbooks by providing a concise volume that introduces readers to practices of slavery in a wide variety of settings, as well as a handful of thematic and theoretical essays.¹⁶

To understand slavery—why and how it developed, and how it functioned in various societies—is to understand an important and widespread practice in world civilizations. The *Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout World History* encourages students and scholars to zoom out and understand the similarities, differences, and connections between practices of slavery around the world. As such it hopes to inspire a new generation of slavery studies and help set the research agenda for years to come.

NOTES

1. Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (Princeton: Marcus Weiner, 1988).
2. The recent surge in global perspectives of slavery can be seen not only in a wealth of new publications and handbooks, but also in other academic projects, such as large international conferences; the launch of the *Journal of*

- Global Slavery* to complement the longstanding journal *Slavery & Abolition*; the opening of the Brown University Center for Slavery and Social Justice in the US; and the opening of the Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies at the University of Bonn, Germany; among others.
3. Damian Alan Pargas, "Slavery as a Global and Globalizing Phenomenon: An Editorial Note," *Journal of Global Slavery* 1, no. 1 (2016): 1–4; David Stefan Doddington and Enrico Dal Lago, eds., *Writing the History of Slavery* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022), chs. 1–2.
 4. Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Does Slavery Have a History? The Consequences of a Global Approach," *Journal of Global Slavery* 1, no. 1 (2016): 6.
 5. Joseph C. Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2009).
 6. Vlassopoulos, "Does Slavery Have a History?" 12–13.
 7. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982).
 8. Frederick Cooper, *Colonialism in Question: Theory, Knowledge, History* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 17.
 9. For classic works on slaves as marginalized outsiders that have greatly influenced current global slavery scholarship, see for example: Igor Kopytoff and Suzanne Miers, "African 'Slavery' as an Institution of Marginality," in idem, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1975); Claude Meillassoux, ed., *L'esclavage en Afrique précoloniale* (Paris: François Maspero, 1975).
 10. H.J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System: Ethnographical Researches* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1900); Evsey D. Domar, "The Causes of Slavery or Serfdom: A Hypothesis," *Journal of Economic History* 30 (Mar. 1970): 18–32. Orlando Patterson delivered one of the most scathing critiques of the Nieboer-Domar hypothesis, arguing that rather than viewing slavery as an economic system, it should be seen in terms of power relationships. See Orlando Patterson, "The Structural Origins of Slavery: A Critique of the Nieboer-Domar Hypothesis from a Comparative Perspective," in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences* 292 (1977): 12–34; Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 1.
 11. Marcel van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labor," in Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García, eds., *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery* (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 291–322.
 12. Vlassopoulos reminds scholars that in many cases "prestige creation" was the main—sometimes the only—slaving strategy. See Vlassopoulos, "Does Slavery Have a History?" 14–15.
 13. See for example Vlassopoulos, "Does Slavery Have a History?" 10; as well as Anthony Reid's discussion of this concept for Asian slavery systems: Anthony Reid, "Merdeka: The Concept of Freedom in Indonesia," in David Kelly and Anthony Reid, eds., *Asian Freedoms: The Idea of Freedom in East and Southeast Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 141–60.
 14. van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labor."
 15. The most recent and ambitious handbook to date is the French-language *Les mondes des esclavages: Une histoire comparée* (Paris: Le Seuil, 2021), edited by Paul Ismard, Benedetta Rossi and Cecile Vidal. This excellent volume is twice the size of the Palgrave volume and contains 50 chapters on various case

studies. For a similar (more succinct) handbook of global slavery in German, see Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei: eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (Berlin and Boston: De Gruyter, 2013).

16. Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 3: AD 1420–AD 1804* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); David Eltis, et al., eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 4: AD 1804–AD 2016* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017); Craig Perry, et al., eds., *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 2: AD 500–AD 1420* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Gad Heuman and Trevor Burnard, eds., *The Routledge History of Slavery* (New York: Routledge, 2012); David Doddington and Enrico Dal Lago, eds., *Writing the History of Slavery* (London: Bloomsbury, 2022). For a global view of modern slavery, see Kevin Bales, *Understanding Global Slavery* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Ancient Societies (to 500 C.E.)

PREFACE

The first part of this handbook introduces the reader to four different empires of ancient times and their practices of slavery: Mesopotamia, Egypt, Greece, and Rome. The chapters cover huge time periods of up to three thousand years of history and deal with various phases, distinct centers, and diverging aspects of ancient empire building. It is a period in history for which written sources are scarce and remains of legislative codification little. Historians of slavery therefore rely to a large extent on fragmented documentary and literary texts as well as on archaeological evidence. And yet, the chapters of this section unveil some patterns of ancient slavery that show remarkable similarities and give reason to some general reflections also relevant for later periods in history.

First, all contributors agree that there was no labor division based on status. Even in the so-called slave societies of Athens and Rome, slaves were deployed side by side with other workers. Second, in all four societies, slaves were not only used as unskilled workers in food production and service industries. Mesopotamian and Egyptian, Greek and Roman slaveholders also relied on slaves as qualified specialists and persons of trust, serving as courier, educators or doctors. Third, slaveholding was not only (and often even to a lesser extent) a matter of economic calculations but served other purposes such as credit needs and revenue extraction, gratification, and prestige creation as well as authority and the exercise of power.


Generally speaking, human trafficking and slave trade played a bigger role in societies that were connected to and embedded in broader supra-regional networks. Likewise, expansionist phases of each of the ancient empires usually went hand in hand with large-scale imports of captives as slaves. While enslavement was basically open to all peoples and races, some authorities and

legislations introduced mechanisms and rules intending to protect their own people from slavery within their borders. In all four societies, slaves were most extensively used in labor- and capital-intensive sectors as well as for elite surplus production. Also, there was a strong tendency to integrate enslaved persons into existing family and social structures. The fact that multiple types of manumission existed side by side illustrates the complexity of the relationship between slaveholder and slave where the exercise of power and protection and the need to trust interacted with the obligation for subordination and obedience and various degrees of agency.

As a matter of fact, the use of archeological knowledge for the study of social and power relations is still in its infancy. Yet, new biochemical methods might open new perspectives on old questions, not only for the study of ancient societies.



Mesopotamian Slavery

Seth Richardson 

“What are a slave-woman’s dreams? What are a servant’s prayers?”—Sumerian proverb

INTRODUCTION

This chapter introduces us to Mesopotamian slavery by focusing on the Old Babylonian period (hereafter, “OB”). This periodization is bounded both temporally (ca. 2000–1600 BCE) and geographically: Babylonia corresponds roughly to southern Iraq from Baghdad to the Persian Gulf, as opposed to the Assyrian north near present-day Mosul/Kirkuk. The OB is a historical time and place about twice as long and large as Classical Greece, with thousands of documents available to inform us about our subject. It is necessary to focus on one period, because to describe a single “Mesopotamian slavery” for the whole of cuneiform culture (from ca. 3300 to 300 BCE) would require us to concatenate evidence from at least ten major historical periods, and only result in a Frankenstein image of our subject.¹ I will therefore explain the situation in one time and place which typifies the subject, but also try to give a sense of where, when, and how specific features of slavery in other periods conformed to or differed from it.

S. Richardson (✉)
Oriental Institute, University of Chicago, Chicago, IL, USA
e-mail: seth1@uchicago.edu

OB slavery was primarily a mechanism to provide credit in an emerging mercantile economy—which otherwise had few if any stable financial institutions—rather than to satisfy labor needs in any other productive sector.² It was primarily in this way that Mesopotamian slavery had globalizing effects: merchants, slaves, and transacted values moved through local, regional, and supra-regional trading networks: trafficked slaves were moved to what is now southern Iraq from places of origin as much as 1000 km away which are now in Turkey, Syria, and Iran. This has implications for language and cultural contact, but the most durable consequence was the transmission of the socio-economic practice of using people as a form of capital. The trade in slaves began to establish homologies of prices, systems of credit, legal standards, and even concepts of personhood throughout the Near East.

The OB period was the age of Hammurabi, a time characterized politically by competition and conflict between many small territorial states; socially, by an emerging class of private householders and merchants; and economically by credit markets and great trading networks connecting Mesopotamia to the Mediterranean, Anatolia, Elam, and the Persian Gulf, with contacts extending to Oman and the Indus Valley. It is a period with a well-rounded range of sources for slavery, with evidence from law codes and lawsuits, letters and contracts, proverbs and bequests. These diverse text types all have their own conventions and limitations, but they allow us to build a portrait of slavery as a social, legal, and economic institution and even of the experiences of individual slaves and masters.³

These records reveal the basic socio-economic contours of OB slavery.⁴ Some slaves were born into status (i.e., “house-born”); others were brought from foreign places.⁵ Some slaves eventually “integrated” into their masters’ families by adoption, inheritance, or marriage; some formed families of their own. Slaves could own moveable property; some were literate; they had the capacity to give legal testimony.⁶ Households which owned slaves generally had only one or two. Slaves and masters knew each other face-to-face as individuals, and slaves were virtually always referred to by name.⁷ They performed housework and field labor, but no type of work which was not also done by non-slaves. They were trusted with a wide range of tasks which required their free movement (even unguarded travel to other cities), independent judgment, and personal knowledge of their masters’ affairs. They acted as legal and business proxies for their masters, and their reputations reflected on their households. Yet these positive indications of personhood are tempered by other features. Slaves were bought and sold as chattel much like oxen and commodities. They were commonly used as pawns to establish commercial credit, and a variety of mechanisms existed to control their movement and behavior, including community surveillance and force. Slaves were required to wear distinctive hairstyles and perhaps garments, partially isolating them from their previous social identities, and they were “genealogically isolated” by the limited possibilities to pass on their names as patronyms, though this was not forbidden.

This mixture of adverse and positive attributes, broadly accurate for slavery in all periods of Mesopotamian history, requires us to ask where to inscribe the boundaries of “social death.”⁸ The social death which characterizes slavery cross-culturally, according to Orlando Patterson, entails the loss of name and identity, punishment by death for flight,⁹ and the rejection of the slave as a member of society. But Babylonian slavery, in its particular admixture of social recognitions and subordinations, does not meet all these criteria.

It must be stressed that we have no clear semantic or etymological understanding of the various Sumerian and Akkadian words for “slave” (either masculine or feminine) and “slavery.” This is a complicated matter which cannot be addressed in full here but suffice it to say that although some proposed meanings are hardly impossible, they are neither linguistically clear nor as logical as they first appear.¹⁰ For instance, Sumerian *arad*₂ and Akkadian *ardu* for “slave” might connote foreignness on etymological and even graphemic grounds (as “mountain man” or “(one) brought down (the river?).” But the etymons are neither certain nor even semantically exclusive in either case, and even the logical premises are complicated by the fact that both words were routinely applied to “slaves” who were clearly not foreign at all but (former) citizens of the same city. We can also exclude the idea that racial or ethnic identity was imbued in the Mesopotamian terms, as “Slav” is within “slave.” The point is that any translation of “slave” for Mesopotamian terms (including as I use it here) is purely conventional, and possibly anachronistic and plain old wrong.

All of this introduces us to the central problem and paradox of Mesopotamian slavery: the disposition of persons whom we identify in socio-economic terms as “slaves” because they were legally and commercially chattel, but who nevertheless had both agency and specific social and legal identities. Thus, even the evidence from this earliest of literate world cultures requires us to question how foundational slavery really was and the degree to which it compromised or erased personhood. Should we understand this Babylonian slavery to be para-social, in which a degree of personhood was conferred on slaves, at least to the minimum extent necessary to deputize them as effective proxies for their masters? Or should we think of that very construction as slavery’s most fundamental hypocrisy, to create a class of persons who could be “trusted” to perform as many roles as free persons without recognizing and permitting basic control over their bodies, places of residence, and life choices? No less urgent are the questions for the slaveholding society itself: how did the institution, practices, and individual slaves affect what it meant to be a Babylonian who was *not* enslaved?

ENTERING SLAVERY

When and how did a person become a slave in OB Mesopotamia? The discussion below moves from dispreferring certain options for mode of enslavement—namely, as consequences of legal punishment, raiding, or commercial markets—in favor of debt as the broad and underlying condition for most instances.

Probably no one, to begin with, was enslaved as a punishment by law in practice. A half dozen OB law collections (such as Hammurabi's) regulated various matters regarding enslaved persons, but only rarely ventured to form their status.¹¹ The OB law collections we have, preserving around 450 paradigmatic decisions, were primarily concerned with masters and commercial practice rather than the regulation of slavery as such. These laws addressed five basic areas of practice:

- The award of damages to a master for the death or injury of a slave.
- Holding slaves as pledges or pawns in distraint for credit (see below).
- Limiting (but not excluding) slaves' capacity to make commercial transactions.
- Punishment of flight, but largely focusing on the free persons who aided fleeing slaves, not the slaves themselves; the crime was understood to be a theft of property by a free person, not a slave's decision to flee.
- The status and inheritance rights of children born of slaves and free persons. The laws mostly guaranteed the eventual manumission of such children, but sometimes only following the death of the enslaved parent. The law codes differed in supporting, limiting, or nullifying the rights of these children to inheritance of a free father's property.

But all of these laws focus on slaves *already in status*. Only three of ca. 450 extant OB laws can even potentially be read as *creating* slave status. The first (SLEx 4') says that an adoptive son who repudiates his family may be "sold for his full value," though it does not say "into slavery." The second and third are both found in Hammurabi's laws. ¶141 states that a wife found at fault in a divorce case must reside in her husband's house "as (if she were?) a slave," though it is unclear why it is qualified "as (if)" (*kīma*); ¶146 says that a slave woman who bears her master's child and then "aspires to equal status" with his primary wife cannot be sold by her (presumably out of jealousy), but should "counted (*immanūšī*) among the slave-women"—which is of course confusing, because she was already a slave to begin with. It is possible that these decisions created slave status as legal punishments, but none of the three is crystal-clear on this point. Neither is any of them documented in any real-life context, which raises considerable doubt that these rules were ever applied.¹² No other crimes or civil infractions were said by the statutory laws to be punishable by slavery, and no court cases reflect such a punishment. The laws instead were overwhelmingly concerned with rules for people who

were already masters and slaves to guarantee property rights, not to create new slaves.

Significantly, when the laws mention in passing any specific mechanism of status formation, it is sale.¹³ This accords with the fact that the most substantial body of evidence we have for enslavement comes from slave sale contracts. These contracts are the documents in which people are first (to our knowledge) called “slave” in their life histories. The slaves sold in these texts are people who are not previously or subsequently known to us in any non-slave status; no sale contract makes mention of any different and preceding status or cause of enslavement. It is therefore almost impossible to reconstruct the events by which any individual was sold let alone what happened to them next. Whether or not sale per se was the mechanism which created slave status cannot therefore be determined—especially given that many sales of slaves were demonstrably *re*-sales. (Other significant modes of transfer included gifts, dowries, and inheritances, but this was not entry into status per se.) It is hard to avoid the conclusion that slavery was defined as a contractual and commercial matter between private parties and not institutionally generated. It is worth noting, given the discussion of self-sale and enslavement for debt below, that sold slaves, although always named by the contracts, were never parties to the sale, although sometimes their family members were.

There is little evidence that OB slavery was sourced from the widespread capture of people through war raiding. That is, although there is occasional evidence for raiding for people subsequently forced to work for their captors—a form of unfree labor likely a distinction without a difference for those thus exploited—none of it points to the sale of those prisoners as chattel slaves.¹⁴ Indeed, prisoners of war were typically redeemable through the payment of a ransom (*iptēru*) by their home country’s family, temple, or palace. That OB slavery was not substantially stocked with prisoners of war may surprise readers who are familiar with the ample record of the mass deportation of conquered populations by many Mesopotamian states since the early third millennium.¹⁵ But even during the time of the Neo-Assyrian empire, when literally millions of people deported during three centuries of war violence, the evidence for the transformation of war captives, plentiful though they were, into slaves is “rather limited,” “difficult if not impossible to trace,” and “questionable.”¹⁶

Even when OB kingdoms captured prisoners of war, the actual work to which they were put is not well documented. The only evidence for this in the OB comes from an archive of texts from Uruk covering about eighteen months over the years 1742–1740, documenting prisoners of war mostly from local cities (not faraway places). The archive largely documents the individual households to which these men were assigned and their food rations, but says almost nothing about their labor. We need not doubt they *did* work—they were called “workers” rather than “slaves,” and none were sold—but there is almost no documentary attention to the kinds or amounts of work they did.

In fact, the capture and deportation of prisoners are *topoi* entirely absent from the royal literature we would expect to mention them, which tracks

with the near-absence of slaves in mass-use by institutions. Palace and temple administrative texts, documenting properties, production, and people, are in good amounts throughout the four centuries of the OB, but we do not find much evidence that they depended on enslaved workforces. We do not, however, have from Babylonia the kinds of coherent royal archives such as the one recovered from the contemporary Syrian city of Mari (ca. 400 km northwest of Babylon), where slaves disbursed to private households could be summoned for seasonal mass labor in the king's orchards and smaller numbers of female captives manned textile workshops of the palace.¹⁷ It is possible that such arrangements existed in Babylonia proper, but none of the surviving letters or work rosters hint at it. On the rare occasions when groups of slaves do appear as laborers, they were working alongside non-slaves (soldiers, workers, tribesmen, neighbors, etc.) performing the same tasks.¹⁸ In sum, there is little evidence that OB states organized the forcible acquisition of people in large numbers for labor exploitation or sale.

Instead, the OB slavery represented in contracts and letters was overwhelmingly characterized by relations between small numbers of specific individuals known to each other by name. Sale contracts usually conveyed just one person, occasionally two (often a parent and child sold together); rarely, three. In letters from prospective buyers asking merchants to procure slaves for them, again, the typical request was for a single slave, although occasionally up to six are mentioned, but we never hear about the acquisition of slaves by the dozens or hundreds. The letters make clear that it was a normal expectation that slaves could be acquired on the market, sometimes in foreign places by long-distance merchants, but also that the supply was limited, or that only “unhealthy” or “skinny” slaves might be available. Sometimes a preference for certain foreign ethnicities was expressed, perhaps for linguistic reasons (i.e., to obtain a slave who at least spoke some Semitic language, as opposed to Elamite or Hurrian¹⁹) or because “house-born” (i.e., native) slaves might come encumbered with rights to eventual manumission or inheritance. But nothing suggests that enslavement was thought to be particularly appropriate to specific ethnicities; many ethnonyms attached to slaves also described free persons.²⁰ Neither do literary sources present a consistent point of view about slaves as ideally foreign or not. One may consider two proverbs offering conflicting advice, even though they derive from the same composition. The first warns against the acquisition of foreign slaves:

*When you bring a slave girl from the hills, she brings both good and evil with her.
The good is in the hands; the evil is in the heart. (Instructions of Šuruppak, ll. 193–197)*

while another argues for the superiority of foreign slaves, likening house-born slaves to “herbs that make the stomach sick”:

You should rather bring down a foreign slave from the mountains, or you should bring somebody from a place where he is an alien. My son, then he will pour water for you where the sun rises, and he will walk before you. (ll. 158–159)

No clear view can be gained on this point, unless it is deep ambivalence.

In any event, physical force does not seem to have played an important role in the acquisition or transportation of slaves. Contracts and letters speak of slaves bought in the way that other commodities were bought, with no hint of violence: no chains, shackles, brands, yokes, ropes, guards, or other apparatus are mentioned. Restraints were sometimes used on slaves who had fled, and a few instances of corporal punishment are hinted at.

Letters (which can provide more dependable contexts because they were composed to deal with specific rather than paradigmatic problems) strongly indicate that enslavement was a common result from the default of private household debts (Sum. e₂ ur₅-ra, a “household under obligation”), where the sale of selves or family members was done in exigence, but voluntarily.²¹ The Babylonian concept of “debt slavery” had a fundamentally conditional character: persons held in this way were understood to be pledges (Akk. *nipūtu*, a “distrain”) for debts to be repaid—parked in the household of a creditor until (someday) redeemed—rather than property whose ownership was unconditionally and permanently transferred. All such “enslavements,” though indefinite, were not considered a permanent change of status. That the verb of transaction in contracts was unambiguously “to sell” (Sum. *šam₂*, the same verb used to sell a sheep or a chair) may be misleading to the extent that slaves could later be “redeemed” (Akk. *paṭāru*, *uššuru*, *tarādu*; see “exits,” below). To put this in culturally salient terms, “slavery” was often a matter of a low-ranking member of a poor household being deputed to go and live and work (but also to be provided for, i.e., fed and clothed) in another household until such time as a family debt was repaid.

This form of enslavement could hardly be called a desirable option for the enslaved person, and we ought not avoid casting a critical eye on the discursive paternalism which characterized and apologized for it; for instance, the common Babylonian encomium to “take care” of slaves also carried with it the sense of “to keep an eye on” them. But like many other invidious choices, enslavement as a pledge was a rational economic alternative for seller, buyer, and sometimes even slave. It may have been preferable, in hardship conditions, to have your son or sister eat poorly as a slave in a creditor’s household for a year or two than to have them starve in your own. These choices were made within a cultural logic in which *all* household members—selves, wives, children, servants, some animals, and even real property—were not only social beings but also valuable and saleable according to ideas of proportional value, expressed in legal and even mathematical terms. To this extent, the social violence of slavery was not exclusively focused on slaves; the threat of enslavement hung over most non-slaves, who could in theory be sold any day, usually by the decision of someone else. The unpalatable choice

of enslavement was created by a world in which commercial and financial economies were still emergent: one where long-distance, local, and financial markets existed, but sources of credit and financial instruments were few. As an economic phenomenon, Babylonian enslavement was what happened when the inequalities of household hierarchies were commodified for a marketplace which had few other financial structures to build on.

From the perspective of the creditor/enslaver, taking a person as a pledge was a mechanism meant to guarantee the repayment of a loan, most often extended for productive purposes, but it also entailed costs of feeding and housing someone. That the ideal was for distraint-for-debt to be temporary is exemplified by one of Hammurabi's laws, which states:

If a debt is outstanding against a man and he sells or gives into debt service his wife, his son, or his daughter, they shall perform service in the house of their buyer or of the one who holds them in debt service for three years; their release shall be secured in the fourth year. (§117) ²²

The way things were *supposed* to work was: for the term of a loan, a distrained slave was sustained in exchange for the same labor they might normally do in their original household; repayment was the hoped-for outcome on the part of all parties involved. That this did not always work out this way in practice is addressed below.

Debt-and-default was also the primary motor for the enslavement of foreign people. That some slaves were indeed foreign has disguised the fact that they were not acquired by raiding but were already enslaved when purchased in distant non-Babylonian cities. An analysis of sale contracts shows that, just like “native”-born slaves, they too had most likely become enslaved because of economic hardships in their households.²³ The majority were women, perhaps unmarried or widowed, some with children in tow, or even infants at the breast; this demographic profile suggests that women were often the “least valuable” members of poor families precipitating out of their households in order to alleviate the debts of their fathers, husbands, and brothers. The sale of individuals in contracts may also obscure that they document only single members of what were entire households collapsing under debt, with family members sold one by one and pushed out of local communities, on to market towns, and thence to Babylonia.

This image is preserved for us in one literary composition referring to “the banished enemy, the slave from the mountains, or the laborer with a poor wife and small children comes, bound with his rope of one cubit....” The likelihood that debt was the major stimulus for enslavement is furthered by the last part of the second proverb quoted earlier, recommending the acquisition of foreign slaves; it goes on to count among the benefits of having a foreign slave that:

he does not belong to any family, so he does not want to go to his family; he does not belong to any city, so he does not want to go to his city.

In practical terms, debt slavery for re-sold foreign slaves was substantially more permanent than it ever was for Babylonian ones, even those born into slavery domestically (*wilid bītim*, “house-born”).²⁴ Brought hundreds of miles from the home which had sold them in the first place, who would (ever) come to redeem these foreign people? Perhaps slavery was intended only to have been a temporary status—the short-term solution to a very specific problem—but the accretion of foreign slaves into the system may have created (*mutatis mutandis*) a more durable class of unfree persons over time *because* they were sold at a distance. The redemption of foreign slaves occupied a prominent position in Hammurabi’s laws: the antepenultimate and penultimate legal decisions were concerned with facilitating the return of persons purchased as slaves in foreign lands, pointing to frequent abuses of the redemption system (itself guaranteed by law). This may hint that permanent enslavement was emerging as a problem wanting a solution.

We may make an analogy to modern-day abuses where foreign guest-workers, made liable for outlandish transit and housing fees by coercive employment contracts, are effectively transformed into unfree workers, e.g., Filipino laborers in Kuwait or Latin American migrant workers in the United States. In systems of social inequality, the economic nature of exploitation is most directly elucidated by identifying the *means of specification* used to create, regulate, and maintain that inequality. The value of Babylonian slaves was commodified by law and contract; their status as pledges specified by a debt theoretically equivalent to the value of a human, redeemable but sometimes unpayable; and the gradual transformation of foreign slaves into permanent chattels suggests that a system originally based more on human trafficking for credit may have moved toward the reation of permanent chattels. The transfer of the debt obligation or the sale of the slave to a different geographic region could then prevent redemption, even if the original term of unfree service was finite; effectively, the system may have begun to create a category of permanently enslaved people. These developments presented new practical and even moral problems in a system meant to afford only temporary expediences.

THE LABOR AND ECONOMIC FUNCTION OF SLAVES

Here, I distinguish between two topics: the labor of slaves and the economic function of slavery. The reader may reasonably expect that a report on the work of Babylonian slaves is the natural answer to the implicit question of why people bought and kept them. We assume that labor was (and is) the *raison d’être* for slavery—that slaves were kept to grind grain, mine silver, and tend the house. Were they not? Why else would people bother to buy, feed, and clothe slaves if not to profit from their labor?

But the subject of slave work is oddly subdued in the cuneiform record. Sale contracts never specified any particular skills of slaves being sold or work to be done; hire contracts (since slaves could also be hired out on wages basis)

only occasionally did so, usually grain-grinding and weaving for women and fieldwork for men. I am aware of only a single OB letter specifying skill as a criterion for purchase: “As for the slave you wrote me about, buy her if she’s house-born and a weaver” (AbB VI 4). Stray passages in literary sources reflect ambivalent stereotypes of slave labor, both negative (that slaves were lazy, unreliable, fearful, grumbling, misbehaving) and positive (capable, honest, tireless). Compare, for instance, these two proverbs:

A free weaver equals two slave girls. A free worker equals three slaves.

*At harvest time, at the most priceless time, gather like a slave girl, eat like a queen!*²⁵

The first proverb implies that slave labor was inherently less productive; the second implies diligence. But parsing these brief and disparate characterizations is less helpful than observing how few literary references there are to slaves’ work at all.

OB letters paint the same picture. Of 804 references to slaves and servants in OB letters, only 6 percent were about work expected or performed. (By comparison, 37 percent of all statements had to do with where, when, and how slaves were to move freely to different locations to carry and acquire information, and 19 percent related to issues of pledge and distraint.²⁶) Most references to labor were unspecific—just that slaves should “do work,” “be on duty,” or “not be idle.” A few letters speak of herding, cooking, fetching wood, household chores, or field- or canal-work (including as proxies for labor expected of their masters); six letters mention specialized skills: weaving, gardening, grooming. But no form of work was particular to slaves: the work they did included the same tasks performed by free persons: harvesting, grinding grain, tending animals, dredging canals, etc. No activity was socially marked in the OB or any other period as distinctively “slave labor.”

What is more revealing is how typical it was for slaves to work alone, very occasionally in twos and threes, and virtually never in labor gangs. The few households that owned slaves rarely seem to have had more than one or two at a time. Slaves almost always worked without supervision and alongside non-slave persons. Force and coercion are rarely indicated (and even then, not uniquely for slaves). And though the dress and distinctive hairstyles of slaves visibly identified their status publicly, chains and other restraints were used only as forms of punishment in unusual circumstances; branding, used for slaves in the mid-third and mid-first millennium,²⁷ is not attested for the OB.

If we put these observations in dialogue with the foregoing discussion about entry into slavery, the somewhat counterintuitive takeaway is that OB slavery did not exist in order to aggregate labor power, solve labor shortages, or extract work in exchange for invested value. Slavery was not really *about* work, per se. To be clear: all slaves worked, but only as all other people did. Like most pre-modern agricultural societies, work was not an optional activity for

anyone—even the highest priests and officials were obliged to perform *corvée* labor, for instance—and there was little opportunity to intensify production or maximize profits. To think that labor in this socio-economic setting could be commodified and apportioned to an encumbered class of persons so that another class could thereby enjoy leisure time is not only anachronistic, but just simply not in evidence. Moreover, given the technological and informational boundaries of the period, the raw compulsion of labor would have been wildly inefficient. Given the dispersed distribution of slaves throughout the population, forced work would have required supervision at a ratio too close to 1:1 to effect compliance. Neither did slavery solve any obvious deficits in available labor resources, given that other forms of semi-free labor existed alongside it: servants (*šubarū*), dependents (*rēdūtu*, i.e., in the status of a client; *miqtu*, a “fallen” person), tenants (*ikkararātu*), hirees (*agrū*), levied workers (*tupšikkū*, rendering *ilku*-duty), subordinates (*mārū*, lit. “sons”), and dozens of other terms for various kinds of workers. Finally, ganged labor under force and supervision would have hampered the most common task we see given to OB slaves: to carry messages, gather news, act as proxies for their masters, and be deputed as pledges for productive loans. In economic terms, slavery existed because it had these specific functions related to information and credit, not to labor power.

Free movement was central to these functions. The business of merchants and landowners required that they be in more than one place at one time, and few communications technologies were available to solve them. To check on the plowing of a field, collect a debt, deliver a letter, bring silver to a creditor, herd sheep, or ready a departing caravan, Babylonian masters needed slaves carrying letters to effect business when and where they themselves could not attend. Whether they were dispatched to other households, out to the countryside, or even to other cities altogether, it was precisely for their ability to move freely and exercise independent judgment that slaves were needed. For this reason, masters prized slaves not for brawn or beauty, but for being “trustworthy” (*taklu*), and socio-economic relations based on trust are fundamentally incompatible with those based on force. If we assume that “work” should look like hard labor under a beating sun, our expectations are confounded by the economic functions slaves fulfilled in a mercantile economy focused on commerce and credit.

THE EXPERIENCE OF HOUSEHOLD SLAVERY

Above, I have made two partially contradictory statements: that it is possible to say something about the individual experiences of slaves and masters; but also that we usually only have a historical window through single documents (usually sale contracts), which do not allow us to reconstruct life histories.²⁸ But a few vignettes and exceptions to the one-document rule allow us to illuminate social experiences of slavery in markets, worksites, households, and communities.

To begin from some admittedly crude statistics: the OB urban slave population (and slavery seems an emphatically urban institution) hovered around 5 percent; the average number of slaves we see in a household is one; an average household size was around five non-slave persons. Incidental evidence suggests that more slaves were women than men, perhaps by as much as a 2:1 ratio.²⁹ Given these parameters, we might find one slave in every fourth household along a city street, and perhaps 500 slaves in a Mesopotamian city with a population of ca. 10,000 people. Slaves were therefore common and familiar (but not typical) members of urban communities. This image of small-scale household slavery may differ from, e.g., institutional workhouses known from the third millennium, where large groups of foreign men, women, and children, some branded in their flesh, toiled in such places as a textile factory called the *é kešda*, the “Bound-House.”³⁰ We know that OB slaves were visually identifiable by a shaved hairstyle called an *abbuttu*-lock, perhaps wore distinctive garments, and were routinely watched and observed (especially when in proximity to city-gates, through which they were forbidden to pass). It is enough to observe that Mesopotamian cities in the OB were not particularly large, and that there was a great deal of face-to-face recognition and knowledge of people (including slaves) by name. If the shackles and racial identification we might think of as classic markers and constraints of slave life were not therefore features of this particular historical context, slaves were nevertheless under watch through pervasive community and individual knowledge—through the watchful nosiness of village life. (And slaves were themselves participants in social surveillance, sometimes reporting on the doings of neighbors and collecting juicy gossip.)

Contracts identified some slaves as “house-born,” which acknowledged them as natively Babylonian. Some laws promised eventual manumission and sometimes inheritance rights for such children born to slave women, and sometimes for the mothers as well.³¹ To this limited extent, our sources suggest that legal and social distinctions were made between slaves who had been born into households and those who had not. Foreign slaves, meantime, as far as we can make out, came from lands across a vast arc of the Near East, stretching almost 2000 km from the region of modern Aleppo in the northwest to Khuzestan in the southeast. The linguistic or cultural differences of these slaves from Babylonians seem to have been unimportant, however, to any documented dimension of their daily working life; foreignness was noted only in contexts of procurement, sale, and law, aspects related entirely to issues of property and jurisdiction. In no other respect is any preference or dispreference for any particular kind of slave expressed in any source beyond stipulations about health.

We do know that slaves could (and some did) marry, have children, live together with their families in their own residences, own moveable property (but not land or houses), and work fields to produce their own crops. How common these dimensions of life were remains entirely unknown. Slaves could marry into the families of their masters or take on a new status as caretakers

for the elderly, as second wives, or even as adoptees. In such cases, they might in legal and social terms become freer and fuller social beings with a patronym and household identity. Some slaves were owned within the community of unmarried religious votaresses called *nadītus*, who conducted financial business as independent householders, but it is unclear that life in this community differed in terms of (m)any social or economic norms.

Whether “integrated” into masters’ families or not, slaves represented those households to the community, and their behavior and reputation, good or bad, “whether honored or despised” (as AbB III 11 puts it), reflected on their masters. A slave’s reputation went hand-in-hand with the “trust” (*taklu*) vested by a master to carry out household business. Slaves also had limited legal capacity, for instance, to give testimony though not to bring suit, but their legal liability was unequal, since they could be punished fully for various crimes (although it was their masters who were often liable for civil penalties and fines).

But slaves could exacerbate tensions within a household as well as reflect its identity. Squabbles between siblings often emerged about who should inherit a favored slave or whether a manumitted slave had received too much inheritance themselves. As with any family, membership hardly resolved all social, financial, or even emotional problems; and although manumission might improve a freed slave’s life chances in social and economic terms, upward mobility was severely limited in this society even for free persons. From the point of view of a slave, life in a household probably represented safety against true immiseration—starvation and homelessness, but “emancipation” was hardly any protection against the kind of debt which could push them right back down into slavery. There was much to lose, and not so much to win; unfortunately, such outcomes can rarely be tracked.

The evidence for structural violence in OB slavery is unclear. Notwithstanding the existence of children born to slave women, we have close to zero evidence about sexual predation. At most, we find oblique statements in letters like this rebuke: “With me, you talk about slave-women!” (AbB IX 19: 11–12); it is hardly clear what this means. Sexual abuse may have been so common that it went unremarked upon; it may have been entirely unusual or forbidden; we simply do not know. It is worth commenting only that *namritu*, an adjective commonly describing female slaves and sometimes translated as “good-looking” (therefore suggesting their acquisition for sexual use) actually meant only “healthy.”³² The evidence for physical violence is similarly scant; a very few references imply the use of beatings to compel obedience, but not to any degree more than for the corporal punishment of wives, children, or annoying neighbors. Again, this does not by itself tell us whether violence was common, everyday, and unremarkable—or highly unusual and shocking. Imprisonment and deprivation are in evidence here and there, as with a female servant reporting that “cold and lice are eating me” in the house where she was distraised (AbB VIII 100), but again the typicality of such complaints is unclear. All we can say is that open references to sexual abuse, physical

violence, and deprivation are few; nor even idioms or allegories connecting slaves to tropes of sexuality or punishment.

If we look to literary sources for insights on social view of slavery, we find a pervasive ambivalence. Slaves appear quite frequently in Sumerian literature of the OB period; more than a hundred references can be found in dozens of works. But the scribes composing and copying proverbs, hymns, and stories were not interested in making sociological observations; they narratively positioned masters and slaves in symbolic roles to allegorize issues of authority and position, especially to satirize haughty behavior. Reversals were common devices, as in the proverb: “When the mistress left the house and the slave woman came in from the street, away from her mistress the slave woman set up her own banquet.”³³ But no consistent viewpoint emerges: some proverbs depict slaves as unfortunates (“Left-over clothes are the share of the slave-woman’s child” [SP 4.43]), while others show them as greedy and overfed (“Although the chickpea-flour of the home-born slaves is mixed with honey and ghee, there is no end to their lamentations” [SP 1.47]). One could say that they reflect an implicitly critical view of slavery insofar as it produced people who were either pitiable or contemptible; but the divergent archetypes reveal a profound ambivalence, seemingly to the purpose of explaining (or explaining away) the moral dissonance of slaves’ simultaneous subjugation and personhood.

EXITING SLAVERY

If Babylonian slavery was not by design meant to be an unalterable status, legal terms of enslavement were nevertheless indefinite and could therefore sometimes be made effectively permanent. That one might remain a slave indefinitely is demonstrated by the fact that slaves were awarded as damages in lawsuits and considered heritable, as shown by inheritance texts (*tuppāt aplūti*), dowries, and laws. That slaves were distinguished (or at least listed separately) in inheritance texts from “possessions” (Akk. *būšu*, i.e., mere “things”) does little to ameliorate that they were chattels whose possession could be transferred—by gift, sale, default, or bequest. It seems likely that any time a slave was transferred from one household to another—and therefore to a new master—the term of their enslavement and/or how they might be redeemed were both rendered less clear, not more. We may compare this to the more permanent status of foreign slaves branded as temple or royal property in the mid-third millennium; or the unfree temple oblates called *širkū* in the mid-first millennium, who (since they were not slaves as such) “could be neither manumitted nor sold.”³⁴

We do read that some slaves ran away—but not from slavery, only to be slaves in other households (sometimes nearby, sometimes in other cities) which they preferred, and which presumably preferred them. Sometimes distrainers kept possession of slaves in violation of contracts and/or against the will of the slaves, but choice of residence by slaves played a remarkably common role

in resolving household conflicts. The Babylonian idiom, in fact, was not that slaves had “run away,” but merely “wandered” (*halqu*³⁵) from where they were meant to be, as a stray ox might; there seems no expectation on anyone’s part that slaves were attempting any wholesale escape from status. To the extent that the problem was policed (i.e., not much in this period), this was aimed squarely at the recovery of the master’s property, not the punishment of the slave.³⁶ None of this precludes, as I have said, that slaves were watched, marked, and controlled—only that there was not much of anywhere to run away *to*. That being the case, restraint and arrest were exceptional measures used in an environment where the mobility of slaves was required.

Most commonly we read of slaves being “redeemed.” This practice of pawning a slave for credit and then redeeming him/her when profits were realized (on the borrower’s sale of barley or the return of his caravan) is attested many times. There were a number of ways to say this: often with verbs denoting the satisfaction of debts (e.g., Akk. *paṭāru*, *wuṣṣuru*), but sometimes only descriptively, i.e., that slaves were “returned,” “sent back,” or “handed over” (Akk. *tāru*, *ṭarādu*, *nadānu*), where the reason is unstated. In many instances, the original debt had been repaid, and the creditor returned the distrained slave to the original master. We know of slaves who were sold and re-sold in this way multiple times between different masters, probably among circles of merchants who were all in debt to one another in turn. But often we read about distrainers *not* returning a pawned slave, despite being paid or going past the normal term of distraint. This is where the law stepped in: if a slave or a master could bring proof that a creditor had either been compensated or that the original debt was somehow invalid.³⁷ It is clear, however, that a slave “redeemed” from a debt was not freed from slavery, only from distraint, because they were returned to the household of an original or earlier master.

Finally, we may contrast redemption with emancipation: certain OB laws mandated the “release” (*andurāru*³⁸) of slaves or prohibited “claims of slavery” against individuals (e.g., *ana wardūtīm ul iraggum*³⁹), usually for slave women who bore children to a master. In such cases, a full manumission was to be effected, involving a full exit out of slave status. (There were, however, limits on the liability of the master to recognize the inheritance rights of the children and/or the marital status of the mother.⁴⁰) What is less clear is how often this actually happened outside of the idealizing logic of the laws: most texts about manumissions using these terms are only model contracts used by scribes as learning tools; we have few actual practice texts. A few documents describe manumissions in terms of ritual actions, such as a “purification” (Akk. *elēlu*, including with *pūtu* 1a-2’, “to purify the forehead”⁴¹) or a declaration before a divine image; in other contexts, these actions were used to indicate the clearance of debts, which suggests that manumission was conceived of in terms of financial solvency. The smashing of a pot at the feet of the slave (Akk. *šebēru* 1b), anointing with oil (Akk. *šamnu* 1f + *šapāku*), and the shaving-off of the *abbuttu*-hairlock are also attested.

Manumissions most frequently coincided with a transition to some other specific status. Many slaves being “freed” were simultaneously obliged by new contracts to support their former and aging masters as “sons” or “daughters”, to become votaries in temples, or to marry into the family.⁴² Few manumissions simply released slaves from servitude, but facilitated some new status with different obligations. The terms of the new arrangement seem typically to have improved the lot of the former slave—there was almost no way for things to get worse, after all—but we need to recognize it was usually a “freedom” which came at the price of a commitment to another obligation. The contrast between “free” and “slave” is, in fact, one made by astoundingly few texts, whether letters or contracts⁴³; manumissions did not contrast slavery to any other civil-legal status, such as *amīlūtu* or *muškenūtu*, “free” or “semi-free.”⁴⁴ This was a society in which the paramount social good was to ensure that people were established *somewhere* within a household hierarchy, not to award (much less guarantee) anyone legal and political rights in any community larger than a household. That household membership (even as a slave) guaranteed some measure of socio-economic security, however, implied its opposite: the threat of exclusion (and thus possible starvation) was a form of structural violence which hung over all members. Just because we are not faced with a record full of beatings or sexual violence (which may anyway have been unnoted and normalized aspects of class and gender relations) does not mean that a very substantial and even existential threat of ostracization did not lurk behind the façade of paternalism and compliance that characterized mastery and slavery.

CONCLUSION: PARADIGM AND VARIATION

The foregoing has described a particular form of slavery, one in which force, restraint, and labor extraction were relatively minor concerns, and reliability, agency, identity, and mobility were considered advantageous characteristics of a slave. Above all, slavery was geared toward mobilizing productive credit in an emerging mercantile economy based on moving agricultural goods to market; where the commodified value of slaves offered one of the few available financial instruments in the marketplace.

It is not my purpose to depict Babylonian slavery as inherently mild or humane, but to point to its economic function as based on social relations of trust. Given this, a determination of “social death” seems unwarranted; not all exploitation nullifies social identity. I mean to stress what the institution was *for* rather than how it compared to other historical instantiations, e.g., the mass-labor context of racialized slavery of the antebellum US South. The more urgent question about Babylonian slavery, then, is not about the degree of exploitation of the slave, but the larger consequences for families and communities *in which all people were potentially salable*—where every mother, daughter, wife, younger brother, or son could be pledged against a bargeful of barley. Perhaps they would be redeemed next week, perhaps in

three years, perhaps never. We have few sources directly commenting on the social and emotional stresses this system must have put on Babylonian households, but it would be obtuse not to consider it as a larger context. It reminds us that enduring structures of inequality are not only harmful to the people who directly suffer deprivation and exploitation, but also to the people who supposedly benefit but could also fall prey to them—for whom legacies of privilege and moral compromise entail profound psychosocial harm. Systems of inequality are harmful to all who participate in them.

How well does the OB situation (ca. 2000–1600 BCE) reflect slavery in earlier and later periods of Mesopotamian history? This can be difficult to answer; other periods produced documentation substantially different in quantity and kind. Corpora prior to the OB, for instance, preserve large numbers of administrative texts from specific times and places—Uruk ca. 3200, Lagaš ca. 2500, Nippur ca. 2300—but with several centuries remaining effectively silent, and with few contracts and no letters. This situation begins to improve around fifty years before the OB begins (i.e., around 2050) under the Third Dynasty of Ur, when commercial documents become more abundant and letters begin to appear. The documentary record following the OB, meanwhile, is relatively sparse from ca. 1600–750, after which point it picks up momentum and widens into a vast river, down to the fourth century, producing texts of all kinds—letters, contracts, laws, and literature. The three thousand years of Mesopotamian history thus (very!) briefly profiled are not known to us on a consistent documentary basis in temporal, spatial, or generic terms, which makes comparisons difficult; the available evidence may artificially emphasize or elide different aspects of slavery.

What we can do is note large-type differences in period documentation, if not necessarily in practice. We may begin by noting that the term(s) for “slave(ry)” develop somewhat later than the institution’s apparent existence. The term “*sag* + *arad*₂/*geme*₂” from the Uruk period (3300–2900) does not so clearly designate unfree laborers. It is not until the Akkadian period (2350–2200) that we have our first evidence for the sale of slaves by contract (a commercial practice extending across the Near East over time)⁴⁵; only by the Ur III period (ca. 2112–2004) do we see slaves given as pledges for loans. During these earlier periods (and later ones as well), not only did other words for unfree persons persist alongside slaves, but terms distinguishing them from “free” persons were relatively undeveloped. The OB introduced the concept of a “gentleman” or “free” class (*awīlū*) but it remained inchoate in juridical and social terms. By Middle Babylonian times, a privileged status for city-dwellers existed (*kidinnūtu*, referring to divine protection), though this substantially meant tax exemptions rather than privileges over other classes. Only by around 700 was there a clearly marked free class called *mār banī* (lit., “grown son”) openly contrasted to slave status. The legal and social differences between slaves and non-slaves is therefore not clear to us until relatively late times. This complicates our thinking, and invites us to think about why

a distinction between slavery and freedom was not made more systematically than it was.

Another possible major difference between OB and third-millennium slavery is the question of whether, how often, and how many slaves were obtained through capture in war. There remains a low-level and sustained (but perhaps irreconcilable) debate about whether the (undoubted) trains of prisoners brought back to Mesopotamia from foreign wars and set to work in large groups on temple and palace estates (as described by Early Dynastic and Akkadian kings) were saleable chattel. The massed POW laborers (perhaps even stationed in labor camps) and the individual slaves of private households, though both victims of force, may have formed distinct sub-populations, casualties of substantially different systems of inequality.⁴⁶ We should, of course, stop to ask how relevant our modern distinctions about status would have been to a captured Subarean or Elamite soldier in, e.g., 2250 BCE: roped around the neck, marched hundreds of miles away from home to the strange land of Sumer, branded in his flesh, and forced to work on a temple estate or gifted to a local grandee by the king, he probably cared little what his precise juridical status was or whether the people who oversaw his work called him a “slave” or not. We can only say that slavery in subsequent times, beginning with the Ur III period, took on a more emphatically financial and commercial character, with little war capture or massed labor.

A more subtle difference can be seen in the Neo-Babylonian period. The use of slaves as pledges for loans had remained a long-term feature of Babylonian commerce, but the enslavement of free persons for debt became effectively illegal after ca. 700, effectively limiting distraint to persons already in slave or subordinate status. Further, manumissions and other exits from slavery seem to have become rarer and more conditional, and permanent marking practices such as branding now obtained (in contrast to the special haircut of the OB, which could obviously be undone). These changes may indicate that the greater specification of the category “free” (*mār banī*) may have come at the price of a hardening of the category “unfree,” with less social mobility (either upward or downward).

But Babylonian slavery largely remained a stable set of practices. In all periods, we see the enslavement of both Babylonians and foreign persons, and of men, women, and children. Slavery remained a highly individualized arena of interaction between masters and slaves known to each other by name, identity, and character. After the third millennium, there are fewer instances of unfree labor at scale, for any kind of labor being particular to slaves, or for slaves as creating any outsized economic value in either primary or secondary production. Despite a possible increased stratification between slave and free persons in the latest periods, slavery remained unmarked in moral or racial terms; little suggests that slavery was ever considered natural to any particular (set of) person(s).

So I briefly return to the very difficult questions posed at the outset of this essay about slavery’s implications for the personhood of everyone involved in

this culture—sellers, buyers, creditors, debtors, merchants, judges, witnesses, neighbors, bystanders, and, of course, slaves. On the one hand, one could emphasize the human scale and temporary nature of Babylonian slavery as less harmful than more dehumanizing instantiations of the institution; we do not find the routine violations of human rights and brutality characteristic of some other historical cases. The close context of household life, an array of expressions of care and affect, relations of trust, and a seemingly high incidence of mixed free and slave marriages all suggest some degree of personhood for slaves. The need to use slaves as an extension of a master’s authority suggests that violence would undermine their economic purpose. Full “social death” cannot describe this form of slavery, even as contradictions and double standards persisted (as they do in all cultures). To this extent, Babylonian slavery looks “nicer.”

On the other hand, Babylonia could be said to be responsible for a generative and standardizing role in the globalization of slavery, since it stands at the opening of a very long, continuous, literate, and self-conscious historical tradition. We have to wonder about the role of the writing system in particular, almost obsessively organized to create categories of meaning, to mark for the first time the social worth of certain persons in relation to others; writing itself was a means of specification. It is not difficult to see writing’s categorical imperatives extending first to the practices of war and commerce that ultimately connected individual Babylonian households with far-flung parts of the world; then to a regularization of the financial means of specification for debt which translated categories of personhood into commodities; and, finally, the hardening of these terms into legal rules and social institutions. The apparently lower levels of violence and inequality visible in the Babylonian record for slavery was not a product of moral imperatives, but of insufficiencies of financial and technological means: this version of slavery was not a matter of being “nice,” just of a social engineering calibrated to a specific economic end. If this culture had had the capacity to intensify production and control people at scale, it would have been perfectly happy to do it. If only for normalizing slavery, the Babylonian case was indeed “foundational” to the globalization of the institution throughout the pre-modern world—out to other ancient Near Eastern cultures, which adopted many Mesopotamian standards of price, status, sale formulae, and legal practice—hence to Greece, Rome, the rising Islamic world, medieval Europe, and beyond.

NOTES

1. All dates used in this article other than bibliographic contexts are BCE. The major periods of Babylonian history include: Uruk, ca. 3300–2900; Early Dynastic, ca. 2900–2350; Akkad, 2334–2192; Ur III, 2112–2004; Old Babylonian, ca. 2017–1595; Kassite, ca. 1475–1154; Middle Babylonian, 1154–ca. 750; Neo-Babylonian, ca. 750–539; Persian, 539–331; Seleucid, 331–63. “Sum.” refers to terms in Sumerian; “Akk.” to terms in Akkadian.

Translations of literary works follow the *Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature* (ETCSL: <https://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk>); references to laws follow Martha Roth's *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor* (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1995); translations of Akkadian words, *The Assyrian Dictionary of the University of Chicago* (CAD) (Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 1964–2010). The abbreviation AbB refers to the series *Altbabylonische Briefe in Umschrift und Übersetzung* (Leiden: Brill, 1964–2005).

2. This is supported by studies of other Mesopotamian periods as well: see, e.g., Heather Baker, “Degrees of Freedom: Slavery in Mid-First Millennium BC Babylonia,” *World Archaeology* 33, no. 1 (2001): 23, reporting: “The tablets rarely give us information as to what duties the slaves performed”; and Seth Richardson, “Walking Capital: The Economic Function and Social Location of Babylonian Servitude,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 4, no. 3 (2019): n. 15 for literature. Cf. Vitali Bartash “Going for the Subarean Brand: The Import of Labor in Early Babylonia,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 77, no. 2 (2018): 263–78. Bartash argues for the economic significance of slave labor in Sargonic Babylonia.
3. I prefer “master” to “owner” partly because it inclines to the semantics of Akkadian *bēlu*, but also for the argument made below that Mesopotamian debt slavery typically positioned the slave as a pledge, where possession was not indetical to ownership (if conditionally).
4. See especially Richardson, “Walking Capital,” 285–342.
5. See F. Van Koppen, “Geography of the Slave Trade,” in *Mesopotamian Dark Age*, ed. H. Hunger and R. Pruzsinszky (Vienna: Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004); Seth Richardson, “Origin of Foreign Slaves in the Late Babylonian Period,” *KASKAL* 17 (2020): 53–73.
6. Slave women are attested as witnesses to legal documents as early as the Akkadian period.
7. Slave names are rarely given with a patronym, however, which denoted full and recognized social identity. As for the re-naming of slaves, the evidence is mixed: slave names of both undoubted foreign origin and probable “re-christenings” are attested in many periods. But re-naming does not appear to have been a consistent practice. For exceptions in the Neo-Babylonian period, see Baker, “Degrees of Freedom,” 22.
8. Orlando Patterson characterized slavery in many (if not all) world cultures as “social death” in these terms. See Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982). Baker engages with Patterson’s ideas in her study of Neo-Assyrian slavery (Heather Baker, “Slavery and Personhood,” in *On Human Bondage*, eds. J. Bodel and W. Scheidel [Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017]).
9. Even OB “laws” at most punished slave flight by cutting off an ear rather than inflicting death. Two points may be made, however: one, we have little indication of how often these punishments were actually practiced; two, Hammurabi’s law to punish a slave rejecting his master (¶282, the last in his list) was probably a literary metaphor for the punishment of political rebellion and not the enforcement of slavery per se.
10. See further my article in prep, “Mesopotamian Words for ‘Slave’: Opacity and Mutability in Early Terms and Practices.”
11. The “laws” found in compositions like the Code of Hammurabi were not statutes as such, but collections of the notional and paradigmatic decisions of

- just rulers. That I occasionally refer to them by shorthand as “laws” is simply to avoid annoying the reader.
12. One may compare with the Neo-Babylonian period, when enslavement is documented as a punishment for, e.g., infidelity (Baker, “Degrees of Freedom,” 21).
 13. With the Akk. verb *šámu*, “to sell,” distinct from *agāru*, “to hire,” including the hire of labor.
 14. See esp. Richardson, “Origin of Foreign Slaves”; cf. Jacob J. de Ridder “Slavery in Old Assyrian Documents,” in *Kultepe International Meetings, Vol. II*, eds. F. Kulakoğlu and G. Barjamovic (Turnhout: Brepols, 2017), 56f.
 15. Notably by the Neo-Assyrian (934–612) and Neo-Babylonian (626–539) empires. There is substantial evidence for the capture and deportation of prisoners of war from Early Dynastic and Akkadian inscriptions. Instances in which those prisoners are called “slaves,” however, are few.
 16. Baker, “Slavery and Personhood,” 22; see also Ignace Gelb’s classic study “Prisoners of War in Early Mesopotamia,” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 32 (1973): 70–98: “Is it possible to turn POWs into slaves? The answer is theoretically, yes, practically, no!”
 17. I thank Hervé Reculeau for this observation.
 18. On the poor evidence for POWs/captives as slaves, the absence of mass/institutional contexts, and the emphasis on individual social relations, see Richardson, “Walking Capital,” 3 n. 9, 9 with n. 28, 16–17, and 23; and Richardson, “Origin of Foreign Slaves,” 55–57.
 19. See Bartash “Going for the Subarean Brand,” 263.
 20. “Elamite,” for instance, was an ethnonym identifying both slaves and free land-owning citizens. Similarly, V. Bartash (“Going for the Subarean Brand,” 273–74) notes that although most “Subareans” were slaves, some were merely menial laborers.
 21. This practice is attested from as early as Ur III times; see S. J. Garfinkle, “Shepherds, Merchants, and Credit,” *JESHO* 47, no. 1 (2004): 5, 7 n. 16, and 27.
 22. See again Garfinkle, “Shepherds, Merchants, and Credit,” 9 and 27, writing of the Ur III situation: “This does not mean that customary loans could not result in debt slavery, but only that this was not the primary intent of the creditor in all such arrangements.”
 23. Richardson, “Origin of Foreign Slaves.”
 24. Cf. the Laws of Hammurabi, ¶¶117–18, which specify that slaves (of any origin) given into debt service could be kept or sold by the creditor if the debt was not paid within three years, whereas non-slaves in the same position were to be released.
 25. SP 3.183 and “The Instructions of Šuruppak” ll. 131–133.
 26. Richardson, “Walking Capital,” 305–23.
 27. Bartash “Going for the Subarean Brand,” *passim*; Baker, “Degrees of Freedom,” 22.
 28. Cf. Bartash “Going for the Subarean Brand,” 269–70, on the (brief) life history of a third-millennium slave woman named “Goody.”
 29. See, e.g., Bartash “Going for the Subarean Brand.”
 30. Bartash “Going for the Subarean Brand.”

31. Cf. Baker, “Slavery and Personhood,” 17–18, who is less sanguine about apparent Mesopotamian protections against “natal alienation,” at least for first-millennium contexts.
32. On the material conditions of OB slave life, see Richardson, “Walking Capital,” *passim*.
33. Perhaps the most famous composition based on this kind of reversal/mirroring rhetoric is the later Akkadian composition “The Dialogue of Pessimism,” in which a slave mechanically endorses a series of contradictory actions proposed by his master, satirizing his vacillation.
34. Bartash “Going for the Subarean Brand,” 275; Baker, “Slavery and Personhood,” 24. Baker notes that manumission is simply not attested in Neo-Assyrian texts at all.
35. Cf. the less common Akk. *abātu*, more straightforwardly “to flee.”
36. LE ¶¶33–34, “defraud”; LE ¶¶49–52; LH ¶¶15–16.
37. In which case penalties for the faulty distrainer might apply, including if the slave had been injured or died while in their custody: LL ¶14 (two-fold); SLHF viii 11–15 (equal amount); LE ¶¶22–23; LH ¶280.
38. See the note in CAD A/2 s.v. *andurāru* s. (p. 117) on the term’s use for both release from slavery and cancelation of debt. The Sumerian term for *andurāru* (ama.ar.gi₄) means a “reversion to a previous state,” which may imply a presumption that free status preceded slavery.
39. See also CAD Q s.v. *qabū* 3a-1’b’ and *qerēbu* 5a.
40. LL ¶25 (slave mother and children freed; no inheritance share); LL ¶26 (if the master marries a slave after his first wife’s death, child gets inheritance share); LH ¶119 (with *paṭāru*), ¶¶170–71 (the latter with *andurāru*), ¶175; cf. LH ¶176a–b. More ambiguous is LH gap ¶s, which seems to suggest that a slave whose master beats him need not be returned to him, but it is unclear if the slave is actually freed.
41. This may indicate that the forehead was where the *abbuttu*-lock of hair was placed: see Kraus Texte 25 cited s.v. *abbuttu* in CAD A/1 p. 49, “if he has a low growth of hair on his forehead (*pūtišu*) as far as his *abbuttu*...”; cf. SLHF ii 4–13.
42. See exs. s.v. CAD Š/3 *širku* A s. and *šikūtu* s. (esp. A32117), devotion to a temple, and *šitektu* s., given in adoption; CAD Q *qerū* v. 2b; *palāḫu* v. 5g, marriage; *ḥarrānu* 9, with an adoption.
43. Cf. H. Baker, “Degrees of Freedom,” *World Archaeology* 33, no. 1 (2001): 21: Neo-Babylonian slave sale contracts clarified that a sold person was (also) not a free person; such distinctions were not made in the OB.
44. Cf. the slightly later situation at the nearby city of Nuzi, where manumission could be qualified as a transfer to a semi-free status termed *šalaššu*. On concepts of freedom, see Eva von Dassow, “Freedom in Ancient Near Eastern Societies,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, eds. K. Radner and E. Robson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), 205–24.
45. Slave sale contracts are next found in Elam in the twenty-first century; in Assyria, by the nineteenth century at Aššur and then in its colony in Kaneš; in Alalakh by the fifteenth century; in Emar by the fourteenth century; etc.
46. This distinction is probably even more valid for the case of war captives in the much later imperial Neo-Assyrian period, when large-scale deportations mostly had the character of mass resettlement rather than mass enslavement.

FURTHER READINGS

- Baker, Heather. “Degrees of Freedom: Slavery in Mid-First Millennium BC Babylonia.” *World Archaeology* 33, no. 1 (2001): 18–26.
- . “Slavery and Personhood in the Neo-Assyrian Empire.” In *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, edited by J. Bodel and W. Scheidel, 15–30. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017.
- Bartash, Vitali. “Going for the Subarean Brand: The Import of Labor in Early Babylonia.” *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 77, no. 2 (2018): 263–78.
- Culbertson, Laura, ed. *Slaves and Households in the Near East*. Chicago: The Oriental Institute, 2011.
- Englund, Robert K. “The Smell of the Cage.” *Cuneiform Digital Library Journal* 4 (2009): 1–27.
- Garfinkle, Steven J. “Shepherds, Merchants, and Credit: Some Observations on Lending Practices in Ur III Mesopotamia.” *JESHO* 47, no. 1 (2004): 1–30.
- Reid, John Nicholas. *Slavery in Early Mesopotamia from Late Uruk until the Fall of Babylon in the Longue Durée*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Oxford, 2014.
- Richardson, Seth. “Walking Capital: The Economic Function and Social Location of Babylonian Servitude.” *Journal of Global Slavery* 4, no. 3 (2019): 285–342.
- . “The Origin of Foreign Slaves in the Late Old Babylonian Period.” *KASKAL* 17 (2020): 53–73.
- de Ridder, Jacob. J. “Slavery in Old Assyrian Documents.” In *Kültepe International Meetings, Vol. II: Movement, Resources, Interaction*, edited by F. Kulakoğlu and G. Barjamovic, 49–61. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017.
- Van Koppen, Frans, “The Geography of the Slave Trade and Northern Mesopotamia in the Late Old Babylonian Period.” In *Mesopotamian Dark Age Revisited*, edited by H. Hunger and R. Pruzsinszky, 9–33. Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Ancient Egyptian Slavery

Ella Karev 

“אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ, אֲשֶׁר הוֹצֵאתִיךָ מֵאֶרֶץ מִצְרַיִם מִבֵּית עַבְדִּים.”

I am the Lord your God, who has delivered you from the land of Egypt, the house of slaves.

Exodus 20:2

INTRODUCTION

Slavery in Ancient Egypt still exerts a powerful hold over imaginations today. Based on the Exodus narrative, the view of Egypt is often that of a “house of slaves,” a society founded on slave labor. And yet, Egyptian documentation reveals little about slaves and slavery, instead providing us with evidence of marginalized groups, prisoners of war, and ambiguous terminology that blurs the line between servant and slave.

The term “Ancient Egypt” suggests a static construction, but this picture is not entirely accurate. Over its three millennia of history, Egyptian society underwent significant changes: dynasties rose and fell, the kingdom was broken apart and reunified, foreign rulers dominated the landscape, and the fabric of society changed dramatically, including the nature of forced labor and

E. Karev (✉)

Department of Near Eastern Languages and Civilizations, University of Chicago,
Chicago, IL, USA

e-mail: ellak@uchicago.edu

slavery. And yet, there is some degree of ideological continuity, enforced by the Egyptians themselves. The idea of an enduring Egypt was important to Egyptian people, especially to the ruling elite; this is why, for example, Egyptian art appears to change little over time.¹ When foreign kings began to rule Egypt, this ideological and artistic continuity was used as a method of legitimization for their rule.

This chapter provides an overview of Egyptian slavery and bound labor in its varying forms throughout Egyptian history, following Marcel van der Linden's analysis of coerced labor as dissected into methods of entry, forms of extraction, and exit from slave status.² Each of these sections proceeds through the major phases of Egyptian history:³ the Old Kingdom (c. 2686–2160 BCE), the Middle Kingdom (c. 2055–1650 BCE), the New Kingdom (c. 1550–1069 BCE), the Saite and Persian Periods (664–332 BCE), and the Ptolemaic Period (332 BCE–30 BCE). The Old, Middle, and New Kingdoms are separated by so-called “Intermediate Periods” of unrest and division: the First Intermediate Period (c. 2160–2055 BCE), Second Intermediate Period (c. 1650–1550 BCE), and Third Intermediate Period (1069–664 BCE).

The broad nature of this overview comes with two caveats: first, the scope of such a work means that the methods of coerced labor and slavery in each period are only briefly described to provide a useful guide, though each historical period certainly warrants a full-length work of its own.⁴ The second caveat is related to the first; the concision of this chapter suggests continuity. However, it cannot be stressed enough that each period was socially and economically distinct from the others. This chapter serves as introduction to, and synopsis of, certain aspects of slavery and compulsory labor that existed throughout this broad timespan. However, this work makes no pretence to be comprehensive, and an updated study on Egyptian enslavement remains a *desideratum*.

There are two overarching considerations which remain the same throughout Egyptian history and are important to note. The first relates to our sources of information: unlike Mesopotamia, for most of Egyptian history there is no preserved codification of laws;⁵ all observations about slavery must therefore be gleaned from documentary and literary texts. Especially for the former, quantity and quality vary considerably over time. Additionally, documentary texts are focused on single cases or events, and so any conclusions drawn from them—unless these events are repeated—need to be taken in stride.

Second, and particularly relevant to slavery studies, is the fact that until the Ptolemaic period, there is virtually no evidence for *large-scale* Egyptian slavery,⁶ agricultural or otherwise. Slavery was small-scale and mostly involved domestic labor, though other kinds of labor are attested; this was not the industrial agricultural slavery evidenced in the American South or Republican Rome. Even in the few forms of large-scale coerced labor attested in Egypt, it can be difficult to determine whether the subjects were indeed enslaved or not.

Some notes on ambiguity and terminology are also in order. Until the Ptolemaic period and the incursion of Hellenistic forms of slavery, there was little clear-cut distinction between slaves and other coerced laborers in Egypt. Seemingly free people could be abducted and coerced into labor by the state and punished if they attempted to flee; conversely, seemingly unfree people who had been sold as property could hold rights we would not expect from slaves such as owning property, testifying in court, and negotiating the terms of their enslavement. Therefore, a work on slaves in Egypt needs to be discussed within the broader context of coerced labor, as the lines between “slave” and “coerced laborer” were often blurred. For instance, we cannot say for certain whether women in Deir el-Medina whose labor was bought and sold were owned in any real sense—either by the state and then assigned as property to the workmen at Deir el-Medina, or privately—or whether they functioned as servants who were ultimately paid for their labor; the past does not provide enough information. This blurred distinction partially stems from imprecision in terminology referring to slaves; this imprecision is simply a part of Egyptian society. Unlike the modern world, in which there is a close connection between the exactitude of economic terminology and law, throughout most of Egyptian history a precise translation of terms related to slavery, servitude, and forced labor is not always possible.

For example, the word *hem* (*hm*) could be translated as “servant” or “slave,” and appears in the dictionary with both of these possible meanings.⁷ The word itself has a number of uses, and could variously refer to: a priest; the subject of a king; an agricultural worker for the state who may or may not have been enslaved; a prisoner of war; a trusted housemate; or the object of a small-scale slave sale. While these are all clearly positions of subordination, the inclusion of the same term in these different contexts would seem to suggest that these positions are identical, when they are not. Indeed, terminology is so often so inexact and its context so unclear that deciding whether to label certain individuals as “slave” or “servant” is usually the decision of a translator.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW

| <i>Period name</i> | <i>Date (BCE)</i> ⁸ |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Old Kingdom | c. 2181–2025 |
| First Intermediate Period | c. 2160–2055 |
| Middle Kingdom | c. 2055–1773 |
| Second Intermediate Period | c. 1773–1550 |
| New Kingdom | c. 1550–1069 |
| Third Intermediate Period | c. 1069–664 |
| Saite and Persian Periods | 664–332 |
| Ptolemaic Period | 332–30 |

Before delving into the nature of slavery and bound labor, it is useful to begin with a broad historical overview of the main periods under analysis here. Egyptian history does not begin in the Old Kingdom, but rather in the period known as the Early Dynastic (c. 3000–2686 BCE), which covers the 1st and 2nd Dynasties. However, there is limited written evidence from this period, and most transactions were probably conducted orally, so little is known about slavery or bound labor practices before the Old Kingdom. The Old Kingdom formed the basis of Egyptian iconography, religion, and culture; the great pyramids at Giza were built for Old Kingdom pharaohs.

The First Intermediate Period (2181–2025 BCE)—so-named because it was the first of the three transitional periods between kingdoms—saw the monarchy split into two competing branches. The reunification of Egypt after nearly a century of conflict marked the end of the First Intermediate Period and the beginning of the Middle Kingdom. The political division of the First Intermediate Period ended with the unification of Egypt under the 12th Dynasty pharaoh Nebhepetre Mentuhotep II. The Middle Kingdom (2055–1773 BCE), was marked by internal stability and prosperity, but declined after a period of dynastic chaos. This decline, combined with the invasion of northern Egypt by the Hyksos from the Levant, began the Second Intermediate Period (1773–1550 BCE).

The Hyksos were defeated and Egypt reunified under the pharaoh Ahmose I, beginning the New Kingdom. The New Kingdom was stable excepting the rule of Akhenaten, who instituted religious reform and moved the royal city to El-Amarna, later abandoned after his reign. The New Kingdom ushered in a period of political stability and imperialist expansion. Military campaigns of the period extended Egypt's influence in the Near East, expanding the borders from modern-day Syria to the very edge of Nubia, in modern-day Sudan. This expansion brought extraordinary wealth into Egypt and an influx of foreign enslaved persons as prisoners of war, booty of conquests, and incursions into existing slave markets.

The first millennium BCE in Egypt was marked by shifts in the ruling elite of Egypt, including periods of foreign dominion. The wealth and expansion of the New Kingdom was followed by the upheaval of the Third Intermediate Period (c. 1069–850 BCE) and the Persian invasion of Egypt in 525 BCE. Persian dominion lasted until 332 BCE, with a brief period of native Egyptian rulers (404–343 BCE). The Persians ruled Egypt from afar with the aid of provincial governors known as satraps. The constant changes in rule and state fragmentation undoubtedly led to changes in labor practices and, indeed, slavery. However, the period provides precious little documentation with regard to slavery, with only a few isolated cases.

Persian domination over Egypt ended with Alexander the Great's expansion and subsequent conquering of the territory in 332 BCE. After his death in 323, his empire was divided among his generals, with Ptolemy taking Egypt. Ptolemy initially ruled as an extension of the heirs of Alexander, but ultimately declared himself king in 305 BCE, founding the eponymous Ptolemaic

Dynasty. The Ptolemaic Dynasty ruled from the royal city of Alexandria for three centuries, until the Roman conquest in 30 BCE.

Although Ptolemaic Egypt retained much of traditional Egyptian culture, the culture of the Ptolemaic period was heavily influenced by Hellenism, including its labor practices and approach to slavery. The Ptolemies also introduced Greek as the administrative language of Egypt, which continued well into Roman dominion. Slavery is well-attested in the Ptolemaic period of Egypt, and papyrological sources on slavery are published as a collection in the *Corpus der Ptolemäischen Sklaventexte*.⁹

ENTRY INTO ENSLAVEMENT

In his classification of coerced labor, Marcel van der Linden listed ten reasons for entering a coerced labor relationship, of which the following seven are relevant for Egyptian coerced labor: sale (between individuals or institutions); hiring out or leasing of owned persons; self-sale; birth to an enslaved woman; abduction; debt bondage; and taxation (levied in the form of labor). Though all are attested, the incidence of these reasons differ over time, as summarized in the following table, with an X indicating attestation. This table should also be considered in the context of the varying availability of sources; the Old Kingdom and the Saite and Persian periods, with fewer sources, are likely to evidence fewer methods of entry, but that does not necessarily mean that these methods did not exist, only that they are undocumented.

| | <i>Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period</i> | <i>Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period</i> | <i>New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period</i> | <i>Saite and Persian Periods</i> | <i>Ptolemaic Period</i> |
|-----------|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Abduction | × | × | × | × | × |
| Taxation | × | × | × | | |
| Sale | | | × | × | × |
| Hiring | | | × | | × |
| Self-sale | | | | × | |
| Birth | | | × | × | × |
| Debt | | | | | × |

These methods of entry differed not just in their incidence, but also in their manifestation. For example, abduction in the Middle Kingdom took the form of prisoners of war from Nubia and Libya drafted into the military; in contrast, abduction in the Ptolemaic Period included native Egyptians enslaved as punishment for their participation in rebellion.

Abduction

Throughout Egyptian history, the best-attested method of entry into enslaved status was through abduction as a prisoner of war. This is not to say that it was the most common method, but simply the one for which there is the most evidence, partially because the capture of prisoners of war was ideologically important to the Egyptians as a mark of strength in the region. Autobiographies boasted of capture of enemies, and scenes of “smiting the enemy”¹⁰ and leading away chained Nubians and Libyans became a mainstay in Egyptian art even when Nubians and Libyans were no longer enemies of the state.

In the Old Kingdom, prisoners of war (*skrw-rnh*, “bound for life”) included male Nubians and Libyans.¹¹ Old Kingdom expeditions into Nubia are particularly well-attested in personal autobiographies of military officials¹² which boast their capture and enslavement of thousands of captives, both men and women. Native Egyptians could also be abducted into labor, though it seems that this practice was frowned upon; two autobiographies of officials list among their accomplishments that they had never forced Egyptians into servitude (*bsk*), with one of these officials specifying that he had never forced any daughters into enslavement.¹³

Conscription of prisoners of war into the military continued into the Middle Kingdom, in which Nubian¹⁴ and Levantine troops were conscripted in order to accompany Egyptian troops on quarrying expeditions as armed support.¹⁵ Women and children were also captured and enslaved *en masse*: P. Brooklyn 35.1446¹⁶ lists among its eighty laborers forty-five “Asiatics” along with eight “Asiatic” children. These were presumably captured in the Levant, part of the Middle Kingdom expansion into that area.¹⁷

The New Kingdom experienced greater imperial Egyptian expansion into the Levant, with the result that there are more records of people entering enslavement through capture during wartime. The autobiography of General Ahmose¹⁸ evidences how he “brought away” two enslaved women (*hmmwt*) as booty (*hsk*) from his conquests in the Levant. As part of his retirement gift of land and gold, he was gifted nineteen more slaves, some of whom bore foreign names and originated from similar campaigns. The stela of Usertat, the viceroy of Kush, lists among the achievements of the king that he possesses a “female slave from Babylon, a female slave from Byblos, a little girl of Alalakh, and an old woman of Arrapkha.”¹⁹

Tutankhamun’s Restoration Stela, written after the upheaval of his father Akhenaten’s reign, mentions among his accomplishments that he had filled the workhouses of his officials and priests with men and women, brought as booty and entered into slave status. Papyrus Harris I, a New Kingdom administrative document,²⁰ includes a historical section that details the king’s capture of persons in military campaigns in Nubia, Libya, and the Levant:

I brought back in great numbers those that my sword has spared, with their hands tied behind their backs before my horses, and their wives and children in

tens of thousands [...] I imprisoned their leaders in fortresses bearing my name, and I added to them chief archers and tribal chiefs, branded and enslaved, with the cartouche of my name, their wives and children being treated in the same way. (P. Harris I, 77.4–6)

Enslaved persons who entered their status as prisoners of war in the New Kingdom were branded upon the right shoulder, as attested on a relief at Medinet Habu. Branding continued into the Late Period, in which the practice is applied to all enslaved persons.²¹

After the end of the New Kingdom and the upheaval of the Third Intermediate Period, Egypt no longer had the military presence in the Levant nor the centralized state that would provide for such huge influxes of foreign labor. However, the Kushite kings of the Late Period (c. 800 BCE) led campaigns into what is now Gaza, capturing men who appear sporadically in the textual record as “Men of the North.”²² The Persian satrap Arshames, residing in Egypt in the fifth century BCE, records in his letters the importation of a number of foreign slaves, including Cilicians and Iranians²³; the former were likely captured as part of Persia’s expansion into Anatolia.

In the Ptolemaic period, capture in war remained a common source of slaves, though it is interesting to note that not all captured persons became enslaved; some of the prisoners of war from the ongoing conflicts in Syria ended up as free settlers in the Fayum.²⁴ Prisoners of war who were captured for the purpose of enslavement had to be registered with the state (along with a 20 drachma payment, C. Ptol. Sklav.4.4–16). Failure to do so would result in the confiscation of the enslaved person by the state (C. Ptol. Sklav. 3). This method of entry into enslavement was not limited to foreign prisoners; in 198 BCE, a royal decree was issued stating that Egyptians who took part in rebellious unrest would then be enslaved (C. Ptol. Sklav. 9; 88).

Taxation

It is important to note at this juncture that although taxation levied in the form of labor was a reason for entering a (possibly coerced) labor force in Egypt, this does not necessarily mean that this labor could be defined as enslavement in modern terminology. The aforementioned ambiguity of terminology means that it is difficult to tell whether the people performing this labor were coerced into doing so or not.²⁵

Taxation through labor, usually referred to as “corvée” in Egyptology, first appears in the Old Kingdom, though the evidence is sparse and mostly indirect. The most detailed information about the corvée actually comes from the so-called “Exemption Decrees”²⁶ of the Old Kingdom, which delineate the people who are *not* eligible for corvée labor. Corvée recruitment of eligible persons happened on a scheduled day (or series of days) known as “Day of Corvée Recruitment (*štp m nḏwt-ḥ*).” Officials responsible for raising the corvée workforce were apparently tasked with a quota; a graffito from

Wadi Hammamat evidences a military official who, knowing that the day was coming, sets out to recruit 4350 persons to labor by the order of the king. Recruitment was likely based on registration; a 4th Dynasty Gebelein Papyrus,²⁷ for example, preserves a list of men and women recruited for temple construction. The class of laborers who performed the corvée as well as agricultural labor²⁸ were known as “*merit (mit)*.” The meaning of the class is unclear beyond the fact that they are subject to labor.

In the Middle Kingdom, taxation in the form of labor is attested, as well as punishment for attempting to avoid such labor. P. Brooklyn 35.1446 includes a list of Egyptians who attempted to avoid their obligatory labor and as a result are now imprisoned in a building termed “The Great Enclosure (*hrrt-r3*).”²⁹ The “Great Enclosure” of this papyrus was not the only one.³⁰ In addition, records from Lahun evidence that in the event that a person neglecting their state duties could not be found, the state could also seize a replacement, usually a family member, and usually determined by sex (i.e., a father replaced his son, a mother replaced her daughter).³¹ Another Middle Kingdom papyrus, P. Reisner I,³² includes a list of women who have been “drawn (*sd*)” from the town for the purposes of weaving and housed in the “Enclosure.” Fragments of official papers from the temple of Senwosret near Illahun include letters that indicate that the authorities of the town could, at will, take a female singer and a child from the “Enclosure” for the purpose of state works.³³

There is considerably less evidence for taxation as labor in the New Kingdom, but there is evidence that free people were requisitioned alongside slave laborers for state projects. The Horemheb Decree³⁴ warns against such a requisitioning by officials, who perhaps did so under the pretense of official state business. The same decree states that officials who seize other kinds of property will be imprisoned in the fortress of Sile, though it is not specified whether these convicts are then impressed into labor or the military.³⁵ From the Saite and Persian period, taxes were collected by temple officials, in cash or kind.³⁶

Sale

Sales of slaves are only attested from the New Kingdom onward, but it is important to note that this does not indicate that sales did not occur before the New Kingdom; rather, it is likely that sales of slaves were oral and left behind no written record.³⁷ New Kingdom sales were likely small-scale—there is no evidence of anything akin to a slave market—and took part between individuals, though public ownership did occur. One of these private small-scale sales is evidenced in P. Cairo 65739,³⁸ in which a Syrian girl (very likely the result of capture abroad) has been sold and re-named,³⁹ the sale itself was not documented in writing, and the transaction is recorded only as part of the judicial record of a dispute over the payment.

Enslaved persons could, by petition, transfer their ownership from private to public. A petition from the Second Intermediate Period (P. Berlin 10470)⁴⁰ evidences a slave woman named Senbet who is owned by both the people of the town of Elephantine and by a man named Hebsy. The text approves the petition of transferring Senbet to public ownership—“giving her to the city”⁴¹—but the text is elusive on whether this new status grants Senbet freedom⁴² or citizenship.⁴³ This private ownership could be contested and then settled in court.⁴⁴

In the Third Intermediate Period, slaves are sold in a larger capacity as part of an itemized list of land and commodities given to the king.⁴⁵ These slaves are sold at scale (5–30 people at a time) and are unnamed in the transaction. The Saite and Persian Periods continue the New Kingdom trend of small-scale slave sales⁴⁶ between individuals, but integrate a statement from the slave sold, perhaps influenced by the self-sales into enslavement from the same period.⁴⁷

Sales of slaves are only sporadically attested in the Saite and Persian Periods. In the Ptolemaic period, however, slave sales proliferate and are written exclusively in Greek, which may be the result of an otherwise unattested decree. These sales are usually direct (i.e., the seller and buyer know one another), but sometimes include an intermediary who will deliver the slave to their owner (e.g., Zaidelos of Idumea, who appears in P. Cair. Zen. 3.59374). There is also evidence of slave auctions, in which the state was involved and collected a fee for each bid and counterbid.⁴⁸ Although there is no evidence of a slave market per se, the involvement of an intermediary and the possibility for auction suggests the development of a system designed to buy, sell, and deliver slaves.

Hiring

The New Kingdom provides the most sources for the hiring of slaves. The workmen’s community at Deir el-Medina included female domestic servants, who were assigned to certain households on certain days known as “days of labor (*hrw bskw*)” which could then be bought, sold, inherited, and traded between free villagers (e.g., O. Gardiner. 123, a sale of 480 days of service; O. Gardiner. 90, a bequeathment of days of service from a father to his son). However, it is somewhat unclear whether these women were owned in any real sense—either by the state and then assigned as property to the workmen at Deir el-Medina, or privately—or whether they functioned as servants who were ultimately paid for their labor.⁴⁹ Other slave women were also hired out. Three papyri of the New Kingdom reference the purchase or leasing of slave women for periods between two and seventeen days.⁵⁰ These hired women could pursue legal action if they were abused during their hiring period.⁵¹

The Saite and Persian Periods offer scant evidence of hiring. There are some texts which could potentially refer to a leasing arrangement,⁵² but the evidence is inconclusive. In the Ptolemaic Period, slaves with specialized skills were often rented out for their labor. For instance, enslaved women could also function as wet-nurses for a contracted period of time, for which their owner

would receive additional payment.⁵³ Interestingly, these contracts can involve the nursing of a child who is himself a slave, a child borne between a slave and the owner—and yet the slave who bore the child cannot nurse her own child.

Self-Sale

Self-sale is attested only in the Saite and Persian Periods, and even so, it is poorly attested: a mere four documents evidence self-sale,⁵⁴ three of them belonging to the same individual who has sold himself to a new owner. These self-sales are identical formulaically to sales of other commodities, with the only difference being that the contracting party is also the object of the sale. These have often been thought to represent debt bondage, though this is likely not the case (see below, *Debt Bondage*).

Birth

In the Middle Kingdom, the hereditary nature of enslavement is implied by the inclusion of children with their mothers in lists of slaves.⁵⁵ The first direct evidence that the children of slaves were also enslaved comes from the New Kingdom, and it seems that the sale of enslaved children was discouraged until they reached a certain age. In the archive of Ahmose son of Peniati,⁵⁶ a man requests that a female slave of his is returned after her mother complained:

Why is it that the female slave who was with me has been taken away to be given to someone else? [...] Let payment for her be accepted for her to be with me, because she is only a child and unable to work [...] her mother has written to me, saying: ‘it is you who has allowed my daughter to be taken away [...]’.

In the New Kingdom, it is unknown if these children were born to two enslaved parents or if only the mother was enslaved; however, impregnating a slave of the household was considered to be an undesirable act. In his tomb, a man portraying himself as a model son proudly states among his accomplishments: “I did not know a slave-woman of [my father’s] house; I did not impregnate a slave.”⁵⁷

The self-sales of the Saite and Persian Periods include current and future children in the transaction, even when it is the father who is selling himself, suggesting that slave status could be passed on not just from the mother, at least in the Egyptian record. The fifth-century archives of the Jewish community at Elephantine evidences six people born to slave mothers, all of whom appear to have inherited their slave status from their mother.⁵⁸

In the Ptolemaic period, inherited slavery through birth was well-known and even administered by the state. Children born to slave women were referred to as “house-bred (οἰκοτροφῆν)” or “house-born (οἰκογενή).”⁵⁹ These house-born slaves would have to be registered with the state for the purposes of taxation.⁶⁰

Debt Bondage

Debt bondage appears to not have been a method of entry into slavery in Egypt before the Ptolemaic period, but is often cited as such,⁶¹ and warrants some discussion. A distinction should be made between self-sale as a satisfaction of debt versus transfer of title following seizure, as the two are often confused.⁶² Putting up collateral in the form of the debtor's own person could lead to a form of conditional enslavement in which he is seized until the debt is repaid, but self-sale is a different mechanism in that the transaction in itself satisfies the debt.⁶³ It is also, by this nature, more final than self-seizure; in order to exit enslavement, a person who has sold themselves would then need to pay the debt through self-purchase.⁶⁴

Slaves, as well as free women and children, could be pledged as collateral against loans from the First Intermediate Period onward. The question remains as to what could *actually* happen if the debtor defaulted on his debt. With slaves, it is relatively certain that they would simply be transferred into the new owner's possession, perhaps even without a written transfer of title.⁶⁵ But what would happen to the children? Would they become the creditor's slaves,⁶⁶ and thereby enter the status of enslavement through seizure? Hypothetically, yes; however, the evidence suggests that this rarely happened in practice, and there is only one extant case of a man's seizure following his father's failure to return loaned copper tools. It is unclear if he actually did any work during the time of their bondage, or if he simply served as collateral. Either way, he was freed when the tools were returned.

There are four instances of self-sale into slavery dating to the Saite and Persian periods, and it has been suggested that these were intended to satisfy a debt, contrasting the classical account of Diodorus Siculus which states that debt-slavery had been outlawed.⁶⁷ This classical evidence has been shown to be unreliable,⁶⁸ but even still: whether as a result of systematic law reform or not, the four self-sale documents do not seem to refer to a debt of any kind and more likely represent self-sale in exchange for protection. Only in the Ptolemaic Period is there direct evidence for debt bondage:⁶⁹ a papyrus recording sale tax on slave sales records a list of persons who have become enslaved as a result of a debt.⁷⁰ By the Late Ptolemaic Period, however, this practice had been replaced by imprisonment.⁷¹

EXTRACTION OF LABOR

Once an employer (or owner) has a laborer at his disposal, he must somehow induce the laborer to actually work. But how? Marcel van der Linden approached this question from the viewpoint that no one individual can be forced to work through physical compulsion alone; rather, physical compulsion is only one of the three factors which motivate a worker to work. These three factors are compensation (i.e., wages), conditional force (i.e., punishment), and commitment (e.g., loyalty).⁷² As with the entry into enslaved status,

the following table summarizes the incidence of various factors motivating a laborer to work, with an X indicating attestation.

| | <i>Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period</i> | <i>Middle Kingdom and Second Intermediate Period</i> | <i>New Kingdom and Third Intermediate Period</i> | <i>Saite and Persian Periods</i> | <i>Ptolemaic Period</i> |
|----------------------|--|--|--|--|-----------------------------|
| Indirect wages | × | × | × | × | × |
| Conditional force | × | × | × | × | × |
| Commitment | | | | × | × |

The issue here is not determining whether these factors were existent in Egyptian slavery—as they likely were—but that only one generally warranted written documentation and therefore is directly evidenced: conditional force. The written documentation reflects corporal punishment, imprisonment, and expulsion, but speaks little to the motivation behind the reasons *why* a coerced laborer has chosen to work beyond the fear of retribution if they do not.

Nevertheless, there is some implicit evidence of the other motivators. Indirect wages in the form of housing and protection (from practical fears such as starvation or theoretical evils) was a feature of Egyptian systems of patronage: a slave knew that an owner was obligated to provide protection, and this obligation was referenced in self-sale into temple slavery. Commitment, the most difficult of the three to delineate with regard to ancient labor is implied in some Saite and Persian Period contracts.

Indirect Wages

Although wages appear to be irrelevant to slave labor, “compensation” also includes “indirect wages,” such as housing, food, and social perks. This was likely the premier motivation behind working as an enslaved laborer, and perhaps even entry into enslavement: in return for labor and freedom, an enslaved person received the obligation of their owner to protect them from debt and poverty as well as serve as their advocate. In other words, slaves were compensated in protection, both practical (e.g., food to eat, a roof to live under) and social (e.g., literacy, the payment of a dowry, or the social connections to have a complaint heard in a court of law).

It is assumed that coerced laborers were accommodated with a space to live in the Old Kingdom.⁷³ Direct evidence of (domestic) slaves sharing dwelling space with their owners only comes in the Middle Kingdom papyri of the landlord Heqanakht, who expels a slave of his from his home following her bad behavior (see below, *Conditional Force*). Entering a household carried not just the practical benefit of a roof over one’s head, but also entry into the

basic unit of social organization.⁷⁴ Some slaves also learned marketable skills from their owners, like writing.⁷⁵

In the New Kingdom, institutional slavery provided slaves with a living space and protected them from seizure for other types of labor, including state-imposed taxation through labor. The Nauri Decree of Seti I (c. 1300 BCE),⁷⁶ a protective decree of the personnel and lands attached to Seti's temple of Osiris at Abydos, warns against the "taking" of any of the personnel away from temple grounds with the intent of employing them in other kinds agricultural labor, whether by seizure, contract labor, or *corvée*. Entry into enslavement was also a form of protection for those with no family ties or connections, such as abandoned or orphaned children. A passage in P. Harris I,⁷⁷ explaining the origins of a priestly order, records the gathering of "children that had been scattered in the service of others" and their pledge to serve the god Ptah, guaranteeing them a home and a profession.

In the Saite and Persian periods, there is contractual evidence that a slave-owner paid the dowry of his female slave when she married a free man.⁷⁸ This period also provides evidence that a slave could negotiate (or perhaps renegotiate) the rations given to him by his owner: in P. Rylands 7, a self-sold slave requests more grain as compensation for himself and his family. Especially in the Saite and Persian periods, entering a subordinate relationship with a superior also involved social protection in the form of access to justice. The wealthy and socially connected had the upper hand in court: they were more likely to receive a favorable hearing, and could use their influence to obstruct the complaints of the less-influential.⁷⁹ Non-elites, then, traded subordinate status in exchange for a voice in court.

The same terminology used for human patronage and protection was employed in Persian-period letters to divinities, requesting protection from legal threats and physical abuse in exchange for subordinate status. The word used to indicate this subordinate status, *bak* (*b3k*), is the same one used for slaves from the New Kingdom onward. In the Ptolemaic Period, at least 37 Demotic documents evidence petitions to the god, with a supplicant dedicating him/herself—along with a payment of money—to become a "slave"⁸⁰ to the god for 99 years in exchange for protection from natural (and supernatural) threats.⁸¹

Conditional Force

Evidence from the Middle Kingdom shows that conditional force in the form of imprisonment, corporal punishment, expulsion, or even death was likely a motivating factor in labor extraction. Letters from Illahun attest to the attempted escape and recapture of a slave, a man named Sobkemhab, who is then housed in an Enclosure for his hearing and ultimately put to death for his crime (P. Kahun 34). The punishment for not appearing for coerced labor was, as noted above, seizure of a substitute; but if a substitute could not be found, a person was sentenced to coerced labor for life, a status passed on

to children.⁸² This is the case of one fugitive conscript laborer, Mentuhotep son of Sabes, who is ordered by the court to be “given to the ploughlands together with his people (i.e., his family) forever.”⁸³

Household slaves could also seemingly be expelled from their homes as a punitive measure. The private letters of the landowner Heqanakht attest to his dismissal of a female slave named Senen for her bad behavior,⁸⁴ instructing his family to not even let her spend a single night in the house. Bad behavior of slaves could also be punished corporally. In the literary tale recorded on the Westcar Papyrus,⁸⁵ a slave argues with her owner and receives a corporal beating both from her owner, and, after she flees, from her own brother as additional punishment.

From the New Kingdom until the Ptolemaic Period, conditional force may have been relevant only insofar as the invocation of criminal law, and was not specific to slaves. A New Kingdom judicial papyrus⁸⁶ records an interaction between a slave and a gang of tomb robbers who asked him to participate in criminal activity. His response—“am I, who came from Syria, one to be sent to Kush?”⁸⁷—invokes a punishment also faced by his co-conspirators. At Deir el-Medina, a slave and a necropolis worker, both thieves, are punished identically for their crimes.⁸⁸

In the Saite and Persian periods, Aramaic sources record that slaves would be liable to punishment if they stole goods,⁸⁹ and that this punishment was likely corporal.⁹⁰ But there is little evidence for specific slave-related crime, like escape; when the self-sold slave woman of Louvre E706 alludes to escape (see below, *Exit*), she does not mention any punishment beyond recapture. If the motivation to labor lay in protection, then expulsion may have served as a conditional threat.

In the Ptolemaic Period, conditional force took the form of detainment, especially as punishment for flight⁹¹ or bad behavior.⁹² This is generally in line with punishment in Ptolemaic Egypt, during which a broad array of offenses could lead to detainment.⁹³ Certain offenses—though the record is vague on what they could be—could also result in corporal punishment, branding, and deportation.⁹⁴ While penalties differed for slaves and free men,⁹⁵ there is once again little evidence for specific slave-related crime such as escape.

Commitment

In the Saite and Persian Periods, the statement of commitment by the slave in Demotic and Abnormal Hieratic sources (sales and self-sales) suggests a level of personal loyalty, at the very least to a contractual relationship. This level of personal loyalty may have been a factor before, but simply left unspoken, unwritten, or both. These statements of commitment include a promise: “I am your slave, forever (*šr dt*).” In other words, the workers are motivated to work by their own oath to do so—sometimes, as in the case of the Demotic Louvre E706, as reflected by an actual oath to Amun.⁹⁶

EXIT FROM ENSLAVEMENT

According to van der Linden, a person can terminate a coerced labor relationship on the basis of seven variables, divided into two categories: physical compulsion (i.e., forced to leave or forced to stay); and constrained choice (can leave, but chooses not to).⁹⁷ Some of these methods of exit are not germane to Late Period Egypt. Methods such as “unconditional exit” would not warrant a contract of any sort in the Egyptian legal tradition, and therefore we have no way of knowing if such a practice existed; “exit forced by another power” (as an example, van der Linden cites the British abolition of slavery) are similarly not applicable.

Of van der Linden’s seven methods of exit, only three are pertinent to Egyptian slavery: exit despite impediment (i.e., escape), though the evidence is minimal; conditional exit (i.e., marriage, adoption, and manumission, the latter of which listed obligations of its manumitted party); and death, which is the final and irrevocable termination of a labor relationship.

Escape

There is virtually no documentary evidence of escaped slaves in Egypt before the Ptolemaic Period. This is not to say that slaves did not escape, but only that evidence of their escape or their pursuit have rarely been preserved. One such piece of evidence is from the New Kingdom, a letter recording the pursuit of two slaves who had escaped from the palace and fled into the desert.⁹⁸ They are pursued at top speed⁹⁹ by a troop commander, suggesting the urgency of his mission. It is not known if these slaves were particularly important—prompting their pursuit and its recording—or if this was standard procedure.

In the Persian Period, the self-sold woman of Louvre E706 hints at the possibility of recapture after escape, suggesting that her new owner may take her if he finds her in another house: “I am your slave [...] you are entitled to me (lit. behind me) in any house in which you will find me.” The more conclusive Persian-period evidence is from the Arsames archive: a letter dated to the middle of the fifth century BCE (TADA6.3) records an official complaint filed by a man named Psamshek. In it, he requests for Arsames to punish eight slaves—belonging to Psamshek’s father—who he claims have taken his property and fled. Psamshek is apparently intending to recapture these slaves though he does not indicate how; his request is that, when Psamshek brings the (re-captured) men to the official Artavanta, that Artavanta will punish them as Psamshek sees fit.

In the Ptolemaic Period, slaves regularly escaped, as evidenced in notices advertising their escape, calling upon authorities to assist in the recovery of “lost property”¹⁰⁰ as well as letters regarding their recapture.¹⁰¹ It is unclear how successful enslaved persons were in escaping, but they often took valuable items with them,¹⁰² or even the mortgage on a house¹⁰³ to start a new life.

As evidenced by letters¹⁰⁴ and trial records, some freed persons helped these fugitive slaves in their flight and risked trial to do so.¹⁰⁵

Conditional Exit

A conditional exit from coerced labor is one in which a worker has to meet obligations before being allowed to leave. van der Linden cites indentured laborers as an example, as they had to first complete the duration of their labor. In Egypt, conditional exit manifested in marriage to a specific person (perhaps someone who would be difficult to marry off otherwise) as well as adoption and manumission (both of which obligated a newly freed person to “act as a son”).

In the New Kingdom, though it is unclear if marriage provided an exit from slavery in itself, it was seemingly possible to exit enslavement by meeting the conditions of a specific marriage, a *quid pro quo* between the owner and the slave. This was the case in an inscription evidencing a slave named Sabastet who had been captured in battle (“taken prisoner with my own arm when I accompanied the king”). Sabastet agreed to marry his owner’s blind niece in exchange for the right to “leave the house.”¹⁰⁶

Adoption and contractual manumission are near-identical methods of exit from slavery from the New Kingdom to the Ptolemaic Period. There is only one extant manumission contract, and much like adoption, it obligates its subjects to act as children to their ex-owner. A New Kingdom adoption papyrus (P. Ashmolean Museum 1945.96) details how the children of an enslaved woman are adopted by her married owners, and her daughter is married to the owner’s brother. The condition for their manumission is the adoption, which is intended to reorganise the hierarchy of inheritance within the family.¹⁰⁷

Adoption in the Saite and Persian Periods also obligated the manumitted parties to act as children in exchange for their freedom.¹⁰⁸ In the case of a male child, this meant both perpetuation of the family line as well as upholding the religious responsibilities of an eldest son, including presenting the necessary funerary offerings after a parent dies.¹⁰⁹ The one surviving pre-Ptolemaic manumission contract¹¹⁰ evidences a near-identical condition: in exchange for manumission, the two freed slaves promise to take care of their “father” in his old age, or be liable for a heavy monetary penalty.

In the Ptolemaic period, manumission through contract occurred more frequently,¹¹¹ but evidence is still limited; though only six of these contracts are attested (C. Ptol. Sklav. 28–34), and the appearance of freed slaves (i.e., post-manumission) is rare.¹¹² Manumission was usually embedded into wills, and came with two conditions: first, that the owner had died; and second, that the slaves had stayed with their owner “as faithful servants” as long as the owner lived.¹¹³ Once freed, however, the slaves had no obligations to their previous owner, unlike the adoption/manumission contracts of earlier periods.

CONCLUSIONS

The methods of entry into, exit from, and extraction of enslaved labor differ substantially throughout the history of Egypt from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic Period. As the state underwent significant societal and economic changes, so too did the approach to enslavement and coerced labor.

Despite these considerable variations in slave labor, there is one ideological constant in Egyptian slavery: the desire for protection, at the cost of subordination. In all of the periods in which slavery is attested, patronage and protection are held in high regard in Egyptian society, whether this protection originates from the gods, the king, high officials, or simply another person who can provide a degree of protection. This ideology is apparent in teachings and wisdom texts from the Old Kingdom to the Ptolemaic Period: instructions urge to seek out “a strong superior”¹¹⁴ when one has been injured and warn against taking a superior to “without protection.”¹¹⁵

In return, superiors were morally obligated to take care of their dependents, whether these dependents were their own children or other members of their household—including slaves—from illness, lawsuits, and illegal seizure.¹¹⁶ To be dependent and protected, then, was preferable to being independent and unprotected, even if it meant becoming a slave. Entering the status of slavery meant entering a household or an institution, albeit at a lower social stratum, but in return gave the enslaved person practical protection from debt and starvation as well as social protection through a connection to a high-status individual. Thus, we see an overlap between the vocabulary of slavery and other forms of voluntary subordination for which a person would receive protection, such as adoption, pleas to a god for patronage, or a fulfilling of responsibility to the state in exchange for protection by the king.

This aspect of slavery in Egypt throws a wrench in a wholesale acceptance of Orlando Patterson’s “social death” theory¹¹⁷; through protection and patronage, slavery often offered its participants an entry into the protective fold of society, rather than “killing” them through social alienation. Indeed, it can be argued that the more socially alienated persons were those who were not enslaved, but lay outside the norms of Egyptian society and therefore lacked protection: unclaimed orphans, vagrants, criminals, and foreigners. These people would have to seek out some way of entering the social fabric, including slavery, to find the protection they needed to function as members of society. This is not to say that Egyptian slavery was an institution with humane intentions; even at its best—a reciprocal relationship exchanging labor for protection—it still involved the commodification of human bodies, and the crucial point is that these were not mutually exclusive concepts. This contextualization of slavery within Egyptian social and legal mores requires us to recognize both the exploitation inherent to slavery and human commodification as well as the Egyptians’ justification for it through language of patronage and protection. A recognition of these social facts as co-existent in Egyptian thought points to a critical paradox, hardly unique for cultures with slavery:

an awareness of moral goods along with inequalities which could never be satisfactorily resolved.

NOTES

1. Egyptian art certainly changes over time, but the degree of change is small enough that we can speak of a relatively uniform and recognizable “character” of Egyptian art. See H. Schäfer, *Principles of Egyptian Art*, trans. John Baines (Oxford: Griffith Institute, 1974), 14–36.
2. M. van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labor,” in *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, eds. Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 293–322.
3. Unless otherwise noted, all dates are according to I. Shaw, ed., *The Oxford History of Ancient Egypt* (Oxford; New York: Oxford University Press, 2003). References to primary sources differ by language. For Greek sources, references follow the Checklist of Editions, found online at <https://papyri.info/docs/checklist>; references for sources in Egyptian follow their museum catalogue number (e.g., P. Brooklyn = papyrus housed in the Brooklyn Museum); references in Aramaic refer to their placement in the four-volume publication by B. Porten and A. Yardeni, *Textbook of Aramaic Documents from Ancient Egypt* (Jerusalem: Hebrew University Department of the History of the Jewish People, 1986). Each volume is assigned a letter value (1986 = TADA; 1989 = TADB; 1993 = TADC; 1999 = TADD).
4. One needs only to consider that the edited volume on labor in the ancient Near East—M. Powell, ed., *Labor in the Ancient Near East* (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987)—included three essays on Egypt, covering nearly 210 pages.
5. This statement excludes the Codex Hermopolis, a set of laws dated to the Late Period but written in the Ptolemaic Period; for the majority of Egyptian history, no such source appears to have existed. For the Codex Hermopolis, see K. Donker van Heel, ed., *The Legal Manual of Hermopolis: (P. Mattha); Text and Translation* (Leiden: Papyrologisch Instituut, 1991).
6. Despite the quote opening this chapter, this includes any reference to the Exodus narrative; though there is evidence for enslaved persons originating from the Levant mainstream scholarship largely rejects the narrative as historical truth. The literature is too massive to cite here, but some resources include D. Redford, “Exodus 1.11,” *Vetus Testamentum* 13 (1963): 401–18; D. Redford, “An Egyptological Perspective on the Exodus Narratives,” in *Egypt, Israel, Sinai: Archaeological and Historical Relationships in the Biblical Period*, ed. A.F. Rainey (Tel Aviv: Tel Aviv University Press, 1987), 137–61; J. Hoffmeier, *Israel in Egypt: The Evidence for the Authenticity of the Exodus Tradition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999).
7. A. Erman and H. Grapow, *Das Wörterbuch der ägyptischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1953), 87.
8. Before 664 BCE, absolute dates are only approximate; it is only after 664 BCE that regnal years, reigns, dynasties, and periods can all be correlated with absolute dates.
9. R. Scholl, *Corpus der Ptolemäischen Sklaventexte* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1990); abbreviated here and elsewhere as C. Ptol. Sklav.

10. On this motif, see J. Śliwa, “Some Remarks Concerning Victorious Ruler Representations in Egyptian Art,” *Forschungen und Berichte* 16 (1974): 97–117; M. Janzen, “The Iconography of Humiliation: The Depiction and Treatment of Bound Foreigners in New Kingdom Egypt” (PhD diss., University of Memphis, 2013), 23–4, 311–3.
11. Expeditions into the Levant did take place, but are poorly attested. Expeditions to Punt did not seem to have been a significant source of prisoners of war. On Nubians, see M. Bietak “Zu den nubischen Bogenschützen aus Assiut. Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte der Ersten Zwischenzeit,” in *Mélanges Gamal Eddin Mokhtar*, eds. Muhammad Mukhtār Paule Kriéger. Bibliothèque d’Étude 97 (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1985), 87–99.
12. Like Pepynakht; K. Sethe, *Urkunden des alten Reichs* (Leipzig: J.C. Heinrichs, 1903), 131–5.
13. Sethe, *Urkunden*, 217.
14. E. Feucht, “The Nubian Mercenaries of Gebelein during the First Intermediate Period,” *Kush* 9 (1961): 44–80; J. Darnell, “A Bureaucratic Challenge? Archaeology and Administration in a Desert Environment (Second Millennium B.C.E.),” in *Ancient Egyptian Administration*, ed. Juan Carlos Moreno García (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 791.
15. *Ibid.*, 817.
16. W. Hayes, *A Papyrus of the Late Middle Kingdom in the Brooklyn Museum (Papyrus Brooklyn 35.1446)*. (Brooklyn: The Brooklyn Museum, 1955).
17. On this Middle Kingdom expansion, see J.C. Moreno García, “Egypt, Old to New Kingdom (2686–1069 BCE),” in *The Oxford World History of Empire*, eds. Peter Bang, C.A. Bayly, Walter Scheidel (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 26–7.
18. K. Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie: historisch-biographische Urkunden* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs, 1927), 1–10.
19. J. Darnell, “The Stela of the Viceroy Userhat (Bostona MFA 25.632), his Shrine at Qasr Ibrahim, and the Festival of Nubian Tribute under Amenhotep II,” *ENIM* 7 (2014): 239–76. In general on prisoners of war in the New Kingdom, see U. Matic, *Body and Frames of War in New Kingdom Egypt: Violent Treatment of Enemies and Prisoners* (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2019).
20. P. Grandet, *Le papyrus Harris I (BM 9999)* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale du Caire, 1994).
21. On this practice, see E. Karev, “‘Mark Them with My Mark’: Human Branding in Egypt,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 108 (2022): 191–203.
22. “Men of the North” appear in P. Vatican 10574; P. Leiden 1942/5.15; the Apanage Stela of Iuwelot (Cairo JdE 31882); P. Louvre E3228e, P. Louvre E3228d, and P. Louvre E3228c; for identification of the “northern region” as Gaza, see J. Quaegebeur, “À propos de l’identification de la ‘Kadytis’ d’Hérodote avec la ville de Gaza,” in *Immigration and Emigration Within the Ancient Near East, Festschrift E. Lipiński*, eds. Karel Van Lerberghe, Antoon Schoors, and Edward Lipiński. OLA 65 (Leuven: Peeters, 1995), 245–70. See also J. J. A. Ramírez, “Papyrus Vatican 38595: A Lease of a Man of the North during the reign of Py,” *Bollettino dei Monumenti Musei e Gallerie Pontificie* 36 (2019): 30–46.

23. J. Ma and C. Tuplin, *Aršama and his World: The Bodleian Letters in Context*. 3 vols. Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents 14 (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020).
24. E.g., P. Petr. 3. 104.
25. For a detailed look at corvée and people considered “corvéable,” see: J.C. Moreno García, “La population *mrt*: une approche du problème de la servitude dans l’Égypte du III^e millénaire,” *JEA* 84 (1998): 71–83; C. Eyre, “Work and Organisation of Work in the Old Kingdom,” in *Labor in the Ancient Near East*, ed. Marvin Powell (New Haven: American Oriental Society, 1987), 18–20.
26. R. Jasnow, “Egypt: Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period,” in *A History of Ancient Near Eastern Law*, ed. Raymond Westbrook (Leiden: Brill, 2003), 94–5; N. Strudwick, *Administration of Egypt in the Old Kingdom* (London: KPI, 1985); E. Hornung, *Grundzüge der ägyptischen Geschichte* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 40.
27. P. Posener-Kriéger and S. Demichelis, *I papiri di Gebelein: Scavi G. Farina 1935* (Geda: Turin, 2004).
28. The hieroglyphic writing of this term includes a hoe and stresses the agricultural nature of these laborers. See Ogden Goelet, “Problems of Authority, Compulsion, and Compensation in Ancient Egyptian Labor Practices,” in *Labor in the Ancient World*, eds. Piotr Steinkeller and Michael Hudson (Dresden: ISLET, 2015), 547, especially n. 87 and 88. See also S. Allam, “Une class ouvrière: les *merit*,” in *La dépendance rurale dans l’antiquité égyptienne et proche-orientale*, ed. Bernadette Menu (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2005), 123–56 and J. C. Moreno García, “Acquisition de serfs durant la Première Période Intermédiaire: une étude d’histoire sociale dans l’Égypte du III^e millénaire,” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 51 (2000): 123–39.
29. Goelet, “Problems,” 572; S. Quirke, *The Administration of Egypt in the Late Middle Kingdom: The Hieratic Documents* (New Malden: SIA Publishing, 1990), 127–86; C. Eyre, *The Use of Documents in Pharaonic Egypt*. Oxford Studies in Ancient Documents (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 261–3; W. Grajetzki, “Setting a State Anew: The Central Administration from the End of the Old Kingdom to the End of the Middle Kingdom,” in *Ancient Egyptian Administration*, ed. Juan Carlos Moreno García (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 233–4.
30. It is unclear how many of these enclosures actually existed—and whether they were all used to the same end—but throughout the late Middle Kingdom they do appear to have been limited to the housing (and perhaps also coerced labor) of individuals attempting to avoid their corvée duties. See S. Quirke, “State and Labour in the Middle Kingdom: A Reconsideration of the Term *Chenert*,” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 39 (1988): 83–106, especially p. 102.
31. On this practice, see Quirke, “State,” 89–90, with citations *indem*. As Quirke notes, substitutions were not necessarily gender-based if a task had yet to be allocated (i.e., conscription for general state services), but once the task had already been determined, it would require differentiation by gender.
32. W. Simpson, *Papyrus Reisner I: The Records of a Building Project in the Reign of Sesostris I* (Boston: Museum of Fine Arts, 1963). See also Quirke, “State,” 86–7.
33. Quirke, “State,” 87–8.

34. J. Kruchten, *Le décret d'Horemheb: Traduction, commentaire épigraphique, philologique et institutionnel* (Bruxelles: Editions de l'Université de Bruxelles, 1981); Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, 2140–61.
35. Conscription into the military is favored by Kruchten, *Le décret*, 79.
36. B. Muhs, *The Ancient Egyptian Economy, 3000–30 BC* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press), 184; there was also taxation in the form of labor, but less attested than in earlier periods.
37. On oral transactions of other goods, see Muhs, *The Ancient Egyptian Economy*, 6, 52, 91, 140, 157.
38. A. Gardiner, “A Lawsuit Arising from the Purchase of Two Slaves,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 21 (1935): 140–6.
39. Gardiner, “A Lawsuit,” 142. Her name is a clue to her origin: *gm.n.i³-hr-i³mntt*, meaning “I found (her) in the West” or “(she) who I found in the West.”
40. P. Smither, “The Report Concerning the Slave-girl Senbet,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 34 (1948): 31–34; see also T. Hofmann, *Zur sozialen Bedeutung Zweier Begriffe für “Diener”: B3k und Ḥm: Untersucht an Quellen vom Alten Reich bis zur Ramessidenzeit* (Basel: Schwabe, 2005), 133–9.
41. P. Berlin 10470, 3.5.
42. The conceptualization of “freedom” is nebulous in Egypt. For further, see E. Karev, “Nemeh in Pharaonic Egypt: ‘Free’ or ‘Miserable’? (A Case Study of Historical Semantics),” *Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaften* (forthcoming).
43. For the suggestion that this transfer of ownership was for the purposes of marriage, see W. Helck, “P. Berlin 10470,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 115 (1988): 35–9.
44. A. Gardiner, “Four Papyri of the 18th Dynasty from Kahun [Berlin P. 9784, Gurob P. II 1, Gurob P. II 2, Berlin P. 9785],” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 43 (1906): 27–47; P. Berlin 9785 on pp. 38–43.
45. So-called “oracular pronouncements.” See R. Ritner, *The Libyan Anarchy: Inscriptions from Egypt’s Third Intermediate Period*. Writings from the Ancient World 21 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 2009), 166–72, 271–8.
46. For an interpretation of sale and self-sale texts of the Saite and Persian periods as “cessions of services” rather than sales, see B. Menu, “Cessions de services et engagements pour dette sous les rois Kouchites et Saïtes.” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 36 (1985): 73–87.
47. Self-sales: P. Rylands 3, 5, and 6; Louvre E706; Sales: P. Leiden F1942/5.15; P. Vatican 10547; P. Louvre E3228e; P. Turin 2122; P. Bibl. Nat. 223; P. Inv. Sorbonne 1276 + 1277.
48. C. Ptol. Sklav. 5.
49. Favoring the former, see J. Černý, *A Community of Workmen at Thebes in the Ramesside Period* (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 1973), 175–81; for the latter argument, cf. Goelet, “Problems,” 546–47 and Hofmann, *Zur sozialen*, 113–8.
50. Gardiner, “Four Papyri”; see also R. Navailles and F. Neveu, “Qu’entendait-on par ‘journée d’esclave’ au Nouvel Empire?” *Revue d’Égyptologie* 40 (1989): 113–23.
51. B. Davies and J. Toivari, “Misuse of a Maidservant’s Services at Deir el-Medina (O. CGC 25237, recto),” *Studien zur Altägyptischen Kultur* 24 (1997): 69–80.

52. TADD7.9; P. Louvre E3228d. For the latter, see K. Donker van Heel, *Dealing with the Dead in Ancient Egypt: The Abnormal Hieratic Business Archive of Petebaste Son of Peteamunip (7th Century BCE)* (Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2021).
53. As recorded in P. Tebt.2.399. This profession was not limited to enslaved women; the only difference is that an enslaved nurse was represented by her owner rather than representing herself. See J. Straus, “Papyrological Evidence,” in *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Slavery*, eds. Stephen Hodkinson, Marc Kleijwegt, and Kostas Vlassopoulos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).
54. P. Rylands 3, P. Rylands 5, and P. Rylands 6; Louvre E706.
55. As in P. Brooklyn 35.1446; Hayes, *A Papyrus*, 90.
56. P. Louvre 3230b; E. Peet, “Two Eighteenth Dynasty Letters, P. Louvre 3230,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 12 (1926): 70–4.
57. A. Gardiner, “The Tomb of Amenemhet, High Priest of Amon,” *Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde* 47 (1910): 87–97.
58. TADB3.9; TADB3.3; TADB3.6; TADB2.11.
59. Straus, “Papyrological”; I. Biezuńska-Małowist, *L’esclavage dans l’Égypte gréco-romaine. Première partie: période ptolémaïque* (Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974), 49–54; Y. Rotman, “Slavery in Greco-Roman Egypt,” in *Law and Legal Practice in Egypt From Alexander to the Arab Conquest: A Selection of Papyrological Sources in Translation, With Introductions and Commentary*, eds. James Keenan, Joseph Manning, and Uri Yiftach-Firanko (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 443.
60. P. Harr. I. 61 = C. Ptol. Sklav. 8.
61. Menu, “Cessions,” 81–87.
62. E.g., F. van Koppen, “Geography of the Slave Trade,” in *Mesopotamian Dark Age*, ed. H. Hunger and R. Pruzsinszky (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 2004), 11 who equates self-sale with a creditor claiming the pledges of a previous loan contract—in other words, seizure following default.
63. A. Testart, “The Extent and Significance of Debt Slavery,” *Revue française de Sociologie* 43 (2002): 179–80.
64. We have no record of this happening in Egypt, but that doesn’t exclude it as a possibility; we only have three self-sales, of which only two are potentially as a result of an obligation—and they belong to the same individual. For further on debt bondage in the Late Period, see E. Karev, “Debt Bondage in Late Period Egypt (8th–5th Centuries BC)” (forthcoming).
65. E.g., in Abnormal Hieratic P. BM. 10113, the debtor states that the creditor may take any of the property listed “without citing any document (*i’w_h dd knbt nb*)”; see K. Donker van Heel, “Abnormal Hieratic and Early Demotic Texts Collected by the Theban Choachytes in the Reign of Amasis. Papyri from the Louvre Eisenlohr Lot” (PhD diss., Leiden University, 1995), 231.
66. As suggested in T. Markiewicz, “Security for Debt in the Demotic Papyri,” *Journal of Juristic Papyrology* 35 (2005): 153, n. 32.
67. Diodorus Siculus, *Bibliotheca Historia* I.79.3, states that the pharaoh Bocchoris abolished debt slavery; on this claim, see T. Markiewicz, “Bocchoris the Lawgiver—Or Was He Really?” *Journal of Egyptian History* 1 (2008): 309–30.

68. Markiewicz, “Bocchoris,” 321.
69. Biežuńska-Malowist, *L’esclavage*, 29–49, esp. 43.
70. Sel. Pap.2.205; W. Westermann, *Upon Slavery in Ptolemaic Egypt* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1929).
71. J. Bauschatz, *Law and Enforcement in Ptolemaic Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 236.
72. van der Linden, “Dissecting,” 306–10, graphic on p. 308.
73. Eyre, “Work,” 28–30.
74. J.C. Moreno García, “Households,” in *The UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, eds. Elizabeth Frood and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 2012), <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002czx07>. The house as a unit was socially important enough that its confiscation was employed as a punitive measure; D. Lorton, “The Treatment of Criminals in Ancient Egypt: Through the New Kingdom,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* 20 (1977): 2–64.
75. E.g., P. Kahun 35 = UCL 32210; M. Collier and S. Quirke, *The UCL Lahun Papyri: Letters* (Oxford: Archaeopress, 2002), 133.
76. An extensively studied decree; for a partial bibliography cf. Goelet, “Problems,” 555, n. 109.
77. P. Harris I, 47.8–9.
78. TADB3.3; see also B. Porten and H. Szubin, “The Status of the Handmaiden Tamet: A New Interpretation of Kraeling 2 (TAD B3.3),” *Israel Law Review* 29 (1995): 43–64.
79. J.C. Moreno García, “The ‘Other’ Administration: Patronage, Factions, and Informal Networks of Power in Ancient Egypt,” in *Ancient Egyptian Administration*, ed. J.C. Moreno García, Section 1: Ancient Near East, vol. 104 (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 1030.
80. It’s not clear if this is metaphorical or actual enslavement. See K. Ryholt, “A Self-Dedication Addressed to Anubis: Divine Protection against Malevolent Forces or Forced Labor?” In *Lotus and Laurel: Studies on Egyptian Language and Religion in Honour of Paul John Frandsen*, eds. Rune Nyord and Kim Ryholt (Copenhagen: Carsten Niebuhr Institute of Near Eastern Studies, Museum Tusulanum Press, 2015), 329–50. The fact that some of the people dedicated in these contracts were children listed without a father has led some to suggest actual enslavement or even temple prostitution (H. Thompson, “Two Demotic Self-Dedications,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 26 [1941]: 68–78), though the latter is unlikely.
81. E.g., scorpion stings and snakebites, but also “dead men” and spirits; A.G. Migahid, “Demotische Briefe an Götter von der Spät- bis zur Römerzeit” (PhD diss., Bayerischen Julius-Maximilians-Universität, 1986).
82. A. Loprieno, “Slavery and Servitude,” in *The UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, eds. Elizabeth Frood and Willeke Wendrich (Los Angeles: UCLA Press 2012), <http://digital2.library.ucla.edu/viewItem.do?ark=21198/zz002djg3j>; Hayes, *A Papyrus*, 65.
83. Hayes, *A Papyrus*, 52–53; on the practice of substitution, see also Quirke, “The Administration,” 162–63; K. Kóthay, “La notion de travail au Moyen Empire. Implications sociales,” in *L’organisation du travail en Égypte ancienne et en Mésopotamie: Colloque Aidea - Nice 4-5 octobre 2004*, ed. Bernadette Menu (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2010), 155–70.

84. J. Allen, *The Hekanakht Papyri* (New York: The Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2002).
85. P. Westcar, 12, 20; her owner is saddened by this beating, referring to her slave as “the little girl who grew up in this house.” A. Blackman, *The Story of King Kheops and the Magicians: Transcribed from Papyrus Westcar* (Reading: J.V. Books, 1988).
86. P. BM 10052, 12, 20; E. Peet, *The Great Tomb-Robberies of the Twentieth Egyptian Dynasty* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1930), 155.
87. P. BM 10052 12, 8; Peet, *The Great*, 154.
88. J. Černý, “Restitution of, and Penalty Attaching to, Stolen Property in Ramesside Times,” *The Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 23 (1937): 186–9.
89. TADA6.3.
90. TADB8.4, referencing a man who had been enslaved and beaten on the palms and legs following a court dispute. TADB8.6 also involves corporal punishment, but it is not entirely clear that the person in question was enslaved.
91. P. Cair. Zen. III 59369; P. Diosk. 9.
92. P. Tebt. III 2.904.
93. Bauschatz, *Law and Enforcement*, 240.
94. C. Ptol. Sklav. 1; the law makes a distinction between crimes undertaken with the knowledge of the owner vs. without the knowledge of the owner, presumably to prevent collusion between the plaintiff and the slave against the slave’s owner.
95. Rotman, “Slavery,” 449.
96. Standard as part of the Abnormal Hieratic legal tradition; this oath to Amun is included in other sales as well as a promise to protect title. B. Menu, Bernadette. “Les actes de vente En Égypte ancienne, particulièrement sous les rois Kouchites et Saïtes,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 74 (1988): 165–81.
97. van der Linden, “On Dissecting,” 310–13; graphic on p. 311.
98. P. Anastasi V, 19: 2–20: 6; this document has attracted considerable attention due to the apparent similarity between the escape route favored by the two fugitives and that followed by the proto-Israelites.
99. E. Morris, *The Architecture of Imperialism: Military Bases and the Evolution of Foreign Policy in Egypt’s New Kingdom* (Leiden: Brill, 2005), 240.
100. P. Cair. Zen. 1.59070; P. Cair. Zen. 2.59213; P. Cair. Zen. 4.59613; C. Ptol. Sklav. 61–85.
101. P. Zen. Pestm. 36; P. Hib. 1 54; C. Ptol. Sklav. 72; C. Ptol. Sklav. 69.
102. P. Paris. 10; P. Cair. Zen. 2.59213.
103. P. Oxy. 3.472.
104. P. Oxy. 12.1422.
105. P. Oxy. 14.1643.
106. Sethe, *Urkunden der 18. Dynastie*, 1369.4–16; see also J. de Linage, “L’Acte d’établissement et le contrat de mariage d’un esclave sous Thoutmès III,” *BIFAO* 38 (1939): 217–34.
107. A much-discussed text. See A. Gardiner, “Adoption Extraordinary,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 26 (1941): 23–9; E. Cruz-Uribe, “A New Look at the Adoption Papyrus,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 74 (1988): 220–3; S. Allam, “A New Look at the Adoption Papyrus (Reconsidered),” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 76 (1990), 189–91; C. Eyre, “The Adoption Papyrus in Social Context,” *Journal of Egyptian Archaeology* 78 (1992), 207–21.

108. P. Louvre E7832 (Demotic), published in Donker van Heel, “Abnormal Hieratic,” 177–82; TADB3.9 (Aramaic).
109. M. Cannata. *Three Hundred Years of Death: The Egyptian Funerary Industry in the Ptolemaic Period*. Culture and History of the Ancient Near East 110 (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 513; Girgis Mattha, “Rights and Duties of the Eldest Son According to the Native Egyptian Laws of Succession of the Third Century BCE,” *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts, Fouad I University, Cairo* 12, no. 2 (1950): 113–8.
110. TADB3.6 (Aramaic).
111. Biezuńska-Małowist, *L’esclavage*, 128–29.
112. Straus, “Papyrological”.
113. E.g., P. Petrie I 3, lines 9–38.
114. Teachings of Amenemope 22.1–4; Moreno García, “The ‘Other’,” 1030.
115. Instructions of Ankhshonqy 8, 11.
116. Moreno García, “The ‘Other’,” 1051; M. Chauveau, “Administration centrale et autorités locales d’Amasis à Darius,” *Méditerranées* 24 (2000): 99–109; M. Campagno, “Patronage and Other Logics of Social Organization in Ancient Egypt during the IIIrd Millennium BCE,” *Journal of Egyptian History* 7 (2014), 1–33.
117. O. Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 13; this does not mean that Patterson’s ideas should be completely rejected, but rather that they are not the best fit for describing Egyptian slavery, which would be better served by a synthetic approach such as the one suggested by D. Lewis, “Orlando Patterson, Property, and Ancient Slavery: The Definitional Problem Revisited,” in *On Human Bondage: After Slavery and Social Death*, eds. John Bodel and Walter Scheidel (Sussex: Wiley-Blackwell, 2017), 31–54.

FURTHER READINGS

- Bakir, Abd el-Mohsin. *Slavery in Pharaonic Egypt*. Cairo: L’Institut français d’archéologie, 1952.
- Biezuńska-Małowist, Iza. *L’esclavage dans l’Égypte gréco-romaine: Première partie: période ptolémaïque*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1974.
- Bakir, Abd el-Mohsin. *L’esclavage dans l’Égypte gréco-romaine: Deuxième partie: période romaine*. Wrocław: Zakład Narodowy im. Ossolińskich, 1977.
- Cruz-Uribe, Eugene. “Slavery in Egypt during the Saite and Persian Periods.” *Revue internationale des droits de l’antiquité* 29 (1982): 47–71.
- Goelet, Ogdén. “Problems of Authority, Compulsion, and Compensation in Ancient Egyptian Labor Practices.” In *Labor in the Ancient World*, edited by Piotr Steinkeller and Michael Hudson, 523–82. Dresden: ISLET, 2015.
- Helck, Wolfgang. “Sklaven.” In *Lexikon der Ägyptologie*, edited by Wolfgang Helck and Wolfhart Westendorf. Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1984.
- Hofmann, Tobias. *Zur sozialen Bedeutung Zweier Begriffe für “Diener”: B3k und Ḥm: Untersucht an Quellen vom Alten Reich bis zur Ramessidenzeit*. Basel: Schwabe, 2005.

- Loprieno, Antonio. "Slavery and Servitude." In *The UCLA Encyclopedia of Egyptology*, edited by Elizabeth Froid and Willeke Wendrich. Los Angeles: UCLA Press, 2012. <https://escholarship.org/uc/item/8mx2073f>.
- Menu, Bernadette. *Nouvelles recherches sur l'histoire juridique, économique et sociale de l'ancienne Égypte: III*. Cairo: Institut français d'archéologie orientale du Caire, 2004.
- Moreno García, Juan Carlos. "Acquisition de serfs durant la Première Période Intermédiaire: une étude d'histoire sociale dans l'Égypte du III^e millénaire." *Revue d'Égyptologie* 51 (2000): 123–39.
- Morris, Ellen. "Mitanni Enslaved: Prisoners of War, Pride, and Productivity in a New Imperial Regime." *SAOC* 69 (2014): 361–79.
- Quirke, Stephen. "State and Labour in the Middle Kingdom: A Reconsideration of the Term *Chenert*." *Revue d'Égyptologie* 39 (1988): 83–106.
- Thompson, Dorothy J. "Slavery in the Hellenistic World." In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume I, the Ancient Mediterranean World*, edited by Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge, 194–213. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Vittmann, Günter. "Ägypten (vom Alten Reich bis in die Spätzeit)." In *Handwörterbuch der antiken Sklaverei*, edited by Heinz Heinen. Wiesbaden: Fran Steiner Verlag, 2006.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in Ancient Greece

Kostas Vlassopoulos

INTRODUCTION

Slavery in the Greek city-states has held a foundational role in the modern study of global slavery. Moses Finley, an influential ancient historian, coined the famous distinction between “societies with slaves,” where slaves are few and slavery plays a limited economic role, and “slave societies,” where slavery constitutes a dominant economic, social, and political institution and slaves comprise a substantial proportion of the population. Finley argued that while societies with slaves have been ubiquitous in global history, there had been only five slave societies: Greece, Rome, the US South, Brazil, and the Caribbean. In this approach, Greek city-states had the “honor” of being the first slave societies in world history.¹

The traditional approach to Greek slavery has been based on two major tenets. The first is that early Greek communities were originally societies with slaves, where the dependent labor of the free lower classes was the main source of elite wealth. But in the course of the archaic period (700–500 BCE), the lower classes gained citizenship rights and could no longer be directly exploited by Greek elites, who turned to the mass importation of slaves, leading to the emergence of slave societies. The second tenet is the assumption that Greek slavery is tantamount to Athenian slavery in the classical period (500–300 BCE), from where most of our evidence comes; the

K. Vlassopoulos (✉)

Department of History and Archaeology, University of Crete, Rethymno, Greece

e-mail: vlasp@uoc.gr

other Greek cities are assumed to have essentially the same slave system as Athens. This idea was further supported by the assumption that servile groups like the helots of Sparta and the *woikeis* of Crete were not “proper” slaves, but should rather be seen as akin to medieval serfs, since they lived in family groups as dependent peasants. According to the traditional approach, slavery in the Greek world consisted of those slave systems that resemble the familiar image of slavery in the US South; any system that diverged significantly can be explained away as not being “proper” slavery.²

This chapter is based on the revolutionary implications of recent research over the last decade, which has seriously challenged the major assumptions of the traditional approach. A careful reading of the Homeric and Hesiodic epics, our earliest sources for Greek history, has revealed that the elites in the Homeric world (800–700 BCE) depended overwhelmingly on slave labor; accordingly, early Greek communities were already slave societies. We do not know how far back slavery was a dominant phenomenon in the Greek world, but it is obvious that the traditional narrative of a transition from societies with slaves into slave societies in the course of the archaic period is no longer tenable. We need a new kind of narrative to explain the differences between the forms of slavery attested in different historical periods. At the same time, scholars have started to accept that Greek slavery was not a uniform phenomenon, but consisted of various local slave systems, each of which had developed its own peculiar features. Spartan helots, for example, were not serfs, but slaves with peculiar characteristics as a result of the particular historical development of Spartan society. Slavery does not have some trans-historical essence, but is the historical outcome of the interplay between strategies employing human property for various ends and the wider processes and contexts within which these strategies take place.³

Instead of the traditional narrative and interpretative framework, we should rather locate the history of Greek slave systems within a number of processes. We will focus on four distinct but interrelated historical processes. Prime of place goes to the **process of growing connectivity** that from the archaic period onward came to interlink various areas of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea; this process was partly based on decentralized networks moving goods, people, ideas and technologies, and partly on attempts by states and potentates to canalize connectivity for their own ends. Greek slave systems cannot be understood outside this quantum leap in the connectivity of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea during the first millennium BCE; in the same way that early modern slavery is incomprehensible outside the emergence of the Atlantic world that interlinked European, African, Native American and Colonial American societies, economies and cultures, Greek slave systems were intimately related to other Mediterranean and Black Sea slave systems. Increasing connectivity set the stage for drastic changes in Greek material culture; it made possible the utilization of Mediterranean micro-ecological diversity and fragmentation through large-scale **processes of exchange and redistribution**. The resulting specialization, production for the

market, dependence on exchange and surplus accumulation went hand in hand with the emergence of the first consumer societies, in which substantial social strata desired and consumed goods from various areas of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Slavery was deeply inscribed in this process, not only in terms of the slave trade, but also in terms of producing a major part of these various goods and creating the surpluses that allowed the emergence of consumer societies.

At the same time, **processes of community formation and claim-making** transformed the socio-political settings of Greek city-states. This process shaped the institutions of Greek city-states and the meaning of citizenship and changed the ways in which Greek communities formulated the distinction between insiders and outsiders. Freedom was no longer the status of not being property, and started to acquire additional features that tended to turn into a total and unalterable status; freeborn people could no longer lose their status within their community and their status protected them from dishonor and physical punishment. The formalization of free and slave status created major disadvantages for slaves, but at the same time opened new institutional settings that slaves could potentially take advantage of. Political communities could also superimpose their own priorities on masters and slaves, limiting what could be done to slaves or what slaves could do. Finally, **geopolitical processes** redefined how violence and ideology affected enslavement and liberation across the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Most slaves were produced through warfare, raiding and international trade. This means that slavery was directly inscribed in the changing history of the forms of warfare, predation, exchange, state-building and empire-building that linked together communities into wider systems of international relations. The emergence of large states and empires in various parts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea, as well as their occasional collapse, enhanced the scale and stakes of warfare and the extent of slave-making, creating large and interconnected slaving zones; at the same time, the peculiar form of the Greek geopolitical system had also important implications for the emergence of various forms of no-slaving zones.⁴

It might be worth offering a general typology of Greek slave systems at this point. The first group of Greek slave systems comprised societies like Sparta and Crete, whose citizenries consisted of leisured gentlemen exploiting slave labor. These systems had limited engagement with Mediterranean connectivity, being agricultural societies geared toward local production and consumption. Slaves constituted the majority population group in these societies, and their replenishment was based on natural reproduction. A second group of slave systems consisted of relatively wealthy societies with deep engagement with Mediterranean connectivity, highly diversified economies and often a predilection for marketable crops, like oil and wine. Apart from Athens, which was in addition an imperial center, this group included primarily island and coastal communities like Chios, Corfu and Aegina. These slave systems depended

largely on trade for the replenishment of their slave populations. The historian Thucydides believed that Chios had more slaves than any other Greek city, even Sparta, presumably as a proportion of the population rather than an absolute number⁵; it is possible therefore that some Greek cities like Chios had slave populations that approached those in some early modern Caribbean colonies. In the case of Athens, most scholars would accept a guesstimate between 20 and 50 percent of the population. The third group, which comprised the majority of Greek societies, was similar to the second, but with far fewer resources and extent of connectivity; we should therefore expect a social structure similar to the second group, but with fewer slaves given their limited wealth; slave populations of 20 percent or less should probably be expected.⁶

ENTRY

Cross-culturally, we can distinguish between four major forms of entry into slavery: (a) internal enslavement within a community; (b) violent enslavement through state warfare or piracy; (c) the slave trade and (d) the inheritance of slave status through the natural reproduction of slave populations. As we shall see, we can find both common patterns across the Greek world, as well as major differences.

One of the peculiar features of Greek slave systems is the limited role of internal forms of enslavement. Solon's reforms in early sixth-century BCE Athens prohibited debt slavery; Athenians could no longer be enslaved for debt within their community. We have no concrete evidence about most other Greek communities, but we get the impression that enslavement for debt was marginal, if not equally prohibited. On the other hand, the existence of debt bondage is attested; free people had to work for their lenders in order to repay their debts in conditions that were often akin to slavery, although they retained their free status while in debt bondage. Largely invisible is the right of fathers to sell their children, as was the case in many other ancient societies. Finally, penal enslavement is unattested for citizens, although we know that in Athens it was a possible punishment for free foreign residents who had not paid their special taxes, or for people who attempted to usurp the right to citizenship. Internal forms of enslavement were not unknown in Greek societies, but as a result of community protection of the free status of citizens they were marginal phenomena in the Greek world.⁷

Greek city-states had very strong no-slaving zones, but these zones concerned only their own citizens; the rest of the world, including citizens of other Greek city-states, were considered potentially enslaveable. The slaving zones of Greek city-states were therefore enormous; not only could Greek city-states potentially enslave their neighbors, but, due to the connectivity expansion we examined above, they could also receive slaves from areas like Asia Minor, the Levant, Thrace and the Black Sea. Given the limited role of

internal forms of enslavement, it was violence and trade that constituted the main forms of entry into slavery in the Greek world.

Generally speaking, in all periods of Greek history it was taken for granted that violence was a legitimate means of generating slaves; but this general fact was often hedged in by certain important qualifications. The first important qualification is the distinction between oligopolistic and monopolistic states in terms of their recourse to violence; oligopolistic states allowed their citizens to employ violence against foreigners for their private gain, and required their citizens to contribute their military equipment and ships only on those occasions in which the state was fighting against another state; monopolistic states restricted the use of violence to state purposes only, prohibiting or discouraging their citizens from using violence for private gain, and often maintaining substantial state arsenals.⁸ Until the late archaic period, all Greek states were oligopolistic; accordingly, elites and commoners habitually engaged in piracy and other forms of violence that produced movable wealth and captives. The famous poem of Hybrias presents a Cretan master who attributes his wealth, leisure and cowering slaves to his military prowess.⁹

From the late archaic period onward, though, many Greek states made the transition from oligopolistic to monopolistic forms: although slaves were still produced by state warfare, their citizens could no longer engage in acts of private enslavement through violence. In some parts of the Greek world, like Crete and Aetolia, states remained oligopolistic down to the end of the Hellenistic period (323–31 BCE); piracy remained an important form of enslavement in these areas, and, depending on circumstances, it could occasionally contribute substantial numbers of slaves. But in the main areas of the Greek world (the Peloponnese, central Greece, the Aegean islands and coastal Asia Minor), the emergence of monopolistic states made private violent enslavement by elites and commoners a phenomenon of the past.¹⁰

What was the role of state violence in producing slaves in these areas? The second important qualification is the limited role of transcultural wars in Greek history, a major aspect of global enslavement. There clearly existed military conflicts between (some) Greeks and (some) non-Greeks, and the Persian Wars (490–478 BCE) are the most famous example of them; but, by and large, most episodes of warfare in the Greek world involved Greeks fighting against other Greeks. Given this fact, the large numbers of non-Greek slaves in Greek city-states cannot be attributed to warfare between Greeks and non-Greeks; not because Greeks would not have enslaved their non-Greek enemies in large numbers, but because they rarely had the opportunity to do so. Accordingly, enslavement by war in the Greek world is effectively tantamount to the enslavement of Greeks by other Greeks.

As far as the archaic period is concerned, the enslavement of defeated enemies appears to be a relatively common phenomenon. According to much later accounts, the helots were populations conquered and enslaved by Sparta, while similar narratives exist for the conquest and enslavement of the Penestai of Thessaly or the Mariandynoi in Heraclea Pontica.¹¹ Whether these accounts

are historically reliable is debated by modern historians; but once we reach the classical period, for which we are much better informed, we encounter a paradox. On the one hand, the Greeks considered perfectly legitimate the enslavement of their Greek opponents: among many actual examples, we can mention the enslavement of the Melians by the Athenians and the enslavement of the Thebans by Alexander the Great. On the other hand, given the ubiquity of warfare in the Greek world, the enslavement of defeated opponents appears as a relatively rare outcome of the fate of captives. Furthermore, Greek texts give the impression that slaves in Greek cities were almost exclusively non-Greek, despite the extant evidence for the enslavement of Greeks by other Greeks.

How should we explain this paradox? Greek city-states could deal with defeated opponents and captives in a variety of ways: they could exchange prisoners, release the free captives and keep those who were already slaves, use the captives as bargain chips for a wider settlement, kill all captives, kill the male adults and enslave the rest, or enslave all captives. Enslavement of captives was a form of conspicuous destruction: it was undertaken as a public statement, whether as revenge for heinous crimes, to discourage future resistance or to exterminate an enemy community. Accordingly, the enslavement of Greek opponents was only undertaken in particular circumstances and for specific purposes, rather than as a default policy. The evolution of Greek interstate relations was also an important factor: the creation of hegemonic alliances and the development of means of incorporating defeated communities in state structures offered alternatives to enslavement for victorious states. Finally, Greek city-states developed robust ransoming mechanisms, by signing multilateral treaties or encouraging individuals to ransom fellow citizens or friendly foreigners.¹²

As a result of all these factors, while the enslavement of Greeks in war remained a constant factor of entry into slavery, it was rather trade that constituted the main source of slaves in most areas of the Greek world. The processes of connectivity that we mentioned above ensured that Greek communities could draw slaves from all areas of the eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea. This constituted an enormous expansion of the reach of slaving zones in the ancient world. Geopolitical changes in various parts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea increased significantly the supply of slaves. The warfare that accompanied the creation of large states and empires, like the Odrysian kingdom in Thrace or the kingdom of the Royal Scythians in the Black Sea, provided major opportunities for slave-making; the same applied to the crisis or collapse of such states. The Greek colonies in the Western Mediterranean, Thrace and the Black Sea and their commercial networks provided a major, easy and profitable outlet for the thousands of slaves generated by these conflicts. A single day of campaigning by Seuthes, a Thracian potentate around 400 BCE who was trying to extend his authority, produced a thousand captives that were quickly disposed of in the nearby Greek colony of Perinthos.¹³

Furthermore, the maritime character of Mediterranean connectivity offered significant advantages in relation to the land-based connectivity of most areas that constituted the earlier civilizations of the Near East. Slaves from the Black Sea or Thrace could be sold in the port of Athens within a few days of their capture. The short maritime distances involved meant that there was no need for specialized slave ships or slave routes; slaves moved in the same ways and routes as all other commodities.¹⁴ As a result, the price of slaves in classical Athens appears to be far lower in comparison with any other ancient society for which sufficient evidence exists (Rome, Mesopotamia); on average, Athenian slaves costed the equivalent of the annual wages of a skilled craftsman. Given these low prices, it is not surprising that in places like Athens most slaves appear to be first-generation non-Greeks.¹⁵

But what was the role of slave natural reproduction in terms of replenishing slave populations? For certain Greek communities, like Sparta and Crete, the answer is simple: irrespective of the origins of their slave populations, natural reproduction constituted the overwhelming source of their replenishment. As we shall see in the next section, the leisured lifestyle of Spartan and Cretan citizens required large numbers of slaves; but the limited engagement of these societies with Mediterranean connectivity meant that they lacked easy access to networks of supply and the capital required for the constant replenishment through trade: slave reproduction was effectively their only feasible choice. This had important effects on these slave systems: the systemic need for reproduction meant that slave families were relatively stable and that slaves were native inhabitants forming their own communities. This is a major reason why Spartan helots and Cretan *woikeis* look more similar to medieval serfs than to the standard image of first-generation foreign slaves. The *woikeis* of Cretan Gortyn had two additional remarkable features. Their slave families had legal consequences: slave children did not belong to the master of the slave mother (the widespread principle of *partus ventrem sequitur*), but to the master of her senior male relative (father or brother) or of her slave husband. Furthermore, Gortyn allowed mixed marriages between free and slave, something unparalleled in other Greek societies that we know of. The status of the children of these marriages depended on the residence of the couple: if the family resided with the slave husband and was thus under the authority of his master, the children became slaves, while if it resided with the free mother the children were free.¹⁶

For the rest of the Greek world, the significance of slave reproduction is difficult to gauge. In the case of Athens, which is better known, the relatively small numbers of slaves in individual households would have made it difficult to create slave families within the master's household, a common phenomenon in other societies. Slaves would have often needed to find partners from other households, something that would have created substantial problems in terms of timetables and living arrangements. On the other hand, cities like Athens had substantial populations of slaves who lived and worked on their own; they were more likely to have formed families, and this is often corroborated by the

sources. Accordingly, while for many Greek societies like Athens the role of reproduction was secondary compared to trade, the existence of slave families and the role of second-generation slaves was not insignificant.¹⁷

THE EXPERIENCES OF SLAVES

Slave experience was shaped by the slaving strategies adopted by their masters. In order to understand these various slaving strategies, it is important to examine the nature and size of the master class. Greek societies were shaped by a fundamental distinction between rich and poor: the rich consisted of all those who were wealthy enough to live without working, while the category of the poor was highly diverse, from the destitute and those barely able to make ends meet to those who lived comfortably, but still had to work alongside their laborers. Leisure was a quintessential aspect of the Greek rich; accordingly, we can take for granted that in most Greek societies the rich were able to afford their lifestyle because they possessed a sufficient number of slaves. There are two main reasons for this: the general absence of institutionalized relations of dependence among the free population and the unwillingness of free people to work for somebody else on a long-term basis, as this was considered akin to slavery. Although free wage laborers were a substantial proportion of some Greek cities like Athens, they would mostly work on short-term contracts for successive employers. Accordingly, long-term workers in households, estates or workshops were almost by definition slaves in the Greek world.

In the case of Athens, where we have sufficient evidence, it appears that rich people possessed on average about 10 slaves. We hear of exceptional cases like the Athenian politician Nicias, who owned a thousand slaves leased to mine operators, and there are examples of owners of workshops that employed 30, 50 or 60 slaves. But it is fairly evident that there was barely any Greek equivalent to the Roman imperial magnates, who possessed urban households with hundreds of slaves, let alone slaves in their rural estates. The orator Demosthenes accused his wealthy opponent Meidias of arrogance for appearing in public spaces accompanied by three slaves¹⁸; this gives a good impression of the relative size of Athenian slaveholdings. We can conclude that while a few very rich people might own tens (and occasionally hundreds) of slaves, most rich people had much smaller slaveholdings.

While slave ownership among the rich is beyond doubt, it is more difficult to assess its extent among the rest of the population. During the archaic period, Sparta and Crete extended the lifestyle of the leisured gentleman to the whole citizen body; as a result, every citizen at Sparta and most citizens in Crete were slave-owners who devoted their lives to warfare, politics and leisure pursuits, because their slaves performed all necessary labor tasks. Sparta and Crete were exceptional; in most other Greek societies, the overwhelming majority of the citizen population had to work for a living. Nevertheless, it is fairly evident that in a rich and powerful society like Athens slave ownership extended to a significant section of working citizens, perhaps one-third of all

citizens. Most of these non-elite citizens would own only one or a few slaves. Whether this also applies to other Greek communities, it is impossible to say. Accordingly, while huge slaveholdings, like those attested in Rome or the New World, were quite rare in the Greek world, at the same time slave ownership extended far beyond the elite. The particularly cheap prices of slaves that we mentioned above are probably a major reason for this phenomenon.¹⁹

Households were the key units of social and economic practices in the ancient Greek world. Most Greek slaves were members of relatively small households, consisting of the nuclear family of the master, a few younger or older relatives and a couple of slaves. Accordingly, Greek slavery was deeply shaped by the economic and social strategies of households in terms of acquiring and maintaining property, ensuring a livelihood, producing heirs and transmitting property. A crucial parameter in this respect was the extent to which household heads had free rein to pursue their aims, or were limited by countervailing tendencies and factors. Were household heads allowed to marry, recognize as heirs and bequeath their property to whomever they wanted, or were there rules that imposed, prohibited or prioritized particular courses of action? While most Greek slaves operated within households, an important development of Greek history is the emergence of a new context, in which the economic strategies usually pursued within households were expanded and transformed into large-scale operations employing hundreds or even thousands. By the classical period we see operations like the Athenian workshops employing tens of slaves, while the Athenian mining operations in Laureion used thousands of slaves.²⁰

In what ways were slaves employed? Earlier approaches prioritized the use of slaves in production, and in particular agriculture, as the key criterion of the importance of slavery in a society; other uses, like household service, were considered to be of secondary importance. But this is unnecessarily restrictive. Without modern technological advances that provide fresh water, electricity for lighting and cooking, washing appliances for clothes and dishes and disposable nappies, an enormous quantity of labor was required to perform essential everyday activities, like cutting wood, drawing water and making bread; the various forms of the sexual exploitation of slaves were crucial parameters of the gender and sexual structures of ancient Greek societies; the employment of slaves by Greek states defined their character and activities. At the same time, the economic role of slavery did not take a single form, but a range of diverse forms with very different implications. We should therefore pay equal attention to all the diverse ways in which slaves were employed in ancient Greek societies; the variety of these uses enables us to escape from the structuralist assumptions that have dominated earlier approaches. Many of these uses were compatible with each other and even complementary; but they could also be contradictory and even incompatible. They could therefore generate important stress points and areas of conflict, while also providing slaves with opportunities that would otherwise have been impossible. To this end, we can

distinguish between different slaving strategies and examine the full range of strategies that co-existed within a single society.

We can distinguish between five major slaving strategies in the Greek world. A first set of strategies focused on the **extraction of labor**; within this set, we can further distinguish two subsets: the use of slave labor for *maintenance*, by employing slaves for the drudgery required for the everyday maintenance of households (cooks, cleaners, personal attendants, nannies), and the employment of slave labor for the *production of wealth* on rural estates, in workshops and mines. As we have seen, Greek households, even those of the very rich, usually employed only a few slaves. On the other hand, the Athenian mines employed thousands of slaves at their peak, while we know of workshops that employed tens of slaves. Our sources record nothing equivalent for Greek agriculture, but this seems to reflect the fact that even rich Greeks possessed a series of dispersed landholdings, rather than large unified estates. We should therefore expect that such kinds of landholdings required small group of slaves for their cultivation.

In this set of strategies, slaves usually worked in labor processes under the direct control of their masters. Given the unwillingness of free Greeks to be at the constant beck and call of a long-term employer, the practically exclusive use of slaves for household maintenance played a crucial ideological role in Greek societies, by supporting the illusion of citizen equality that was crucial in particular for democracies like Athens.²¹ Given the defining role of leisure for Greek social structures, strategies of labor extraction performed the crucial task of absolving masters and mistresses from the need to work to produce wealth and maintain households. Slavery was also crucial for gender structures: since respectable Greek women were supposed to avoid public spaces and stay indoors, the possession of slaves who could accompany their mistresses allowed mistresses to do things that otherwise would have been unacceptable.

Another set of slaving strategies aimed at **revenue extraction** rather than labor; in this set masters withdrew from the labor process and used slaves like other possessions and investments which brought revenue, such as real property or loans. We can again distinguish between two subsets. In the first subset masters *hired* their slaves to other people, who could not afford to buy their own slaves, or had short-term or temporary labor needs that made hiring preferable. In the second subset, masters allowed their slaves to *work on their own* as cultivators, artisans or traders, on condition that they surrendered part of their earnings. The strategies of revenue extraction were of crucial importance for all forms of Greek slave systems. Spartan citizens were obliged to live in Sparta, but the most fertile part of Spartan territory was Messenia, separated from Sparta by the Taygetos mountain range and difficult to access. As a result, Spartan masters were absentee landowners; this allowed their Messenian helots to effectively operate as dependent peasants, who lived in their own villages, organized the labor process on their own and surrendered only part of the crops to their masters.²² In the highly urbanized societies of the second group of slave systems, independent slaves played major roles as traders and artisans;

slave bankers were among the richest inhabitants of Athens. These slaves were relatively independent and were often indistinguishable from the free lower classes; they could often use their hard-won savings in order to enhance their living and ultimately buy their freedom.²³

A third slave strategy concerns **gratification**: the use of slaves to provide sensory pleasure in all its various forms. Gratification slaving involved musicians, singers, dancers, barbers, masseurs, hairdressers and cooks; but the most important form of gratification concerned sex. The sexual economy of Greek societies was organized on the basis of distinct gender roles. Respectable women could have legitimate access to sex exclusively through marriage; on the contrary, men could legitimately have sex outside marriage, as long as they refrained from having sex with respectable women. But women without honor were fully usable, and slaves constituted the overwhelming majority of women without honor. Furthermore, while girls were commonly married as soon as they reached puberty, men in Greek societies normally deferred marriage until their late twenties or thirties, when they would have received their inheritance and could support their families. As a result, men faced a window of opportunity between puberty in the late teens and marriage in the early thirties in which sexual access took place outside wedlock and was provided by women without honor.

The casual sexual exploitation of slaves by their masters was a ubiquitous feature of Greek societies; at the same time, the high levels of urbanization in the Greek world created the necessary population density for the emergence of brothels; spurred by the widespread availability of slaves and the gender prescriptions of Greek sexual economies, prostitution increased exponentially. The sexual exploitation of slaves fundamentally shaped how gender and sex operated in the Greek world. At the same time, the use of slaves for gratification also led to the creation of relatively stable relations between masters and female slaves (relations between mistresses and male slaves were considered beyond the pale). Concubinage was a common phenomenon. In the Homeric world, masters could recognize the children of their female slaves; this seems to have remained the case in certain Greek societies. But in most Greek societies the intervention of the political community curtailed or prohibited getting heirs through slaves; in Athens, masters could not recognize their slave progeny as legitimate heirs even if they wanted to.²⁴

The fourth set of strategies is the most paradoxical, for it employs slaves for **expertise, trust and authority**. Slaves were often employed as commercial agents and managers; given the limited scope of Greek legal systems for the delegation of authority among free people, slavery allowed masters to have full control over those that run their business interests. Slaving for expertise was also important for processes of knowledge transmission. In the absence of institutionalized systems of intergenerational training and knowledge transmission, like those of the medieval guilds, buying slaves and training them was a particularly efficient way of creating, maintaining and controlling a specialized workforce. While free trainees could move or become antagonists, trainers of

slave experts could control them in a much more guaranteed way.²⁵ Equally remarkable is how Greek states employed public slaves as clerks, bureaucrats and even policemen, like the 300 Scythian archers employed by Athens. The image of public slaves imposing order on citizens was something inconceivable in other slave systems, such as the US South. Public slaves offer a valuable window into Greek politics. In many societies the various groups of the state sector (bureaucrats, judges, policemen, the military) develop their own interests and are able to prioritize them over those of the citizenry as a whole; the use of public slaves allowed Greek states to eschew the development of a powerful bureaucracy, while also allowing states with high levels of citizen participation and magistrate turnover to maintain institutional know-how and continuity.²⁶

The final slaving strategy is that of **prestige creation** for their masters. This was certainly not unknown in the Greek world: a satirist describes how a man of petty ambition in Athens would buy an exotic Ethiopian slave to flaunt his putative wealth.²⁷ But in contrast to the huge slave retinues that were the necessary accompaniment of elite Romans in public, the role of slaving for prestige creation in the Greek world was highly circumscribed. Greek city-states carefully orchestrated how elite citizens could gain honor and prestige, primarily through acts of public service and munificence; slaving offered private wealth more influence in gaining honor than Greek communities were willing to accept. This is a good example of how slaving strategies allow us to explore the divergent anatomies of different ancient and modern societies.

As the above summary of Greek slaving strategies indicates, the experiences of Greek slaves could differ significantly.²⁸ There was a world of difference between the experiences of mining slaves, slave prostitutes, slave bankers, slave policemen and slave artisans who worked on their own. At the same time, slave experiences were also shaped by wider features of Greek societies, as well as by slave agency. Given that Greek slaves did not belong to a single racial group, it was usually impossible to tell apart slave and free persons by visual means, though there existed certain bodily characteristics that were more common among certain groups of non-Greeks, such as red hair, and could therefore make certain non-Greek slaves easily identifiable. At the same time, Greek cities, in particular from the later classical period onward, contained significant numbers of free immigrants from various parts of the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Accordingly, e.g., Athenians did not encounter Thracians solely as slaves; the Thracian presence in Athens included free immigrants, freedpersons and slaves. The co-existence of free and enslaved members of the same ethnic and cultural groups had important implications for the shaping of slave identities and ethnicities in the Greek world.²⁹

Another factor that often complicated things was the absence of labor divisions based on status; with the exception of household service and mining, which were exclusively performed by slaves, in all other professions and tasks free and slave laborers worked side by side. It was thus difficult to tell the status of an individual solely on the basis of profession or living standards,

as many independent slave artisans or traders lived in conditions identical to those of their free counterparts.³⁰ As one posh ancient author commented, in Athens one should avoid hitting a person because he looked poor, as it was impossible to know whether he was slave or free, and the citizen poor had power because of the democratic political system.³¹ Finally, from the later classical period we see the explosion of associations based on common adherence to a cult, ethnicity or profession. While most members of these associations were free, they could also include freedpersons and even slaves. These mixed associations created networks of solidarity and support that could often play a crucial role in slave strategies for improving their lot.³² As a result of all these factors, passing as free was an important strategy adopted by slaves in the Greek world. In many cases, this was not an attempt to flee from the master, but merely an effort to avoid prejudice and mistreatment from third parties. It is telling in this respect that slaves with “white collar” jobs tended to have standard Greek names shared by the citizens and therefore indistinguishable, while slaves with “blue collar” jobs often bore foreign or ethnic names that made them immediately distinguishable.³³

EXITS

There were diverse forms of exits from slavery across the Greek world; they include manumission, either by individual masters for their own reasons or through state intervention for public reasons; and, finally, individual/collective flight or rebellion. Greek communities employed different forms of manumission: in some communities, manumissions were private and informal, requiring little more than a unilateral verbal utterance by the master in the presence of witnesses, or a written will. In other communities we find the phenomenon called “sacral manumission”: the master formally sold the slave to a deity, which paid the master with money provided by the slave on condition that the slave was then manumitted. The origins and meaning of this practice are debated, but it is clear that the deity acted as the middleman that ensured the validity of the contract, as slaves strictly speaking could not contract with their own masters. We also encounter the phenomenon of masters consecrating slaves to deities; such slaves were strictly speaking not free, but the absence of a concrete human master meant that in practice consecrated slaves lived as freedpersons, merely offering their services to a local temple on festival days. While all these forms of Greek manumission were unilateral acts of the masters, we also encounter Greek communities in which communal assent to private manumissions was required; in the most extreme case we know of, that of Sparta, manumission by masters for private reasons was prohibited, and only the state could manumit helots for public purposes.³⁴

How did slaves manage to gain their freedom? In certain cases, masters decided to manumit their slaves free of charge or for a nominal price. This was usually the result of strong interpersonal relations between masters and slaves: manumission was a reward for long and faithful service, or because

masters wanted to liberate their slave concubines and their progeny. But in most cases slaves paid for their freedom, often more dearly than simply in monetary terms; one of the most heartbreaking aspects of Greek manumission is the obligation of female slaves to give birth and surrender to their masters a set number of children who would take their place in slavery. The ability of slaves to procure money for their manumission highlights two things: on the one hand, the significance of slaving strategies for revenue, trust and expertise, which created independent slaves who could keep part of their earnings; on the other hand, the significance of networks and communities that involved slaves, freedpersons and free people, who allowed slaves to borrow or pool resources in order to gain their freedom.

What was the status of freedpersons in the Greek world? In the world depicted by Homer, incorporation of freedpersons in the free community appears relatively straightforward: Odysseus promises to reward his faithful slaves with land and wives, presumably indicating their full incorporation in the local community.³⁵ But archaic political processes started to change significantly the nature of community membership in the Greek city-states; gradually, citizenship became a highly codified status defined by the political community, bestowed through specific rituals and often requiring descent from both citizen parents. As a result, from the later archaic period freedpersons in most of the Greek world acquired the status of resident foreigners, if they chose to stay in the same place where they had lived as slaves. Like freeborn resident foreigners, freedpersons could occasionally gain citizenship for major benefactions to the city-state, but that was a very rare phenomenon. It is possible that in some communities of central and northern Greece in the Hellenistic period freedpersons could gain political rights alongside their manumission, though details are unclear.³⁶

A peculiar aspect of the status of Greek freedpersons is the practice of *paramone*. In a significant number of cases, manumitted slaves were obliged to remain (*paramenein*) with their former masters for a specified period of time or until the death of the latter; many manumission contracts explicitly state that former masters had the right to punish freedpersons as slaves, or even annul their manumission if they considered them ungrateful or insubordinate, while other contracts prohibit servile punishment and institute panels of arbitrators to settle disputes between former masters and people in *paramone*. Were people in *paramone* slave or free? The best answer seems to be that they were free in regard to everybody else, while their status vis-à-vis their former masters depended on the terms of their manumission, ranging from continuous servile subordination to free dependence.

Another important means of exit from slavery concerned the role of the political community. The Greek world was an anarchic geopolitical environment consisting of hundreds of small, medium and large city-states, in which warfare and civil war were ubiquitous phenomena. States could resort to public manumissions in order to enhance their manpower or mitigate a potentially lethal crisis; in 406 BCE the Athenians manumitted and even enfranchised

thousands of slaves in order to man a new fleet in a desperate but successful attempt to save their fleet from Spartan blockade. In 86–85 BCE Ephesos in Asia Minor, caught in the middle of the war between King Mithridates and Rome, resorted to manumitting public and private slaves in order to enhance its army and avoid the risk of city betrayal under siege. In wars between different communities or civil conflicts within the same community one or both sides could attempt to strengthen their side and/or destabilize the opposite side by inviting slaves to flee or rebel, promising freedom as a reward. A characteristic example is that of the civil war in Corfu in 427 BCE, when both democrats and oligarchs offered the rural slaves freedom for choosing their side; the majority of the slaves took the side of the democrats, a pattern that was repeated on other occasions as well.³⁷

The co-existence of hundreds of neighboring city-states and the ubiquity of war among them made flight relatively easy, as a different political authority existed just a few miles down the road. There was obviously no guarantee that slaves who flew to a different city would remain free there, rather than being enslaved by a different master, but it was often worth trying; in order to counter that threat, Greek cities often signed bilateral treaties for the mutual return of fugitives. The existence of communities of independent slaves and freedpersons in most urban communities could provide a safe environment for fugitives. Maroon communities were a common phenomenon in many areas of the New World, but we are ill informed about Greek examples. The most famous case is that of Drimacus, who led a maroon community in Chios, ultimately forcing the Chians to reach a *modus vivendi*, in which Drimacus was recognized as leader of a maroon quasi-state.³⁸

Slave revolts appear to be a rare phenomenon in the Greek world. Among the few examples, the best known is the revolt of the Messenian helots in the 460s BCE, with the rebels ultimately obtaining a truce allowing them to go into exile as free persons. The helots of Messenia were ultimately liberated in 368 BCE, when Thebes defeated Sparta and created an independent Messenian state. Helot revolts profited from the peculiar geopolitical setting of Sparta; none of its neighbors had a similar form of slave system, and they were willing therefore to encourage helot revolt without fearing the Spartans doing the same.

The Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE) offers a more common example of how slaves gained their freedom in mass numbers. In the early phase of the war, the Athenians occupied a fort in Spartan territory and encouraged the helots to flee; many did, and the Spartan fear of a wider revolt led them to agree to a humiliating treaty that ended the first part of the war. But the Spartans also decided to use thousands of helots as soldiers by promising them freedom, and these helot soldiers scored some of the most decisive Spartan victories. When the Spartans later in the war also occupied a fort in Athenian territory, thousands of Athenian slaves flew to them, although most of them did not gain their freedom in this way, but merely changed masters. This mass flight seriously debilitated Athenian fortunes; at the same time, thousands of

Athenian slaves gained freedom and even citizenship by joining the Athenian navy, while many others joined the movement that restored Athenian democracy in the aftermath of the war. Athenian slaves and Spartan helots did not act in defense of collective slave interests; different groups acted in different ways, according to circumstances and choices. But slave agency played a crucial role in the outcome of the war, and thousands of slaves gained their freedom in one way or another.

Slavery was a defining phenomenon of the history of Greek city-states. The diverse slaving strategies that co-existed in most Greek societies meant that slavery could be used for a variety of purposes, partly complementary, and partly contradictory. While Greek elites depended on slaves, substantial middling strata of Greek societies were also slaveholders; Greek civic institutions and the material culture of Greek consumer societies were fundamentally shaped by the ubiquity of slavery; the connectivity and market expansion of the first millennium BCE had slavery in its very core. At the same time, the processes in which slavery was inscribed could lead to very divergent outcomes among Greek slave systems. Studying the history of these diverse systems is a potent means of understanding the historicity of slavery as a global phenomenon.

NOTES

1. Moses I. Finley, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1980).
2. This is still the dominant approach in Keith Bradley and Paul Cartledge, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011).
3. David M. Lewis, *Greek Slave Systems in Their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c. 800–146 BC* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018); Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Historicising Ancient Slavery* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021).
4. For the concept of slaving and no-slaving zones, see Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, “Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era,” *Past & Present* 205, no. 1 (2009): 3–40.
5. Thucydides, *History*, 8.40.2.
6. Nemenja Vujčić, “A Numbers Game: The Size of the Slave Population in Classical Athens,” *Zbornik: Journal of Classical Studies* 23 (2021): 87–111.
7. Edward M. Harris, “Did Solon Abolish Debt-bondage?” *Classical Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2002): 415–30.
8. Vincent Gabrielsen, “Warfare, Statehood and Piracy in the Greek World,” in *Seeraub im Mittelmeerraum: Piraterie, Korsarentum und maritime Gewalt von der Antike bis zur Neuzeit*, ed. N. Jaspert and S. Colditz (Paderborn: Ferdinand Schöningh/Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 2013), 131–53.
9. *Poetae Melici Graeci* no. 909.
10. David M. Lewis, “Piracy and Slave Trading in Action in Classical and Hellenistic Greece,” *Mare Nostrum* 10, no. 2 (2019): 79–108.

11. Hans van Wees, "Conquerors and Serfs: Wars of Conquest and Forced Labor in Archaic Greece," in *Helots and Their Masters in Laconia and Messenia: Histories, Ideologies, Structures*, eds. N. Luraghi and S. Alcock (Cambridge, MA: Center for Hellenic Studies, 2003), 33–80.
12. Pierre Ducrey, *Le traitement des prisonniers de guerre dans la Grèce antique, des origines à la conquête romaine* (Paris: De Boccard, 1968); Anne Bielman, *Retour à la liberté: Libération et sauvetage des prisonniers en Grèce ancienne. Recueil d'inscriptions honorant des sauveteurs et analyse critique* (Athens: Ecole Française d'Athènes, 1994).
13. Xenophon, *Anabasis*, 7.3–4.
14. David M. Lewis, "The Market for Slaves in the Fifth-and Fourth-Century Aegean," in *The Ancient Greek Economy: Markets, Households and City-States*, eds. E. Harris, D. M. Lewis and M. Woolmer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 316–36.
15. Walter Scheidel, "Real Slave Prices and the Relative Cost of Slave Labor in the Greco-Roman World," *Ancient Society* 35 (2005): 1–17.
16. Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Historicising the Closed City," in *La cité interconnectée: transferts et réseaux institutionnels, religieux et culturels aux époques hellénistique et impériale*, eds. M. Dana and I. Savalli-Lestrade (Bordeaux: Ausonius, 2018), 43–57.
17. Winfried Schmitz, "Sklavenfamilien im archaischen und klassischen Griechenland," in *Kindersklaven-Sklavenkinder: Schicksale zwischen Zuneigung und Ausbeutung in der Antike und im interkulturellen Vergleich*, ed. H. Heinen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2012), 63–102.
18. Demosthenes, *Against Meidias*, 157–8.
19. Jason D. Porter, "Slavery and Athens' Economic Efflorescence," *Mare Nostrum* 10, no. 2 (2019): 25–50.
20. Siegfried Lauffer, *Die Bergwerkssklaven von Laureion, I-II* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1956).
21. Robin Osborne, "The Economics and Politics of Slavery at Athens," in *The Greek World*, ed. A. Powell (London: Routledge, 1995), 41–57.
22. Stephen Hodkinson, "Spartiates, Helots and the Direction of the Agrarian Economy: Towards an Understanding of Helotage in Comparative Perspective," in *Slave Systems Ancient and Modern*, eds. E. Dal Lago and C. Katsari (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 285–320.
23. Jason D. Porter, "The Apophora and the 'Leasing' of Property to Slaves and Manumitted Slaves in Classical Athens," *Historia* 70, no. 2 (2021): 185–205.
24. Edward E. Cohen, "Sexual Abuse and Sexual Rights: Slaves' Erotic Experience at Athens and Rome," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Sexualities*, ed. T. K. Hubbard (Chichester: Blackwell, 2013), 184–98.
25. Tracy E. Rihll, "Skilled Slaves and the Economy: The Silver Mines of the Laurion," in *Antike Sklaverei, Rückblick und Ausblick: Neue Beiträge zur Forschungsgeschichte und zur Erschließung der archäologischen Zeugnisse*, ed. H. Heinen (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 2010), 203–20.
26. Paulin Ismard, *Democracy's Slaves: A Political History of Ancient Greece* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).
27. Theophrastus, *Characters*, 21.4–5.
28. Hans Klees, *Sklavenleben im klassischen Griechenland* (Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1998).

29. Peter Hunt, "Trojan Slaves in Classical Athens: Ethnic Identity among Athenian Slaves," in *Communities and Networks in the Ancient Greek World*, eds. C. Taylor and K. Vlassopoulos (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), 129–54.
30. Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Free Spaces: Identity, Experience and Democracy in Classical Athens," *Classical Quarterly* 57 (2007): 33–52.
31. Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians*, 1.10.
32. Stéphanie Maillot, "Associations dites d'étrangers, clientèles et groupes de travail à l'époque hellénistique," in *Statuts personnels et main-d'œuvre en Méditerranée hellénistique*, eds. S. Maillot and J. Zurbach (Clermont Ferrand: Presses Universitaires Blaise-Pascal, 2021), 285–313.
33. Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Athenian Slave Names and Athenian Social History," *Zeitschrift für Papyrologie und Epigraphik* 175 (2010): 113–144.
34. Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz, *Not Wholly Free: The Concept of Manumission and the Status of Manumitted Slaves in the Ancient Greek World* (Leiden: Brill, 2005).
35. Homer, *Odyssey*, 21.209–16.
36. Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz, "Freed Slaves, Their Status and State Control in Ancient Greece," *European Review of History / Revue européenne d'histoire* 16, no. 3 (2009): 303–18.
37. Karl-Wilhelm Welwei, *Unfreie im antiken Kriegsdienst, I-III* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner Verlag, 1974–1988).
38. Sara Forsdyke, *Slaves Tell Tales and Other Episodes in the Politics of Popular Culture in Ancient Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012), 37–89.

FURTHER READINGS

- Bradley, Keith, and Paul Cartledge, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Forsdyke, Sara. *Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greece*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Garlan, Yvon. *Slavery in Ancient Greece*. Ithaca NY: Cornell University Press, 1988.
- Hodkinson, Stephen, Marc Kleijwegt, and Kostas Vlassopoulos, eds. *The Oxford Handbook of Greek and Roman Slavery*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016–present. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199575251.001.0001>.
- Hunt, Peter. *Ancient Greek and Roman Slavery*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2018.
- Ismard, Paulin. *La cité et ses esclaves: institution, fictions, expériences*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2019.
- Klees, Hans. *Sklavenleben im klassischen Griechenland*. Stuttgart: Steiner Verlag, 1998.
- Lewis, David M. *Greek Slave Systems in their Eastern Mediterranean Context, c. 800–146 BC*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- Taylor, Claire, and Kostas Vlassopoulos, eds. *Communities and Networks in the Ancient Greek World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015.
- Vlassopoulos, Kostas. *Historicising Ancient Slavery*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the Roman Empire

Noel Lenski

INTRODUCTION

The Roman Empire developed one of the largest and most economically and culturally integrated systems of slavery in world history. It thrived on a remarkably robust supply stream that included enslavement by birth, capture, sale from foreign and domestic sources, the reclaiming of exposed infants, and—in late antiquity—self-sale, child sale, and debt bondage. Enslavement was imposed upon people from all regions, inside and outside the empire, and was never inflicted exclusively on a particular racial or ethnic group. Those enslaved to Rome worked in agriculture, industry, service, and even knowledge production, allowing them to be the primary workforce behind the generation of elite wealth. Escape from slavery could at times involve resistance, including everything from open revolt to flight, but Roman society was also remarkably generous with manumission. This and many other features reflect a hybridity between ancient patterns of captive integration and modern habits of slave exclusion.

N. Lenski (✉)
Yale University, New Haven, CT, USA
e-mail: noel.lenski@yale.edu

ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

Roman slaving was practiced in a Mediterranean context where captive taking and slaveholding were nearly universal. From the Semitic and Greek peoples that populated the East, to the Germanic and Celtic peoples in the North and West, to the Phoenicians, Africans, and Egyptians in the South, slaving was an ancient and entrenched tradition before, during, and after the flourishing of the Roman Empire between the third century BCE and the fifth CE. Aware of this, the Romans enshrined it in the legal principles by which they structured their own practices. When Roman jurists described the legal basis on which an individual might enter slavery, they did so with reference to a bipartite division between the “law of all peoples” (*ius gentium*) and their own “civil law” (*ius civile*). The former included two of the most common ways to enter servile status, birth to a slave and captivity to the Romans in enemy combat. For the Romans, birth into slave status depended entirely on one’s mother, for the Romans followed the principle of *partus ventrem sequitur* (offspring follow the womb): an enslaved mother bore children who were slaves, while a free woman birthed free children, regardless of the status of the father. We have no quantifiable data to help us determine the relative importance of various channels into the Roman slave supply stream, but modern historians agree that birth was the biggest.¹

Nevertheless, captivity by all means played a crucial role in bolstering the enslaved population. Massive captive-taking events are recorded regularly in the sources, many of them so sizeable that they temporarily crashed prices on the slave market. This was largely a result of Rome’s repeated successes in large-scale combat against foreign enemies and the ruthless efficiency with which Roman armies disposed of enslaved persons into the market. Julius Caesar, one of Rome’s greatest conquerors, is said to have enslaved 1,000,000 Gauls in his sweeping campaigns in the territory of what is today France between 58 and 50 BCE; on a single day in 57 he sold 53,000 members of the Atuatuca tribe to slave dealers; and when he achieved victory at the Battle of Alesia in 52, he distributed one Gallic captive as plunder to each of his 80,000 soldiers.²

Indeed, the Roman Empire attracted captives from all across the Mediterranean—wherever Rome’s armies went, captives were generated for its markets. These could come in waves as individual territories or polities were integrated into the imperial machine: when Tiberius Sempronius Gracchus defeated the rebellious inhabitants of Sardinia in 177 BCE, he brought 80,000 captives into the markets, equal to as much as a ten percent of the Italian slave population at the time; Aemilius Paulus nearly doubled that number when he defeated the peoples of Epirus in north western Greece, bringing in 150,000 more.³ The trend continued as Rome shifted from a Republican democracy to an autocracy under the rule of an emperor in 31 BCE. To take just two examples, when Titus sacked Jerusalem in 70 CE, he carried off 97,000 Jews into

slavery; and Trajan's campaigns against the Dacians in what is today Romania probably generated at least 100,000 captives.⁴

Nor were all these captives put to work in menial labor, for the Romans were happy to employ victims of enslavement with skills in their respective fields of expertise. These included craftsmen, but also those trained in service professions such as medicine, architecture, or music. According to Pliny the Elder, the satyrist Publilius Syrus, the astronomer Manilius, and the grammarian Staberius Eros, each of whom had an important impact on Roman intellectual history in the first century BCE, all arrived in Rome on the same ship.⁵ If younger captives stood out for their aptitude, these might be trained in a profession rather than being sent directly to the fields. Two captive boys from the eastern kingdom of Parthia have left inscriptions confirming that one was trained as a treasurer, the other as a pedagogue to the imperial family.⁶

All of which is to say that Rome used slaving as part of a larger imperial apparatus for the integration of conquered peoples into its world system. As it expanded its territorial reach, it generated first captives from the territories it conquered and only later, through techniques of domination and pacification, provincial subjects. And neither provincials nor captives were entirely banished from the levers of power. They were instead absorbed—together with their skills and to some degree their customs. Roman captive-taking practices offer only one of the many examples we will see in this essay of the way in which Rome's slave system sits squarely between the fluid and integrative captive-taking systems that predominate in earlier, less complex societies and the more compartmentalized systems of permanent racial slavery that characterize the highly stratified and bureaucratized societies of modernity.

If birth into and captivity constituted the two primary ways into slavery through the *ius gentium*, the Roman *ius civile* was also remarkably efficient at enslaving people or perpetuating their enslavement. The most obvious example is sale, which allowed one master to transfer the body of a previously enslaved person to the ownership claims of another. We have over sixty slave sale contracts preserved on papyri (ancient Egyptian paper) and other writing materials, such as wood and leather, to serve as concrete evidence of such transfers.⁷ Because most of these documents were found in Egypt, where Greek was the official language of the eastern Empire, most are written in Greek, but we also have sale contracts in Latin and Syriac from find spots stretching from Britain to the Euphrates River.⁸ These generally list the ethnic origin of a slave and thereby confirm the staggering variety of regions from which Roman slave traders drew—literally every corner to which the empire stretched and also well beyond it. The most common and indeed the preferred origin was, however, the “homebred slave” (Greek *oikogenēs*; Latin *verna*).⁹ Birth into slavery generally rendered a person more docile and manageable than foreigners or captives because homebred slaves were acculturated in local customs and languages and had never known any life outside of enslavement. All of this means that the “slaving zones” that characterize modern slavery did

not exist for the Romans. The reach of their enslavements was coextensive with their world.

Insofar as the Roman Empire favored certain regions to supply it with slaves, these shifted over the seven centuries during which it remained at its zenith. Rome's expansion was always limited by military, financial, and above all technological constraints, which meant that the Empire was surrounded by ethnic and political others ("barbarians"), whom the Romans treated as a potential source of slaves. In the early first century BCE, when the Romans had conquered only a small slice of southern Gaul, they are said to have traded for slaves with the Celtic peoples who controlled the remaining Gallic territory at the rate of one amphora of wine per human.¹⁰ After Caesar's conquest of Gaul, these same Celtic people became Roman subjects, such that they were sending their own aristocrats to Rome to serve as senators by the mid-first century CE. The Roman frontier had simply expanded and continued to do so into the second century CE, allowing the Empire to draw on new peoples beyond its frontiers to supply it with slaves, usually by human trafficking among members of their own or neighboring tribes or polities: *Scotti* (Irish) and *Picti* (Scots) in Britain; Frisians and Alamanni along the Rhine; Sarmatians and Goths on the Danube; Armenians and Arabs on the eastern frontier; Nubians and Gaetulians in Africa. These were transported, usually on foot, shackled together at the neck or ankle, over the hundreds or even thousands of disorienting miles to their new life as slaves to a foreign empire (Fig. 5.1). We also have textual and archaeological evidence for slave markets where they were resold. The city of Rome had markets in the Saepta Julia and near the Temple of Castor, but markets are also attested in most major cities of the Empire. The Aegean island of Delos—to which Rome had granted free-port status—became the marketplace par excellence, leaving us abundant textual and archaeological testimonies to its role as a trafficker of some 10,000 humans per day.¹¹

The Romans also felt comfortable enslaving at least some of those whom they regarded as provincial subjects. Here it is crucial to note that, as the Empire expanded and incorporated new territories, it did not instantly grant all subjects Roman citizenship. This was a privilege reserved for assimilated members of the local elite, while others were offered more demanding pathways to citizenship, such as service in the Roman army. This meant that, up to the year 212 CE, when the emperor Caracalla issued a sweeping law granting citizenship to most of Rome's provincials, less than twenty percent of Rome's subjects had attained citizenship. In the centuries before this, Rome allowed its non-citizen subjects to follow their own regional legal systems, and many of these permitted enslavement from within their own culture—especially through the sale of children or debt servitude, neither of which were permitted to Roman citizens. Once enslaved, such provincials could be trafficked throughout the empire.

Furthermore, although the Romans of the High Empire never legally permitted the full enslavement of those born with citizenship, *de facto* they

Fig. 5.1 Grabstein aus Nickenich bei Mayen (etwa 50 n. Chr.): Das Relief zeigt einen Sklavenhändler, der zwei Sklaven an einer Kette führt, um sie zu verkaufen. Es ist im LVR-Landesmuseum in Bonn zu sehen. In regard to the use of pictorial material: use of such material in this press release is remuneration-free, provided the source is named. The material may be used only in connection with the contents of this press release. For pictures of higher resolution or inquiries for any further use, please contact the Press office publishing this directly. <https://idw-online.de/en/image?id=274118&size=screen>



allowed the enslavement of unwanted infants who were exposed by their parents after birth. In the absence of effective birth control and safe abortion, the Romans (whether citizens or provincials) dealt with unwanted pregnancies by carrying a fetus to term, then exposing the newborn—usually on town garbage heaps. Knowing this, profit-minded enslavers kept watch and snatched up such infants to raise to four or five years, then sell as slaves. We know this from multiple sources, but especially the more than forty surviving wetnurse contracts, which were written to pay lactating women to feed exposed infants for the first year or two of life and then surrender them as toddlers back to the enslaver so he could sell them. We have no statistical data, but it appears that child abandonment provided a major stream in the slave supply. Even the emperor Claudius ordered a child born to his wife Messalina exposed because he believed it to have been conceived by another man.¹²

Finally, it should be emphasized that the Roman Empire was incredibly long-lived and that its customs and laws changed over time. In the flourish years from the second century BCE till the second CE, legal protections for citizens were strong and prevented most from falling into slavery. But up to 326 BCE, the Romans had been happy to allow citizens to fall into debt bondage to one another, and this practice became common once again by the end of the fourth CE. Then too, the introduction of Christianity as the religion of the emperor after Constantine's conversion in 312 CE caused a shift in attitudes toward infant exposure and child sale. Prior to this, the Romans had left exposure unregulated but forbade the sale of recognized citizen children. Constantine began a process that reversed this formula, forbidding exposure but allowing parents to sell their children into long-term indenture—effectively servitude.¹³ This he did to protect parents from breaking the commandment against killing (exposure often led to death) and to protect children from being raised into a potential life of immorality, especially prostitution. So too the practice of punishing those who committed major crimes by enslaving them to the emperor (*servitus poenae*) was normal for the first five centuries but was eliminated in the sixth century by emperor Justinian, who based his decision on Christian concerns—because penal enslavement had the effect of terminating marriages.¹⁴

The practice of enslavement thus changed over time, adapting to shifting territorial, legal, political, and religious landscapes. But the Roman slave supply was always fortified with multiple streams which ensured that, even as the circumstances and attitudes that governed slaveholding shifted, supply always met demand. This fact is confirmed by the stability of documented slave sale prices throughout the imperial centuries, usually amounting to the equivalent of about five years of wages for a day laborer.¹⁵

EXPERIENCES OF ENSLAVEMENT—LABOR EXTRACTION

Historians and sociologists have long debated what constitutes “slavery”—how might it be defined? No consensus has yet been achieved, but two schools have circled around the definition provided by the 1926 League of Nations Charter (“Slavery is the status or condition of a person over whom any or all the powers attaching to the right of ownership are exercised”) and that first developed by Orlando Patterson in his sweeping 1982 monograph *Slavery and Social Death* (“[Slavery is] the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons”). I have argued that the fullest definition would combine both, for the former emphasizes the claims and commitments of the master class while the latter conveys a fuller understanding of the experience of the enslaved.¹⁶ Only in the dialectical space between these two actors—enslaver and enslaved—can the dynamic of slavery be understood.

With this as background, we can turn to experiences of enslavement as it was practiced by slaveholders, but also experienced by the enslaved. As we do so, we must once again emphasize that Roman society functioned in a way that

simultaneously shared elements of antiquity and modernity. Like some ancient societies, Roman society was at times ready to overlook the productive labor potential of the enslaved in order to capitalize on the numinous or entertainment value of their destruction. Into the middle Republican period, the Romans occasionally used captives for human sacrifice (usually by live burial) and they regularly forced enslaved persons to fight to the death in the arena in spectacles that originated as a kind of funerary rite but took on the primary role of entertainment by the mid-first century BCE. This pure wastage of human life and labor never fully ceased even in the later empire, for a selection of enemy captives was still regularly culled for spectacular execution in public arenas.

Yet the Romans also developed a remarkably complex economic system that bore many of the hallmarks of modernity. The Roman economy was highly monetized; it was supported by a sophisticated institutional framework at the level of commerce (banks and credit) and law (contracts and corporations); it developed specialized agricultural markets in trade commodities (wine and olive oil); it mass produced manufactured goods (tableware, metal work, oil lamps); it supported specialized service industries (transportation, entertainment, sex work); complex supply networks (capable of maintaining over a thousand cities); complex labor differentiation and social stratification; and remarkably developed engineering and technology (paved roads, aqueducts, watermills). The combination of these features allowed the Roman empire to compete with early modern west European economies in terms of GDP and demographic growth, which also meant that its slave system could operate with many of the same complexities of modern Atlantic slave systems—in fact, arguably with more, for the openness of the Romans to the enslavement of all peoples and races and their readiness to deploy slaves in nearly every economic sector allowed the Romans to develop what was arguably the most socially integrated slaving system in world history.

First and foremost, slave labor was deployed in primary industries, food production. This sector commandeered as much as ninety percent of the labor market, and slaves constituted the major force of production for members of the elite in the high Roman centuries. Thus, while subsistence farming continued among the free population throughout the Roman period, slaves represented the major producers of marketable surplus for elite landholders between the second century BCE and the second century CE. This we know above all from the four agricultural manuals surviving from the Empire, those of Cato (c. 160 BCE), Varro (c. 35 BCE), Columella (c. 60 CE), and Palladius (c. 470 CE). The first three are filled with advice on the management of slave labor on the farmstead, where slaves were organized into teams and placed under a manager (*vilicus*), who was himself usually a slave. All three manuals emphasize the need to keep enslaved workers busy throughout the year, but they focus above all on viticulture, which was particularly capital and labor intensive. Cato's manual also lays out the size of rations permitted to slaves: four and a half *modii* of wheat per month in summer as well as some wine

and olive relish for an average of c. 3500 calories per day. Cato also recommends each slave be given a new tunic, a blanket, and pair of wooden shoes every other year.¹⁷ These were, in other words, the barest of living conditions. Animal herding (sheep, goats, cattle) was also labor intensive and was thus regularly assigned to slaves. Herding slaves were, of course, given freedom of movement, and because of the danger of rustlers and predators, they were generally armed. This added to slave agency without generally threatening the system.

We can catch a glimpse of the lives of agricultural slaves from the archaeology. Members of the elite tended to hold land as a collection of geographically diverse estates, each equipped with a large multi-purpose villa structure. These were divided into large living areas for the owners, stalls for animals, functional rooms for food processing and storage, and a series of much smaller quarters (*cellae*) measuring 4–9 square meters for the slaves—probably one *cella* per slave family. Some, like Villa 34 at Gragnano, also had metal hooks affixed to interior walls where some slaves could be chained during sleeping hours. We learn from written sources that many such villae were also equipped with prison cells (*ergastula*) in which to pen slave workers, although archaeological examples have not been found.

It is important to bear in mind that enslaved persons were never the only labor source for any given economic sector. The size of the enslaved labor force varied over time but also geographically, with high-imperial Italy being the period and place of most intensive slave use. Estimates of the percentage of enslaved persons on the peninsula in this period have ranged as high as 35 percent, but most recently these have been revised downward to 15–25 percent (about 1–1.5 million persons from a total of 6–7 million).¹⁸ The only part of the empire where we can begin to assemble firmer numbers is Egypt, where it has been shown from extant census declarations that about 11 percent of the population was enslaved.¹⁹ This was perhaps representative of other imperial provinces, which, as mentioned earlier, tended to structure their societies and economies as they had before the Romans arrived. Thus, in Asia Minor (modern Turkey) or Syria, where elites had tended to work their estates using free (or semi-dependent) tenants in Hellenistic times, this type of production prevailed. The same held of North Africa, which has been shown always to have relied more heavily on free tenant labor rather than slaves throughout the Roman period.²⁰ This was also true because of variability in crop production in different regions. North Africa, for example, was climatically suited to oleiculture, which tended to be less labor intensive and relied mostly on the development of new tree stocks, which took more time than effort and was thus best suited to free tenants. Similarly, cereal cultivation was demanding, but only in the seasons of plowing and harvesting. This meant that grain crops could be put in by relatively small teams of enslaved plowmen and farmers, then taken off by hired teams of harvesters each fall. Enslaved persons were thus one source of labor for elite surplus production, surely the most important one in High Imperial Italy, but not necessarily so in other places

or periods. Already in the second century CE we learn of grand Italian landholders using a mix of tenant and enslaved laborers, and by the fourth century the imperial government tilted the balance in favor of the latter. Beginning in the 320s, the emperor Constantine permitted landowners to bind their tenants (*coloni*) to the plots of land on which they had been born. This may initially have represented an effort to protect tax revenues by eliminating the mobility of taxpayers, but over the course of the fourth century the “bound colonate” came to represent a third status between free and slave and to supplant slave labor on larger estates.²¹

Enslaved persons were also employed in secondary industries, the manufacture of durable and consumable goods. These included trade commodities such as metal wares, clay lamps, and table wares. The last is particularly well attested archaeologically, allowing us to trace both shifts in the centers of production and networks of distribution. Much of the Mediterranean in Roman times preferred to eat and drink from “red slipware” vessels, also known as *terra sigillata*. These were mass produced to high-standards using clay molds and then transported throughout the Mediterranean basin via water transport on seas or rivers. Production was initially concentrated in Italy, then moved to Gaul in the late first century CE, and shifted again in the third to North Africa. Workshops employed up to sixty slaves each, but normally tended to function with ten to twenty. The material excavated from La Grafe-senque in Gaul is particularly well studied and offers rich testimony to the potters involved, who proudly signed their wares.²² Yet the material from La Graufesenque makes clear that free laborers were also involved in pottery production. Indeed, while some industries relied heavily on slave labor, mining for example, others appear to have been predominated by free workers, especially building construction.²³ Enslaved persons were also heavily involved in the processing and production of consumables. Baking offers rich testimony. Because watermills only came into use in the second century CE, grain processing was highly labor intensive, involving the turning of heavy horizontally rotating stone mills that required tremendous effort on the part of animals or humans. The second century BCE comic playwright Plautus often has enslaved characters lament the possibility of being relegated to a bakery, and the second century CE novelist Apuleius famously depicts a troop of emaciated slaves pushing a grain mill with their whip-scarred bodies.²⁴ But we also know that a fair number of enslaved bakers eventually attained freedom, and some went on to become owners and managers of their own bakeries and to amass giant fortunes. The star example is Marcus Vergilius Eurysaces, a freedman of first century BCE Rome who gained enough wealth as a baker to construct a gigantic (10 meters tall) monument for himself just outside the city gates fashioned in the shape of a bread oven.²⁵ Baking was thus quintessentially Roman in its approach to labor, for it entailed the violent professional induction of enslaved laborers, some of whom then escaped from their enslavement to enrich themselves using the professional skills they had learned.

Slaves were also involved in “tertiary” or service industries. Elite self-construction in the Roman world hinged upon the control of enslaved bodies that could be deployed to assist, accompany, curate, and enhance the lives and prestige of slave owners. Many of the tasks moderns accomplish with technology were more labor intensive in antiquity, which meant that those with ambitions to “live well” chose to exploit enslaved persons to do so. Elite houses had enslaved cooks, housekeepers, chamber servants, doorkeepers, watchmen, table servants, silver polishers, lamplighters, etc. This we know from their funerary inscriptions, sometimes preserved in the family *columbaria* of Rome’s super elite. These include the empress Livia (59 BCE–29 CE), whose cadre of enslaved workers included at least 49 discreet kinds of operatives, among them hairdressers (*ornatrices*) and a pearl-keeper (*margaritarius*).²⁶ Enslaved personnel also shouldered the burdens of child-rearing as wetnurses (*nutrices*), nannies (*tattae*), and educators (*paedagogi*).²⁷ Household slaves also played an important role in the daily rituals of the elite. Each time they went to the public baths, wealthy slaveholders would bring a large entourage of slaves who could carry their bathing implements, or wash and massage them. On such trips the slaveowner regularly traveled in a litter (*lectica*) born upon the shoulders of as many as eight specialized carrier slaves (*lecticarii*).

Finally, in contrast with most modern slave systems, the Roman Empire regularly employed slaves in quaternary industries, that is to say knowledge production and curation. Slaves served regularly as doctors, midwives, architects, astrologers, secretaries, accountants, property managers, business managers, ship captains, etc. Some of this arose from the reality, already discussed, that the Romans gladly capitalized on the skills and training of enslaved persons in any economic sector. It also arose from the fact that Roman law—like most premodern legal systems—had difficulty conceptualizing the assignment of agency to third party actors: a person was responsible for their own dealings, and these responsibilities were not easily transferred to an agent in ways that left the principal in an organizational chain legally liable. But a workaround was provided by enslaved persons, who were considered an extension of their master’s legal personality.²⁸ The same legal fiction also led to the deployment of an imperial bureaucracy staffed by the emperor’s own slaves (*servi Caesaris*), who performed most managerial and secretarial functions of state for the first century of the Empire before being replaced by freeborn bureaucrats.²⁹ The same was true of individual cities, including Rome itself, which owned their own teams of slaves (*servi publici*) to perform tasks ranging from street sweeping and aqueduct maintenance to bookkeeping and accounting.³⁰

Particularly prized among household and imperial staffs were eunuchs, males castrated in childhood to serve as household attendants. Castration itself was distasteful to the Romans such that more than one emperor sought to forbid it by law, but the Roman appetite for eunuch servants meant that the practice continued inside the empire, and where supplies fell short, eunuchs

were imported from foreign markets.³¹ Eunuchs were especially prized as chamber servants since they could not pose a threat to the reproductive capacities of the household.

As this discussion indicates, the sexuality of enslaved persons was always a primary concern and will be discussed in greater detail below. In regard to labor output, however, enslaved persons were also regularly deployed as prostitutes. Evidence for prostitution abounds in all periods of Roman history, and particularly from the first century BCE through the third CE. The most vivid testimony comes from the city of Pompeii which had an estimated 35 brothels to service a town of 10,000 persons.³² The use of female sex workers by male clients was greatly encouraged by Roman marriage customs, which tended to favor early first marriage for females (ages 12–18) and later for males (ages 20–25). Male surplus sexual energy in the years of adolescence and early adulthood was thus channeled to sex workers, and the problem was only exacerbated by marriage regulations introduced by the emperor Augustus, which strictly punished illicit extra-marital sex. But there were no legal consequences for males fornicating with prostitutes, whether free or enslaved, and the profits to be made led masters regularly to exploit the bodies of their enslaved females—and males—as sources of income.³³

EXPERIENCES OF ENSLAVEMENT—VIOLENT DOMINATION

If the discussion thus far has focused on the use of slave bodies to perform labor services, we must still explore the question of the experience of enslavement by those who endured it as a regime of physical, social, and psychological repression. This problem was omnipresent, for even if some of the enslaved persons discussed above were at times able to escape their fetters and sometimes to benefit from the training or status imparted to them while enslaved, there was never a slave in the Roman Empire who did not experience slavery as a relationship of violent domination, natal alienation, and general dishonor. The final example in the previous section offers excellent proof of this concept. While some enslaved female sex workers gained fame as professionals and were even rewarded with freedom and wealth, they were never able to escape the anguish of a life of serial assault and the stigma of enforced bodily exploitation imposed on them by the master class.

Indeed, sexual assault was a regular experience for Roman slaves, both male and female, whether or not they were exploited in the sex trade. Owners of enslaved persons could and did have sex with them as they wished with no legal consequences. Romans of the means were thus less likely to use public prostitutes than simply to purchase sex slaves for their own exclusive exploitation. This had the consequence that male masters fairly commonly freed and married their slaves, a phenomenon well attested in funerary epigraphy and one that further points to the integrative role enslavement sometimes played.³⁴ Sex between female masters and male slaves was generally stigmatized, though it too is attested, and some classes of elite male slaves, especially slaves owned

by the emperor, are known to have been sought as marriage partners by free women. Sexual abuse was also common with same sex partners, particularly male masters who sexually abused their male slaves. This was especially common with male youths, who were often expected to grow their hair long and depilate body hair, sometimes well after the onset of puberty, in order to be ogled and sexually assaulted by their master and his friends (Fig. 5.2). The slave body, male and female, was thus a target for masters, who feared no consequences for what would today be considered felony behavior.

The bodies of enslaved persons suffered domination not just as objects of sexual exploitation but also in myriad other ways. The most basic of these was hunger, for food was always used as a tool of control. We have already seen that Cato prescribed set rations for his agricultural slaves, and other sources report that starvation was used to punish uncooperative slaves.³⁵ The sources also confirm that the food given to slaves was distinctly inferior to that eaten by their masters (coarse bread, sour wine, table scraps). The hyper-frugal Cato recommended selling older slaves or otherwise getting them off the books since they could no longer earn their keep with their labor power, and some owners are known to have abandoned their slaves on the Tiber Island if they regarded them as too sick to survive without the expense of a doctor's visit—leading the emperor Claudius to allow any such abandoned slave to go free if they survived their illness and abandonment.³⁶ Slaves who were inclined to flee or whose behavior threatened or displeased a master could be bound with shackles and chains, a regular feature of the archaeological record. And those who fled habitually were often tattooed on the face so they could be identified at a glance and returned. After Constantine forbade this practice, the Romans turned instead to slave collars, permanently bonded to the neck with dog-tags reading “Hold me for I am in flight.”³⁷

Above all, however, slave bodies were tortured and physically abused, even unto death, with no consequences for masters. Plautus' second century BCE plays regularly feature slaves terrified over an impending whipping, a trope that was meant to elicit laughs from the audience. Similarly disturbing insouciance about physical abuse is found in the epigrams of the first century CE poet Martial: “You think me cruel and too fond of my stomach, Rusticus, because I beat my [enslaved] cook on account of a dinner. If that seems to you a trivial reason for lashes, for what reason then do you want a cook to be flogged?”³⁸ And assaults were often much worse than a beating. The physician Galen speaks of his experience of masters, including his own mother, biting their slaves or gouging out their eye with a writing stylus.³⁹ Ultimately, the master could even kill his slaves with impunity. This he sometimes did by contract, especially through the brutal punishment of crucifixion. An inscription of Puteoli (modern Pozzuoli) lays out prices set by a company that specialized in torturing and crucifying slaves on contract, allowing the master to hire out this messy and physically demanding affair to specialized professionals.⁴⁰ Here again Constantine became uneasy with this level of violence and issued a law forbidding the deliberate killing of slaves in 319 CE, but in a



Fig. 5.2 Bronze image of a nude ephebe from Xanten. The boy, who would have carried an actual tray, is shown long-haired and garlanded with his nude body right at the end of prepubescence. Berlin, Staatliche Museen, Antikensammlung, Sk. 4. Bildarchiv Preussischer Kulturbesitz/Art Resource, NY

subsequent law he granted tremendous leeway for masters who happened to kill a slave in the course of “corrective punishment.”⁴¹

Even when slaves were not openly abused, they lived in constant fear of violence. They also lived in a world of “natal alienation,” which meant that they were permanent outsiders, excluded from civic or political rights and privileges, excluded from control over their own birth families and offspring, and excluded from final control over their very bodies and personhood. Their

names could be assigned to them by a master and could be changed at any time, particularly when they were sold to a new master. Their children could be exposed or sold by their master at will. And they themselves could be liquidated for their cash value at any moment. We have evidence of this process from multiple sources which reveal enslaved persons intended for sale were usually stripped down to a loincloth, displayed on a raised platform (*catasta*), made to wear a garland if they were war captives and/or marked with chalk on their feet if they were imported from overseas, their “defects” (disabilities, diseases, habits) were publicly proclaimed on placards hung round their necks, and they were subject to humiliating physical inspections by potential buyers (Fig. 5.3).⁴² They were, in other words, treated in the manner of livestock at market, with all of the attendant dehumanization and degradation.

Despite the repression inherent in this system, many enslaved persons managed to salvage a remarkable degree of agency in their own lives. Much of this occurred within the context of the paternalistic framework established by the master class, which offered a clear if not always reliable set of pathways to recover personal subjectivity. Roman masters considered slaves part of their *familia*, a word which included not just the nuclear family but also its enslaved dependents. As such the Romans associated their slaves with children, often referring to them as “boys” and “girls” (*pueri, puellae*), granting rights of agency (noted above) similar to those enjoyed by children, and offering both slaves and children the right to control some property in quasi-ownership—*peculium*, which was wealth over which they could dispose even if the father/master claimed bare ownership of it. This last in particular encouraged productivity, self-expression, and sometimes even freedom, albeit on terms ultimately controlled by the master. Here again, we see a system poised between the assimilative practices of captive-taking societies and the capitalistic practices of modern chattel slavery, for masters did allow slaves to amass



Fig. 5.3 Tombstone of Capua depicting the sale of an enslaved person, stripped and standing on a *catasta* with auctioneer (winged, to the right) and buyer, late first century CE. G. Fittschen Neg. D-DAI-Rom 1983VW1305)

fortunes large enough to buy their own freedom and even the freedom of their loved ones—spouses, children, parents, friends. And yet, even these freed-persons (*liberti*) were bound to offer obedience and often labor services to their former owner—their *patronus*, a word derived from the word for father. Within this framework, we find numerous instances of enslaved persons who embraced the profession assigned to them wholeheartedly and made it part of their identity, so much so that, apart from their name, their profession often constitutes their main or only identifier in the funerary inscriptions they have left.⁴³ Slaves also formed family groups of their own which, while not recognized by law, represented a reality of their humanity that masters permitted and even encouraged.

But it is by no means the case that all slaves chose to operate within the guardrails established by the master class. This was in part because the actual living and working circumstances created for slaves only sometimes conformed to the ideal presented in the previous paragraph. Much depended on the temperament of any given master, but also on the structure of the work regime, which sometimes favored coercion, sometimes incentives. In less skilled professions, chief among them agriculture, coercion was the default, which meant that work regimes could be incredibly harsh and could foster resistance and even revolt. Three large-scale slave uprisings erupted in the late Roman Republic, the first two overrunning Sicily in 135–132 and 104–101 and the third rampaging through Italy in 73–71, the famous Spartacus revolt.⁴⁴ All three necessitated the commissioning of full-scale Roman armies, thus showcasing the fact that Roman slavery was anything but a benign institution. Nor was revolt the only option for slaves to resist the hegemony of Roman slave society. Maroons of escaped slave brigands are attested across the Mediterranean, most famous among them that of Bulla Felix, who is reported to have sent a message to the emperor Septimius Severus, “Feed your slaves so that they may not turn to brigandage.”⁴⁵ Roman slaves are also known to have murdered individual masters, a reality which led the Romans to issue a law ordering the execution of all slaves present in a household if any one of them murdered the master.⁴⁶ At most times, however, slaves resisted their masters in quieter ways: shirking their work, wandering off for long periods, and damaging or stealing the master’s property.⁴⁷

Roman slavery was thus fundamentally a system of domination and natal alienation, equipped with guardrails and safety valves, but never far from raw aggression. Chief among the mechanisms for relieving tension was Rome’s practice of relatively frequent manumission, but there were also structures of paternalism that granted enslaved persons some degree of agency in their lives even without achieving freedom. But the violence at the core of the system was always evident and made it such that Rome’s slave system could never be characterized as humane. It was the enslaved themselves who had to assert, uphold, defend, and recapture their humanity, at times through calculated cooperation, at others through resistance and open revolt.

EXITS FROM SLAVERY

It is a sad reality that the most common exit from bondage for those enslaved to the Romans was death. For most this meant natural death, often due to overwork or abuse, but some enslaved persons chose to hasten death's approach by taking their own lives. Seneca reports that one captive chose to avoid being forced to fight in the arena by suffocating himself with a toilet sponge and another by inserting his head into the spokes of the oxcart on which he was being transported.⁴⁸ Another escape route from slavery was flight. This was common in Roman society and was assisted by the relatively undeveloped systems of communication available in antiquity. In the absence of printing presses and a public postal system (let alone wireless communication networks), it was more complicated for masters to track down escaped slaves, but this did not stop them from trying, often with the support of the state. We have, for example, a series of letters from the politician Cicero begging friends to help him find and return a person named Dionysius over whom he claimed ownership and who had fled his household, stealing a number of Cicero's books on his way.⁴⁹ In the imperial period, most cities had some sort of public police force one of whose major tasks was to track down and capture runaway slaves (*fugitivi*).⁵⁰ We have already seen that tattooing and collaring were also common safeguards, but the collective weight of the evidence indicates that flight was common, and many surely managed to escape enslavement permanently.

The only legitimate means out of slavery was, however, manumission. We have already indicated that this was common in Roman society, especially when compared to other slave cultures, like those of the Atlantic world. Attempting to assign numbers and percentages is difficult given the nature of our evidence, but careful analysis of the sources (especially inscriptions) points to remarkably high rates of manumission. Perhaps more than 30 percent of urban slaves above the age of 25 could have expected to be given freedom, and many have argued the numbers were even higher.⁵¹

The openness of the system to manumission can also be measured in the variety of ways it could be achieved, ways which were adapted and shifted over the course of the Roman centuries. Manumission is perhaps best described as a formal ending to natal alienation and thus integration of the formerly enslaved into the enslaving society as a member with subjective rights. In early Roman society, this happened by literally enrolling a slave into the formal census roles and thereby rendering them a Roman citizen. Of itself this is remarkable since most slave societies never permit this level of integration, but here too we find Rome's liminal position between earlier captive-taking societies, which were strongly inclined to the full integration of the formerly enslaved, and modern societies, which have tended to resist it. The Romans also permitted a state official or magistrate to manumit a slave in a formal ceremony called *vindicta*, which was based on transactions of sale and thus emphasized the property aspect of slavery, and which also conferred citizen

status. Over time, the Romans came to practice “informal” modes of manumission such as freeing a slave before a group of friends or by a letter, attesting to a desire for streamlining of the formal processes—and for public display. But the emperor Augustus cracked down on informal modes in the first century BCE and imposed rules excluding informally manumitted persons from full citizenship. In the fourth century CE, a new mode arose, “manumission in church,” which was instituted by Constantine and also granted full citizen status but incorporated manumission into Christian ceremonial, thereby elevating it to the level of a “charitable act.”⁵²

Masters were motivated to manumit slaves for a variety of reasons. These included social pressure, for Roman society had a stated “preference for freedom” (*favor libertatis*) which played itself out in law and practice. It was thus a matter of prestige to manumit slaves, particularly in one’s will—a practice so common that it too was restricted under Augustus, to no more than 100 slaves per decedent. Female slaves were often manumitted if they produced at least four viable offspring, thereby reproducing their labor power since all such children would have been born to slavery. Often loyal and productive slaves could expect manumission by a certain age, c. 25–30, although this was never guaranteed, and some made agreements with their masters to purchase their freedom using money they had saved in their *peculium*. In every instance these freedmen remained connected to their former masters through their family names, which were always those of the *patronus*, and they were also bound to their former enslavers in other ways. We have already seen that they owed the *patronus* obedience and labor services, and most also owed part of their inheritance. By the generation following, however, the children of freedmen had no further restrictions or obligations—even if they too retained the *patronus*’ family name. This meant that the children of freedmen could and did sometimes attain quite a lofty status—at least two children of freedmen became emperors, Macrinus and Diocletian.⁵³

Exits from slavery were thus in part controlled by slaves, when these fled or otherwise resisted through revolt or suicide. More commonly, however, they were governed by the master class, which doled out manumission liberally but also in calculating fashion to serve as an incentive and a mechanism of control which could drive enslaved persons toward cooperation and eventually assimilation into their hegemonic system.

CONCLUSION

Roman slavery was thus a peculiar institution. Because Rome was an ancient society but also a remarkably precocious one, its slaving practices show traces both of much older patterns and of quite modern ones. Modern are Rome’s highly specialized and economically integrated uses of enslaved workers across labor sectors and its ability to convert slave power into money capital through rationalist investment and profit accumulation. Ancient are its tendencies to integrate enslaved persons into family and social structures and its readiness

to assimilate the enslaved (almost) fully into the dominant culture. Pervasive throughout the system were the unmistakable hallmarks of all slave systems, violent domination, and natal alienation. These realities were crucial to the maintenance of Rome's truly colossal slaving apparatus. Growing out of the Empire's inherently militaristic ethos, Roman slaving flourished in an environment where violent power could be refined, controlled, and apportioned into quanta of domination that enmeshed not just the enslaved but also the enslavers in a nearly unbreakable social cage.

NOTES

1. Walter Scheidel, "The Roman Slave Supply," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 2, eds. K.R. Bradley and Paul Cartledge (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 287–310.
2. Plutarch, *Life of Caesar*, 15; Caesar, *Gallic Wars*, 2.33; 7.89.
3. Livy 41.28.9; 45.34.3–7; Plutarch, *Life of Aemilius*, 29.4–5.
4. Josephus, *Jewish Wars*, 6.410; cf. Keith R. Bradley, "On Captives under the Principate," *Phoenix* 58 (2004): 298–318.
5. Pliny, *Natural Histories*, 35.199–201.
6. H. Dessau, *Inscriptiones Latinae Selectae*, nos. 1836; 1980.
7. J.A. Straus, *L'Achat et la vente des esclaves dans l'Égypte romaine: Contribution papyrologique à l'étude de l'esclavage dans une province orientale de l'empire romain* (München: K.G. Saur, 2004).
8. Syriac: *Dura Papyrus* no. 28. Latin: S. Riccobono, *Fontes Iuris Romani Ante-justiniani*, vol. III, nos. 87–89, 132, 134; R.S.O. Tomlin, "The Girl in Question": A New Text from Roman London," *Britannia* 34 (2003): 41–51.
9. Elisabeth Herrmann-Otto, *Ex ancilla natus: Untersuchungen zu den "hausgeborenen" Sklaven und Sklavinnen im Westen des Römischen Kaiserreiches* (Stuttgart: F. Steiner, 1994).
10. Diodorus Siculus, 5.26.2–3.
11. John Bodel, "Caveat Emptor: Towards a Study of Roman Slave-Traders," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005): 181–95.
12. Wetnurse contracts: Mariadele Manca Masciadri and Orsolina Montevecchi, *I contratti di balatico* (Milano: Tipolitografia Tibiletti, 1984). Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, 27.1. More on the importance of *expositi* in the supply stream at William V. Harris, "Demography, Geography and the Sources of Roman Slaves," *Journal of Roman Studies* 89 (1999): 62–75.
13. Judith Evans Grubbs, "Church, State, and Children: Christian and Imperial Attitudes toward Infant Exposure in Late Antiquity," in *The Power of Religion in Late Antiquity*, eds. Andrew Cain and Noel Lenski (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), 119–31.
14. *Novels of Justinian*, 22.8.
15. Kyle Harper, "Slave Prices in Late Antiquity (and in the Very Long Term)," *Historia* 59 (2010): 206–38.
16. Noel Lenski, "Framing the Question: What Is a Slave Society?" in *What Is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, eds. Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 15–57.

17. Ulrike Roth, *Thinking Tools: Agricultural Slavery Between Evidence and Models* (London: Institute of Classical Studies, 2007), ch. 2.
18. Walter Scheidel, "Human Mobility in Roman Italy, II: The Slave Population," *Journal of Roman Studies* 95 (2005): 64–79.
19. R.S. Bagnall and B.W. Frier, *The Demography of Roman Egypt* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 70–71.
20. Noel Lenski, "Peasant and Slave in Late Antique North Africa, c. 100–600 CE," in *Late Antiquity in Contemporary Debate*, ed. R. Lizzi Testa (Newcastle: Cambridge Scholars, 2017), 113–55.
21. See the studies in Domenico Vera, *I doni di Cerere: storie della terra nella tarda antichità (strutture, società, economia)* (Turnhout: Brepols, 2020).
22. Luciano Lazzaro, *Esclaves et affranchis en Belgique et Germanies Romaines, d'après les sources épigraphiques* (Paris: Belles Lettres, 1993), 419–25.
23. On mining: A.M. Hirt, *Imperial Mines and Quarries in the Roman World: Organizational Aspects 27 BC–AD 235* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010) 222–28, 271–78, 314–18. On building: P.A. Brunt, "Free Labour and Public Works at Rome," 70 (1980): 81–100.
24. Plautus: Amy Richlin, *Slave Theater in the Roman Republic: Plautus and Popular Comedy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017) 90–104. Apuleius, *Metamorphoses*, 9.12.
25. On baking see Jared T. Benton, *The Bread Makers: The Social and Professional Lives of Bakers in the Western Roman Empire* (Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), ch. 4.
26. Susan Treggiari, "Jobs in the Household of Livia," *Papers of the British School at Rome* 43 (1975): 48–77.
27. K.R. Bradley, *Discovering the Roman Family: Studies in Roman Social History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 37–102.
28. Jean-Jacques Aubert, *Business Managers in Ancient Rome: A Social and Economic Study of Institores, 200 B.C.-A.D. 250* (Leiden: Brill, 1994).
29. P. R. C. Weaver, *Familia Caesaris: A Social Study of the Emperor's Freedmen and Slaves* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972).
30. Alexander Weiss, *Sklave der Stadt: Untersuchungen zur öffentlichen Sklaverei in den Städten des römischen Reiches* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2004).
31. Helga Scholten, *Der Eunuch in Kaisernähe: zur politischen und sozialen Bedeutung des "praepositus sacri cubiculi" im 4. und 5. Jahrhundert n. Chr.* (Frankfurt: P. Lang, 1995).
32. Thomas A.J. McGinn, *The Economy of Prostitution: A Study of Social History and the Brothel* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2004).
33. Thomas A.J. McGinn, *Prostitution, Sexuality, and the Law in Ancient Rome* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998).
34. Matthew J. Perry, *Gender, Manumission, and the Roman Freedwoman* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Katharine P.D. Huemoeller, "Freedom in Marriage? Manumission for Marriage in the Roman World," *Journal of Roman Studies* 110 (2020): 123–29.
35. Richlin, *Slave Theater*, 126–36; Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425: An Economic, Social, and Institutional Study* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 236.
36. Plutarch, *Life of Cato*, 4.4–5; Suetonius, *Life of Claudius*, 25.2; Dio Cassius, 60.29.7.

37. Hugh F. Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery* (London: Duckworth, 2003), 217–40.
38. Martial, *Epigram*, 8.23.
39. Galen, *De propriorum animi cuiuslibet affectuum dignatione et curatione* [Kühn V. 17, 40–41].
40. François Hinard and Jean Christian Dumont, eds. *Libitina: pompes funèbres et supplices en Campanie à l'époque d'Auguste* (Paris: De Boccard, 2003).
41. *Theodosian Code*, 9.12.1–2.
42. Pliny, *Natural History*, 35.200; Aulus Gellius, 6.4.
43. Sandra R. Joshel, *Work, Identity, and Legal Status at Rome: A Study of the Occupational Inscriptions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992).
44. Theresa Urbainczyk, *Slave Revolts in Antiquity* (Stocksfield: Acumen, 2008).
45. Dio Cassius, 76.10.
46. Noel Lenski, “Violence and the Roman Slave,” in *The Topography of Violence in the Greco-Roman World*, eds. Werner Riess and Garrett G. Fagan (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2016), 275–98.
47. K.R. Bradley, *Slavery and Society at Rome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994), 107–31.
48. Seneca, *Letter*, 70.20–26.
49. Cicero, *Letters to Friends*, 5.9, 5.11.3, 13.77.3, and *Letter to his Brother Quintus*, 1.2.14.
50. Christopher J. Fuhrmann, *Policing the Roman Empire: Soldiers, Administration, and Public Order* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), ch. 2.
51. Henrik Mouritsen, *The Freedman in the Roman World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), ch. 5.
52. *Justinianic Code*, 1.13.1–2; Sozomen, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1.9; cf. Noel Lenski, “Constantine and Slavery: *Libertas* and the Fusion of Roman and Christian Values,” *Atti dell’Accademia Romanistica Costantiniana* 18 (2011): 235–60.
53. Macrinus: *Historia Augusta, Life of Macrinus*, 4.3. Diocletian: *Epitome de Caesaribus*, 39.1; Eutropius, 9.20.

FURTHER READINGS

- Andreau, Jean, and Raymond Descat. *The Slave in Greece and Rome*. Translated by Marion Leopold. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2011.
- Bradley, Keith R. *Slavery and Society at Rome*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994.
- . *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989.
- Bradley, Keith R., and Paul Cartledge, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Vol. 1: The Ancient Mediterranean World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Harper, Kyle. *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425: An Economic, Social, and Institutional Study*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Joshel, Sandra R. *Slavery in the Roman World*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010.
- Lenski, Noel, and Catherine M. Cameron, eds. *What Is a Slavery Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.

- Mouritsen, Henrik. *The Freedman in the Roman World*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Thompson, F. Hugh. *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*. London: Duckworth, 2003.
- Vlassopoulos, Kostas. *Historicising Ancient Slavery*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2021.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Injection: An Archaeological Approach to Slavery

Catherine M. Cameron 

INTRODUCTION

Orlando Patterson’s transformative global study of slavery opens with the observation: “Probably there is no group of people whose ancestors were not at one time slaves or slaveholders.”¹ The remainder of the book confirms the truth of this statement. People have been captured and enslaved everywhere, as far back in time as we can see. Yet, until relatively recently, these vast millions of enslaved people were largely forgotten. They were marginal in life and they became invisible in death. The role of archaeology is to recover peoples and cultures of the past, reconstruct their lifeways, and use those reconstructions to explore cultural development through time. Our understanding of the past is skewed, however, if we overlook a significant proportion of the past’s peoples—in fact, an entire category of people: the world’s slaves. Just as classicists, historians, and other scholars have awakened to the need to investigate slavery, archaeologists have become aware of the need to identify slaves in the archaeological record and explore their lives and the effects they had on the societies in which they toiled.

Finding slaves in the archaeological record first requires acknowledging that they existed and then devising methods to identify them. Slaves, like women and children, were invisible to archaeologists until relatively recently. Part of this obliviousness results from a remarkable period of forgetting that occurred

C. M. Cameron (✉)

Department of Anthropology, University of Colorado, Boulder, CO, USA

e-mail: catherine.cameron@colorado.edu

during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries as laws against slavery were enacted around the world. Where the presence of slavery was undeniable, as in the southern United States, there was an embarrassed silence. The world's most brutal slave regime was referred to as the South's "peculiar institution." It took the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s and the empowerment of African Americans to waken archaeologists to the potential of an archaeology of slavery.²

This injection reviews the lines of evidence that archaeologists are developing to identify these largely "invisible" people and explore the lives they lived. The discussion is organized by societal scale. The first section, on state-level societies, focuses on ancient Greece and Rome, emphasizing the paucity of archaeological study of slavery in classical societies. Classical scholars have been advised to look to the extensive archaeological study of the African diaspora, the best-studied slave population. Methods and examples from the American South and Caribbean are explored as a guide for archaeological study of classical societies. The second section explores recent work on the archaeology of slavery in small-scale societies.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SLAVERY IN STATE-LEVEL SOCIETY

There is little doubt that slaves existed in state-level societies from earliest times; many early states were built and operated using slaves. Slaves appear in early cuneiform tablets in Mesopotamia and they are depicted in bas relief at Angkor Wat. Slaves are characters in ancient Greek and Roman plays and were portrayed on Greek vases and on Roman mosaics and murals. Figurines of slaves are found in ancient China, sometimes in graves, where they served their master in the afterlife. Although they appear in art and literature, until the past few decades, slaves were rarely the subject of archaeological study in most parts of the world.

In contrast, in the American South archaeologists have studied slavery for more than sixty years. The Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s, historic preservation legislation, and the involvement of African-American organizations and individuals combined to increase awareness of the African-American past and the role that archaeology can play in recovering that past.³

Classical Archaeology

Texts describing slaves and images of slaves found on pottery decorations, murals, sculptures, and more make clear that slaves were numerous in both ancient Greece and Rome. Nevertheless, archaeological studies of slavery in the classical world are not well developed. This is in part because classicists see textual evidence as more valuable and material evidence of slaves difficult to identify.⁴ Human remains can provide evidence of slave status, as with the two men discovered at Pompeii in 2020.⁵ The younger man's body showed

evidence of hard work and the older man's did not; they were assumed to be slave and master.

In spite of the obvious presence of slaves, efforts to identify slave dwellings have met with difficulty. At times, structures have been proposed as slave houses based on their location or layout, but there proves to be little confirmatory evidence. For example, Greek agricultural sites often have a rectangular or circular tower which has been purported to be an accommodation for female slaves based on only a single text that mentions their use for that purpose. The island of Delos was well-known as a major slave market in the first few centuries B.C. and had large estates worked by slaves. Small cell-like lower-story rooms in buildings on these estates have been suggested as slave quarters with the further assumption that males and females were spatially separated, but there is no material evidence that supports this suggested use.⁶ Many slaves are known to have lived and worked at the Greek mines of Attica making this an obvious place to find evidence of slave lives. Given the likelihood that slaves were procured from distant places, pottery and habitations in this mining region might logically have been made in the style of the areas from which slaves came.⁷ Yet this proved not to be the case. It is almost certain that slaves were present at the settlements near the mines of Attica, but to date there is little supporting material evidence.

Material evidence for slaves during the centuries of the Roman Republic and Empire is somewhat greater, but not robust. Recent excavations in a suburb of Pompeii have uncovered a small, cramped room that excavators interpret as slave quarters; it had three beds, two adult sized and one apparently for a child.⁸ Texts report underground slave prisons called "*ergastula*" where slaves could be held, often in chains, and sometimes were worked there. These structures were described in texts as semi-subterranean with high barred windows, but rooms fitting this description have rarely been found.⁹ Other material evidence of slaves, found during the time of the Roman Empire, are slave collars.¹⁰ These objects involved a metal collar that fit around a slave's neck and was inscribed with the slave's name and instructions to hold or return them if found; alternately the collar was uninscribed and used to suspend a small metal plate (*bullae*) on which information about the slave was engraved. Slave collars and *bullae* are infrequently found.

Archaeologists have recognized that likely many thousand slaves were sold every year across the Roman empire but identifying slave markets has been elusive. Using texts, images, and building layout, Fentress explores four buildings in Roman Italy for evidence of the sale of slaves at the front of these buildings.¹¹ She looked especially for porticos (*chalcidica*) where slaves could be displayed, likely on platforms (*catatae*), and an architectural layout that would have controlled the flow of movement to and from this location. Although evidence for the sale of slaves was not conclusive, she reasoned that slave sales at the front of these buildings were likely and in all cases occurred in central, monumental areas of the cities. In other words, the sale of human

beings in Imperial Rome was not hidden, but was a public activity, a part of the daily life of the citizens of these towns.

The material evidence for slavery in classical Greece and Rome is not extensive and some scholars argue that more effort needs to be put into developing this field of study. Jane Webster argues persuasively that a comparison of slavery in the classical world with that in the New World or elsewhere would provide avenues for research that could reveal slaves in the ancient classical world.¹² For example, rather than imagining foreign slaves continuing to create material culture like that of their birthplace, as Ian Morris suggested for slaves in the Greek mines of Attica, classical archaeologists should recognize that slaves might blend the material culture of their masters with that of their homeland, creating a distinctive new identity expressed in classical material culture—as was observed by archaeologists of the African diaspora. In other words, before determining that an archaeology of slavery in the classical world is unimportant, new approaches to finding slaves in the material record need to be developed.

African Diaspora

Archaeologists studying the African diaspora have demonstrated the rich understandings of the slave experience that archaeology can uncover. They have set the tone for an archaeology of slavery elsewhere, and their work can help classical scholars as they develop an archaeology of ancient Greece and Rome. Archaeologists studying slavery of the African diaspora had an advantage over classical scholars in that slave housing and associated artifacts are generally easily identified, at least for large plantations. Extensive descriptions of slave cabins exist for these plantations, and in the nineteenth century there are even photographs. The living spaces and associated artifacts are much more poorly known in holdings that had only one or a few slaves because their housing and material culture blurred with that of their masters.

Archaeological studies of the enslavement of Africans in the New World initially attempted to explore the lifeways of slaves. Zooarchaeological and paleoethnobotanical studies of animal and plant remains from slave cabins on plantations have been used to reconstruct the types and quantities of foods slaves ate, including both domestic and wild sources. Although masters nominally provided enslaved peoples with food, archaeological remains demonstrated that their diet was often extensively supplemented with wild foods that they procured themselves. Houses occupied by enslaved people were mostly built using designs and materials provided by the master. But archaeology has revealed modifications to these structures in response to the needs of their occupants. For example, during excavations at the Seville Plantation in Jamaica, slaves used the yard surrounding house structures for gardening, food preparation, and social and ritual activities.¹³ In other words, slaves reoriented their living space in ways that addressed their needs and took advantage of the

environment (such as cooling sea breezes), even though forced to accommodate to structures dictated by their masters. In some parts of the American South, slaves dug pits in the floors of their dwellings to store food and valuables, in spite of opposition of their masters to this practice.¹⁴ Slaves used their houses to create personal space in their otherwise tightly controlled lives.

New World archaeologists use artifacts to reconstruct the social identities and ritual practices of slaves. Early studies aimed to link African-American slaves to their African origins by attempting to locate objects from Africa or objects made in an African fashion. Eventually, archaeologists recognized that African Americans, like any other migratory group, blended the cultural elements they brought with them with the cultural practices of the people with whom they interacted in the New World, creating a distinctive African-American culture. One of the most widely known artifact types associated with enslaved African Americans is a handmade earthenware pottery type called Colonoware. Colonoware is found on sites in the American South that had large populations of African slaves, dating to the colonial period. A study of Colonoware from nineteenth-century archaeological sites in Manassas, Virginia, demonstrates that only the enslaved used Colonoware and that it was associated with slave status.¹⁵ Although some archaeologists have argued that Colonoware provides evidence for efforts by slaves to continue an African identity, more recent studies reject that view. With emancipation, Colonoware was quickly abandoned as liberated African Americans were able to exercise consumer choice in the pottery they used.

In other studies, artifact caches and designs on artifacts have been used to recover distinctive African-American ritual practices. Scholars have found that African Americans used symbols on everyday objects as a method of communicating beliefs that drew on both West African and Christian European elements and those were being passed on to future generations.¹⁶ One example is the BaKongo cosmogram, which likely served as an initial model for crossroads symbols that are found on a variety of artifacts in the remains of many slave communities, including pottery, buttons, spoons, metal objects, and more. This “X” symbol was also reproduced and hidden beneath the floors of important buildings (churches, midwife cabins) with caches of ritual objects buried in each cardinal direction. Rather than simply a carry-over of African rituals, such symbols were distinctively African-American and linked enslaved people across the plantation South in a common symbolic understanding that was “hidden in plain sight” from the dominant society.

FINDING SLAVES IN SMALL-SCALE SOCIETIES

Archaeologists have only begun to study slavery in small-scale societies within the past two decades, but already new methods are being introduced that promise to illuminate marginalized peoples that, until recently, few archaeologists would have imagined existed. The recognition that slaves existed in

small-scale societies in the past is not insignificant. Archaeologists have envisioned such groups as egalitarian with social differentiations based largely on age and sex. The presence of slaves, of course, means that marginalized people were common in small-scale societies and that significant social variability was a normal part of life in such communities. Furthermore, the ownership of slaves provided an opportunity for the individuals that held them to gain power. In state-level societies, slaves clearly provided enormous power for their owners, and they almost certainly did in small-scale societies, too. However, the investigation of these issues requires archaeologists to acquire the ability to detect slaves in the archaeological record.

Material culture distinctive to slaves in small-scale societies is difficult to identify. While images of slavery bring to mind plantations with rows of slave cabins, in small-scale societies slaves generally lived in their master's house, although they often slept in the least desirable parts. Furthermore, they were typically occupied with the same tasks as other members of the group. Wealthy and powerful individuals tended to own the largest number of slaves, and slaves might have freed the upper strata from quotidian labor. But since slaves worked in productive activities alongside non-slaves, it is difficult to distinguish their activities in the archaeological record.

Slaves are commonly discussed in ethnohistoric, historic, ethnographic, and other written accounts of small-scale societies, and these texts have been used as a starting point for archaeological identification of slavery in similar societies in prehistoric times. Common patterns in these accounts allow us to look for contexts in which captive-taking and enslavement might have occurred. In small-scale societies, captives were most often taken in raids or warfare, although one or a few individuals were sometimes kidnapped and slaves may have also been traded or sold from group to group. Worldwide, women and children were most commonly taken captive, as adult males were difficult to control and transport, and might pose a threat to the captor's settlement.

These patterns allow archeologists to construct a series of expectations for the presence of slavery in the small-scale societies of the past. Evidence of warfare should alert archaeologists to the presence of captives and, potentially, slaves. Such evidence includes defensive sites built on high or otherwise inaccessible places; settlements surrounded by stout walls; empty "no-man's lands" between groups of settlements; weapons of war; iconography (rock art, figurines, etc.) that shows violence; and trauma to human remains. Because cross-cultural studies have suggested that women and children were most commonly captured, skewed sex ratios in burial populations may be used to identify the presence of captives or the absence of people taken captive: more females may indicate groups that successfully took women, while more men might indicate a society that had been raided for its women.

Human remains provide the strongest evidence for slavery in small-scale societies. Slaves were subject to violence, and indicators of violence include cranial fractures, signs of trauma and pathology in various stages of healing

indicating repeated beatings (called “injury recidivism”), and fractures to forearms (from warding off blows to the head or from violent falls), hands, feet, ribs, or leg bones. Injury recidivism identifies subordinate individuals who may be subject to frequent punishment. Blows to the head can cause neurological trauma that results in a diminished ability of the victim to control her actions, perhaps inviting further punishment.¹⁷

Slaves in small-scale societies were often foreigners to the societies in which they found themselves, captives from distant regions. Consequently, another place to start the search for slaves is by identifying non-local people. Isotope analysis provides one of the best ways of identifying human movement in the past. The two types of isotopic analyses most often used in studies of human mobility are strontium ($^{87}\text{Sr}/^{86}\text{Sr}$) and oxygen (^{18}O). Different environments have different isotopic signatures, and as people eat and drink, these isotopes are incorporated into their bones and teeth. Tooth enamel is created between ages four and twelve, while bone is remodeled throughout an individual’s life. As a result, an individual whose bones and teeth have different isotopic signatures, or whose teeth have an isotopic signature different from the environment in which their body was found must have moved at some point in their life. Ancient DNA (aDNA) is also used to explore human movement in the past, but is most useful for identifying broad patterns of genetic ancestry rather than the movement of individuals.

Although material culture distinctive to slaves in small-scale societies is rare, other aspects of artifacts can help us to “see” captives. For example, at the fourteenth-century site of Grasshopper Pueblo in the American Southwest, an excess of females in the burial population has been interpreted as migrants fleeing war-torn areas to the north,¹⁸ although others have suggested they were captives.¹⁹ The burial population also included a much higher than normal number of children. Interestingly, non-local material culture at Grasshopper was female-linked, including pottery and hearth style. Male-linked material culture, including ceremonial architecture and projectile points did not change after the influx of migrants, indicating that males at the site were local.

A study of early twentieth-century artifact distributions along the Ucayali River in western Amazonia found that, while most objects (weapons, utility objects, clothing, ornaments, tools for body modification) became less common as the distance to their center of manufacture increased, a number of similar female-linked objects did not follow this pattern.²⁰ Instead, objects typically used by women were found in widely spaced tributaries of the Ucayali. These were not places likely to exchange women as marriage partners. The pattern is consistent with raiding for women. In other words, practices of artifact manufacture had been introduced to these remote regions by captive women. The presence of out-of-place female-linked non-local material culture at archaeological sites should alert archaeologists to the potential presence of captives.

CONCLUSIONS

The archaeology of slavery is a relatively new field but it promises to change our understanding of many cultures in the past. When we think of times and places in the past, whether a small tribal society in a remote landscape or an ancient state, like the city-states of Mesopotamia, we should acknowledge that some proportion of the people who made up these societies were marginalized, dependent, probably enslaved. We should envision these people as important actors in the societies of which they were a part. We know that in many times and places in the past, marginalized people not only made many of the tools, utensils, artwork, and more, but they also continued to handle, use, clean, and care for these objects. They used tools to build houses, shrines, temples; as well as to hunt or fish, manufacture canoes, process food, and dig irrigation canals. They served their master's food on dishes that they may have made, painted the murals on the walls of the room in which the master dined, grew and transported the food that was eaten. They made clothing, even though they may have been denied substantial clothing themselves.

This injection suggests some of the avenues that archaeology is taking to identify slaves in the past, reconstruct their lifeways, and recognize the contributions they made to the societies in which they lived. In state-level societies, where slaves often lived and worked separately from their masters, finding slave houses and material culture is easier. Such studies have been especially successful in the American South and the Caribbean. But admittedly, for these places there is abundant textual and iconographic documentation of the locations in which slaves lived and worked. Such detailed descriptions of slave lives are lacking for ancient Greece and Rome, and archaeological studies of slave lives in these societies are, as a result, more poorly developed. Greater efforts by classical archaeology to explore slavery in the past may eventually open a new window to our understanding of slave lives in ancient societies.

In small-scale societies where slave lives are closely entangled with those of their masters, finding slaves in the archaeological record is difficult. Cross-cultural ethnohistoric and ethnographic accounts suggest that captives were most often women and children taken from other groups, so the identification of non-local people provides a starting place for finding marginalized or enslaved individuals. Slaves tend to suffer lives of violence, and studies of human remains can uncover such treatment. These steps allow us to begin to identify slaves in prehistoric small-scale societies, but scholars have yet to develop robust means of studying the lives they lived. Such studies should transform our understanding of small-scale societies that we once assumed were egalitarian.

NOTES

1. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), vii.

2. Theresa A. Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slavery in North America," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 119–40.
3. Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slavery."
4. Jane Webster, "Archaeologies of Slavery and Servitude: Bringing 'New World' Perspectives to Roman Britain," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005): 161–79. Jane Webster, "Less Beloved: Roman Archaeology, Slavery, and the Failure to Compare," *Archaeological Dialogues* 15, no. 2 (2008): 103–23.
5. Associated Press, 22 November 2020. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/remains-man-his-slave-uncearthed-ashes-pompeii-after-almost-2-n1248541>.
6. Hugh F. Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery* (London: Duckworth, 2003).
7. Ian Morris, "Remaining Invisible: The Archaeology of the Excluded in Classical Athens," in *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, eds. Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan (London: Routledge Publishing, 1998), 193–220.
8. "Slaves' Room Found in Pompeii," *The Past*, 16 January 2022, <https://the-past.com/news/slaves-room-found-in-pompeii/>.
9. Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*, 242–44.
10. Thompson, *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*, 238–40.
11. Elizabeth Fentress, "On the Block: Catastae, Chalcidica and Cryptae in Early Imperial Italy," *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005): 220–34.
12. Webster, "Less Beloved," 103–23.
13. Douglas V. Armstrong, "Cultural Transformation Within Enslaved Laborer Communities in the Caribbean," in *Studies in Culture Contact: Integration, Culture Change, and Archaeology*, ed. James G. Cusick (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1998), 378–401.
14. Singleton, "The Archaeology of Slavery in North America," 119–40.
15. Laura J. Galke, "Colonowhen, Colonowho, Colonowhere, Colonowhy: Exploring the Meaning Behind the Use of Colonoware Ceramics in Nineteenth-Century Manassas, Virginia," *International Journal of Historical Archaeology* 13, no. 2 (2009): 303–26.
16. Kenneth L. Brown, "Retentions, Adaptations, and the Need for Social Control Within African and African American Communities Across the Southern United States From 1770 to 1930," in *The Archaeology of Slavery: A Comparative Approach to Captivity and Coercion*, ed. Lydia Wilson Marshall (Carbondale IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 2015), 166–91. Leland Ferguson, *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650–1800* (Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992).
17. Debra L. Martin, "Ripped Flesh and Torn Souls: Skeletal Evidence for Captivity and Slavery From the La Plata Valley, New Mexico, AD 1100–1300," in *Invisible Citizens: Captives and Their Consequences*, ed. Catherine M. Cameron (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press), 159–80; Debra L. Martin, Ryan P. Harrod, and Misty Fields, "Beaten Down and Worked to the Bone: Bioarchaeological Investigations of Women and Violence in the Ancient Southwest," *Landscapes of Violence* 1, no. 1 (2010): art. 3.
18. Julia C. Lowell, "Women and Men in Warfare and Migration: Implications of Gender Imbalance in the Grasshopper Region of Arizona," *American Antiquity* 72, no. 1 (2007): 95–123.

19. Warren R. DeBoer, "Wrenched Bodies," in *Invisible Citizens: Captives and Their Consequences*, ed. Catherine M. Cameron (Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008), 233–61.
20. Warren R. DeBoer, "Deep Time, Big Space: An Archaeologist Skirts the Topic at Hand," in *Ethnicity in Ancient Amazonia: Reconstructing Past Identities From Archaeology, Linguistics, and Ethnohistory*, eds. Alf Hornborg and Jonathan D. Hill (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 2011), 75–98.

FURTHER READINGS

- Donald, Leland. *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997.
- Fentress, Elizabeth. "On the Block: Catastae, Chalcidica and Cryptae in Early Imperial Italy." *Journal of Roman Archaeology* 18 (2005): 220–34.
- Ferguson, Leland. *Uncommon Ground: Archaeology and Early African America, 1650–1800*. Washington, DC: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992.
- Martin, Debra L. "Ripped Flesh and Torn Souls: Skeletal Evidence for Captivity and Slavery from the La Plata Valley, New Mexico, AD 1100–1300." In *Invisible Citizens: Captives and Their Consequences*, edited by Catherine M. Cameron, 159–180. Salt Lake City: University of Utah Press, 2008.
- Morris, Ian. "Remaining Invisible: The Archaeology of the Excluded in Classical Athens." In *Women and Slaves in Greco-Roman Culture: Differential Equations*, edited by Sandra R. Joshel and Sheila Murnaghan, 193–220. London: Routledge, 1998.
- Patterson, Orlando. *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982.
- Reséndez, Andrés. *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.
- Singleton, Theresa A. "The Archaeology of Slavery in North America." *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 119–40.
- Thompson, F. Hugh. *The Archaeology of Greek and Roman Slavery*. London: Duckworth Books, 2003.
- Webster, Jane. "Less Beloved: Roman Archaeology, Slavery, and the Failure to Compare." *Archaeological Dialogues* 15, no. 2 (2008): 103–23.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Medieval Societies (500–1500 C.E.)

PREFACE

The second part addresses the slaving practices in five wider regions before the rise of the modern world: Byzantium, the Arabian peninsula, and Latin Europe as the three monotheistic ruling powers in the Mediterranean, the Black Sea region as one of the main slaving zones of the period, and the pre-Columbian Inka state on the other side of the still unexplored Atlantic Sea. Between the disintegration of the ancient empires and the integration of the Americas into a new colonial system led by Western Europe, the trade and use of slaves continued under different circumstances.

As in ancient times and no matter on which side of the Atlantic, in the period from 500 to 1500 C.E., the border between capture, kidnapping, and trading was often blurred. Slaves were used side by side with other coerced people and entrusted with all sorts of duties connected to the needs of the ruling elites. They served in the household, in the manufacture, and on the field, they were traded as precious commodities, as symbols of prestige and financial assets, and some of them held high positions of trust based on their skills and education.

Four elements, however, prove characteristic for the “old world’s” millennium before 1500. First, starting from the leading powers around the Mediterranean Sea, the question of religious affiliation took center stage in discourses on legal and illegal enslavements, in discussions on slaves as commodities or human beings as well as in practices of slaving and manumission. The mapping of the world in religious cultures of distinct monotheistic belief structured not only trading networks and political borders but also slaving and no-slaving zones and patterns of social mobility and integration in Europe, Asia, and Africa. Second, and closely linked to the first point, the sexual

exploitation of female slaves took different forms according to the respective religious cultures. Sexual gratification aside, in Christianity, sex with slave women produced property while in Islam it produced heirs, and whereas in Judaism, it was forbidden but tolerated. Third, the male counterpart of the concubine, the castrate, appears as an important figure and symbol for luxury and loyalty in the court cultures of the medieval Mediterranean world. Fourth, related to the formation of slaving and no-slaving zones, ethnic attributions given to the most desirable groups of slaves such as “the Ethiopians” or “the Caucasians” paved the way for discourses and practices of racing that little later replaced religious affiliation as main determinant for enslavability.



Slavery in the Byzantine Empire

Youval Rotman 

INTRODUCTION

The importance of Byzantium to the history of global slavery stems from its geographic and historical position. Byzantium boasts a history of more than a millennium, longer than any other Mediterranean empire. As an offspring of the Roman Empire, it inherited the Roman institution of slavery and its legal definition. Yet, both proved to be in constant movement in view of the changes that the medieval world underwent. The Byzantine Empire offers an ideal historical context to examine questions about global slavery, questions that pertain to continuity and change, conditions to entry slavery, the living conditions of the enslaved, conditions of manumission, the destiny of ancient slavery, and thanks to its geopolitical position, also to connectivity between different medieval societies. It offers, in addition, a framework to examine the states of enslavement and questions pertaining to the labor of the enslaved, and its place within the socioeconomic organization.

Nowadays we address and emphasize the contradiction between the humanity of the enslaved and the treatment they receive as a commodity in the labor market. This contradiction stems from the perspective that sees all human beings as having rights, and is a product of the modern age and the human rights movement. To resolve this contradiction, activists today employ two distinct forms of action. The first uses legislative means to enhance the

Y. Rotman (✉)
Tel Aviv University, Tel Aviv, Israel
e-mail: yrotman@tauex.tau.ac.il

human rights of enslaved and bounded persons in order to eliminate the enslavement conditions and exploitation. The second way of action uses the status of the enslaved in the labor market to empower them in order to change their human condition and the violation of their human rights. The present chapter takes the case of Byzantine slavery to examine the relationship between the status of the enslaved as a human being and as a commodity in pre-modern society. In Byzantium this relationship was particularly important.

Contrary to popular belief, slavery did not decline in the transition from the ancient period to the Middle Ages and was as much a part of medieval societies as it was part of the society of the Roman Empire. This current study of slavery in Byzantium will examine the status of the enslaved in the Byzantine labor market and social organization, and will reveal the centrality of the phenomenon of enslavement and the contribution of slavery to the private household in the urban and agricultural economy. This analysis will show the role that the institution of slavery played in social organization. Moreover, examining slavery in view of the evolution of the Byzantine social structures in the central Middle Age, particularly the growing socioeconomic polarization of the Byzantine society starting from the ninth century, will reveal the enslavement of human beings as a means to maintain economic independence through the accumulation of “human property.” The other side of the phenomenon of slavery in Byzantium was the relationship established between this “human property” and the proprietors of humans, i.e., between the enslaved and the enslaver. Based on inequality, force, and asymmetric dependency, in Byzantium this relationship was aimed nevertheless at the integration of the enslaved, integration that carried legal and socioeconomic consequences. A pivotal factor in this integration stemmed from the religious identity of the enslaved persons and their conversion to Christianity. This identity was both enforced on the enslaved persons, and contributed to their integration into Byzantine society by granting them accessibility to legal institutions and open ways for their manumission.

An analysis of the relationship between the enslaved status as a person and as a commodity in Byzantine society may therefore clarify the tension between the two different ways of dealing with slavery today, and will offer a new and fresh perspective. Although there was no human rights discourse in Byzantium in its modern form, the enslaved were perceived as human beings and were attributed with the agency to act as independent persons. These possibilities were not always in line with their exploitation, enslavement, and commodification. In fact, enslavement, conversion, and manumission were three phases in creating dependent agents to enlarge the socioeconomic position of the household. They were therefore also means for the empowerment and liberation of enslaved persons and for their integration into Byzantine society. This chapter analyzes both sides of the phenomenon of slavery: the central role of the enslaved persons in the private economic organization, and their integration into the social organization. In Byzantium these two sides were interdependent.

Byzantium was a direct successor of the Roman Empire in the eastern Mediterranean starting from the fourth century, when Emperor Constantine I built a new capital on the ruins of the ancient Greek city of Byzantium and named it after him, Constantinople (“Constantine’s City,” modern Istanbul). The Byzantines, who continued to refer to themselves as Romans (and as “Byzantines” in referring to the inhabitants of Constantinople), also inherited the legal and social institutions of the Roman Empire. Their language was Greek, and the religion of most of them was Greek Christianity. This became the official religion, “the right faith” (Greek: Orthodoxy), and one of the characteristics of the Byzantine state. Byzantium inherited slavery as a legal institution from the Roman society. Under Roman-Byzantine law both male and female slaves had no juridical persona, in a similar way to children for example. They could not own property, become a party of legal contracts (including marriage), serve as guarantors, give legal testimony, or sue or be sued.

Although there is no record of a decline in the use of slaves in the late Roman period, historians have tended to connect the idea of the “decline of the Roman Empire” in late antiquity (fourth-seventh centuries) to the idea of “decline of slavery.” This idea is not supported by historical sources. Indeed, studies of the last two decades have revealed the existence of various forms and institutions of slavery in medieval societies.¹ In the seventh century, the Mediterranean entered a new stage in its history, with its division into three distinct civilizations: the Islamic Caliphate in the south, Byzantium in the northeast, and Latin Western Europe in the northwest. Each had its own language, culture, and religious identity. Slavery continued to play an important role in the socioeconomic life of Byzantium and the Caliphate. Following the Crusades, a new element was added to this map with the creation of local Latin kingdoms in the Eastern Mediterranean. In addition to the important role it played in local socioeconomic structures, slavery became also a means of connectivity between the different states.

ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

Like the Roman law, Byzantine law determines that the free status of the child came from the mother side. If she had free status during her pregnancy (even if she was later reduced to slavery), the child received the status of free born. In the same way, the children of a slave woman, no matter who was their father were slaves from birth. Cases of self-sale of free persons who sold themselves for debts or other reasons were known since antiquity and were legal provided that the person was *sui iuris*. Children, who did not have a legal persona, could be sold or exposed by their parents. Child exposure could lead to enslavement if the children were abducted by slave traders who then sold or prostituted them illegally. In the fourth through sixth centuries Byzantine emperors promulgated laws to limit such cases, and allowed it only for parents in dire economic circumstances. Reducing a free born person, was

finally prohibited by Leo VI (886–912), and in 1095 by Alexios I Komnenos (1081–1118). We have nearly no evidence of enslavers who sold the children of their slaves to a third party. In fact, most of the documented cases of enslavement in Byzantium point to manumission of the enslaved as the norm, even the objective of Byzantine slavery. These left two ways as the main means to procure slaves in Byzantium: war and trade. Both cases concerned the enslavement of foreigners.

Slavery became dependent on the enslavement of captives. Wars and conquests filled this demand in particular during the period of extensive wars: the sixth through the eighth centuries. By the end of the eighth century the medieval geopolitical map stabilized. It was no longer a period of large conquests and geopolitical annexations. Piracy, captivity, abduction, and enslavement of people became the dominant forms of enslavement especially in frontier zones. The Byzantine sources often depict the Byzantines as the main victims of raids of pirates coming from the Caliphate. But Arab sources of the ninth and tenth centuries reveal that raids were also practiced by Byzantine forces in both land and sea. And yet, the significant part of the enemy population which was captured was not sold as booty, but was kept for prospective acts of ransoming or exchanges of prisoners of war. This left as the main way to acquire starting from the ninth century the slave trade. In fact, it is impossible to distinguish between the medieval slave trade, piracy, and captivity. Indeed, pirates by land and sea were also slave traders and vice-versa. The medieval slave trade is normally not referred to as trafficking. And yet the evidence of the lives of the enslaved, their abduction, the violent ways they entered slavery, their forced migration, and the scale of the international slave trade all point to a new international dynamic centered on human trafficking.²

Sources and documents from the period reveal wide-ranging itineraries of slave traders that connect Eastern Europe, the Eurasian Steppe, and the African Sahel to the markets and economies of the Mediterranean, where the demand for slaves was high and the financial means for their purchase were available.³ In this commercial dynamic Eastern Europe and the Slavic countries were the main source of slaves for Mediterranean societies, Byzantium, and the Caliphate in particular. This orientation of the slave trade marks demographic and economic differences in the Middle Ages between the richly populated areas in the south and east of the Mediterranean and the undeveloped areas northwest of the basin and the African desert and the Sahel. This economic imbalance was the main engine for the medieval human trafficking.

The term “Slavs” became in the Middle Ages a generic name for slaves both in the Arabic of Muslim Al-Andalus (*ṣakāliba*) and in Greek in Byzantium (*sklavoi*, σκλάβοι).⁴ The term later penetrated most of the Western and Central European languages. The enslaved were mostly victims of slave traders and pirates, including Vikings, who operated along the rivers between the Baltic Sea, the Caspian Sea, and the Black Sea, and between Eastern Europe and southwestern Europe. Human trafficking was based on raids by merchants and private and military militias that captured the local population, either

through abduction or for a fee paid to local leaders, and led them far from their country of origin. Slavery in the Middle Ages was therefore dependent on the enslavement of abducted and forced migrants.⁵

The average price of a man in Byzantium was around 20–25 gold coins, and remained fairly constant in Byzantium.⁶ This was the price of a house in a county town; an average price of three shops in the capital, Constantinople; a wage of one year for an employee in the public service, or five to eight years of an employee. It was a serious financial investment, worthwhile only for wealthy households that could afford it.

THE ENSLAVED IN THE LABOR MARKET AND SOCIAL ORGANIZATION

Slaves were employed in Byzantium in every possible economic and social role, in both rural and urban milieu, in the private and public sector, in the service of the emperors, the socioeconomic elite as well as by less wealthy people. The basic economic unit was the private household. Its level determined the number of enslaved persons it included. Enslavement was a means of increasing the economic power and the social position of the family's household in both the rural and urban economic systems. Regulations from the eighth-tenth centuries dealing with the economic-legal organization in the city and in the Byzantine village include references of slaves as part of the economic organization of the private household of peasants and urban enterprises alike.⁷

Although slaves are mentioned alongside waged/hired workers (Greek: *misthioi*, *misthōtoi ergatai*) in both the city and the countryside, their mode of employment was different from the second. Waged workers were employed under a specific labor contract (*misthosis*) concluded between employer and employee. This form of work differed from that of slaves: it was limited to one month and the salary had to be paid in advance.⁸ A household, rural or urban, could not therefore employ a wage worker over time. These regulations of the labor market encouraged the growth of economic organizations that were not dependent on hired labor but on slavery. They were particularly critical for economic enterprises that required trained professionals, such as goldsmiths, money changers, animal traders, shopkeepers, carpenters, builders, painters, and in various types of candle, soap, and silk fabrication.⁹ Slaves could be employed as a long-term, even life labor force. Moreover, unlike wage workers, slaves could become guild members and serve as managers of private enterprises such as shops and workshops. Normally, five guarantors were required to open a private enterprise in Constantinople. But in case of slaves the guarantee of the owner was sufficient. No one would have agreed, presumably, to be a guarantor of another man's slave, and slaves could not stand as guarantors because they had no legal persona.¹⁰ This made slaves the ideal business managers. The economic consequences of this situation were far-reaching. In order to set up a business, a slave could be appointed as responsible for life. The social consequences were also far-reaching: on the one hand, a potential

weakening of financial relations of inter-socioeconomic dependency. On the other hand, the strengthening of independent households that gained their independence by acquisition of enslaved agents. A person who was interested in setting up workshops of various kinds (which was prohibited by law) could use slaves for this purpose, and appoint them at the head of numerous workshops. The socioeconomic dynamics, then, relied on the financial ability to acquire and enslave people in order to employ them as managers and workers for life. The fact that the enslaved were the property of the enterprise's owner, meant that all profit and control was in the hands of the second. Slavery was thus a means of increasing the economic independence of the family household. In this way, the socioeconomic rationale of slavery in Byzantium fits in with anthropological theories that see slavery as a means of expanding the family organization.¹¹

The same rationale also applied in the Byzantine rural organization, which was composed of landowners, slaves, employees, and working animals.¹² In the ninth-century *Life of Philaretos the merciful*, a historical figure who possessed rich lands in Asia Minor and became a saint, Philaretos' household deteriorates from wealth to poverty. He loses his large estate and retains only a modest plot of land around his house which he cultivates himself with his son and daughter. The loss of his slaves indicates his economic decline. This description clarifies what the reverse process was: how a small family household could be developed into a large and rich estate. Indeed, information about this comes from a Byzantine document, dated to the tenth through twelfth centuries, about the tax organization of the Byzantine village.¹³ It shows that the expansion of the rural household from a modest land to a large estate depended on the acquisition of manpower. Slavery served precisely this objective. Moreover, enslavers linked their enslaved persons in couples and profited from their offspring who were enslaved from birth and continued to maintain the family's agricultural enterprise. In this way slavery provided a means of increasing private economic independence, a means that was accumulated and managed by the family unit.

In the central medieval period, Byzantine society experienced a transformation in its economic organization, and saw the creation of a new socioeconomic elite who gained its richness from the control over farmer lands, hitherto independent. Byzantine sources from the ninth through eleventh centuries refer to this new elite as "the powerful" (*hoi dunatoi*, οἱ δυνατοί in Greek). Families close to the imperial government gained authority over large tracts of land by receiving control over the taxes of the land.¹⁴ The farmers, either owners or state tenants, became dependent on by private powers who controlled their land taxes and as a consequence also their farmers' socioeconomic position. A social dependency was created between those who worked the land and those who controlled it, that helped to establish the second as a new elite. Against the background of this new socioeconomic dynamics, slavery gained a new role. Acquiring and enslaving people in order to use them in farming became the main option through which independent farmers could enrich their estates and improve their economic situation in view of the

growing influence of the new elite of “the powerful.” Maintaining economic independence in Byzantium was dependent on the ability to accumulate “human property” to use it in both work and management. Enslavement was therefore a means to acquire and maintain economic independence.

Private testaments from the period show how widespread these dynamics were in the organization of rural family units. This is the case of Gemma’s 1049 testament from Puglia in southern Italy.¹⁵ Gemma, a widow without children, left her land and houses to her four nephews. She bequeathed other houses, plots of land, and cattle to her manumitted slaves: three men and three women, along with three more persons whose juridical status. Her rural household, therefore, consisted of a number of lands and houses inhabited and cultivated by relatives, slaves, and freedmen. This was also the case of larger landowners, for example, Eustathios Boilas who drafted his testament in 1059.¹⁶ His lands in southeast Anatolia included the eleven villages he founded himself. He left most of his property to his two daughters, their husbands, and the churches he founded. Along with them he mentioned three orphans he raised, who received two of his villages. He also mentioned fifteen slaves alongside their families and children, all of whom he had previously manumitted. They all received plots of land. He bequeathed his other slaves, along with the lands and cattle, to his daughters. These were probably the main labor force of the estates and enabled him to build his eleven villages as an independent economic unit.

Another detailed picture of Byzantine household management comes from the testaments of the Pakorianoi couple (Symbatios Pakourianos and his widow Kalē Pakourianē).¹⁷ The couple lived in Constantinople in the eleventh century and belonged to the social elite close to the emperor. They owned the lands of four villages. Thirty-one men and woman are mentioned by name in Symbatios Pakourianos’ testament, eighteen among them are slaves. Upon his death he manumitted all his enslaved men and bequeathed them clothes, bedding, horses, weapons, and modest sums of money. He bequeathed his enslaved women to his wife, who, in her later testament, manumitted all her slaves, women, and men. The couple referred to their entire staff in the testaments by the overall term “my people” (*hoi anthrōpoi mou*; ἄνθρωποι μου in Greek): all those who are in their service. These were not what modern scholarship term “domestics.” Their function was not limited to domestic roles within the house, but they sustained, supported, and maintained the entire economic organization of the household of this aristocratic family.¹⁸ Upon their manumission, the enslaved men and women remained attached to the household and its owners, and continued to sustain and maintain the family unit as a private economic system. The term “my people” indicates that the strength of a household depended on its economic independence, and this meant the number of people who maintained it. This enabled the socioeconomic mobility of the entire unit, which included the socioeconomic mobility of the enslaved themselves. These remained a part of the private household of their enslaver, according to Byzantine customs, also after their manumission.

Manumission of the enslaved acquired a paramount importance in Byzantium as a legal means to integrate the enslaved into Byzantine society. In fact, enslavement and manumission were two sides of the same coin. Together they ensured the dependency and the integration of the enslaved. The new religious identity that the enslaved acquired in Byzantium played a key role in the process of “flipping the coin” toward their integration.

EXIT FROM SLAVERY, ECONOMIC DEPENDENCY, AND SOCIAL INTEGRATION

As was shown above, human trafficking in the Middle Ages was unprecedented in its geographical scope. Its victims were usually local children, women, and men who were abducted, trafficked, and sold into slavery very far from home and country. In the medieval world this meant that they were different also in their religion. The medieval world was divided between different political blocs with distinct religions: Greek Christianity in Byzantium, Islam in the Caliphate, Latin Christianity in western Europe, Jewish communities throughout these regions, and populations that were still pagan in the Slavic world, northern Europe, and the Sahel. The result was that the women and men who were abducted, enslaved, and trafficked to the Byzantine markets were foreign in origin and faith. The process of enslavement included the conversion of the enslaved to the religion of the enslaver: in Byzantium to Christianity, in the Caliphate to Islam, or to Judaism in the Jewish communities (conversion to a religion other than the state religion was forbidden in both the Caliphate and Byzantium). A series of laws, regulations, and treaties from Byzantium, Venice, Rome, and Francia, from the ninth through the twelfth centuries, restricted and prohibited the trade in Christians, and the sale of slaves to Jewish and Arab slave traders.¹⁹

Foreigners who were enslaved by Byzantines were usually not Christian and were converted to Christianity by their enslavers. This separation between enslaved and enslaver according to faith gave moral justification for enslavement: the act of enslavement itself being regarded as an outgrowth of religious superiority and a sense of religious mission to convert. Indeed, starting from the fourth-century Christian writers developed different justifications for slavery. Some saw it as a product of war, others as a crime, sin, or stupidity. At the basis of all these justifications was a worldview that saw slavery as part of the existing divine order and therefore legitimate and justified.²⁰ At the same time, conversion was also a means of integration. The conversion of slaves made them part of the religious community.²¹ This too was the meaning of the conversion process of the enslaved: a religious and social conversion that made the foreigner “one of us” and therefore trustworthy. This is reflected in the two Byzantine legal customs of slave manumission: manumission in church and manumission by baptism.²² The first was introduced in the fifth century and was performed in the church in front of a bishop who acted as the magistrate, with no reference to the religion of the manumitted slave. The

second, attested from the eighth century, aimed at manumitting non-Christian slaves through their baptism by their enslaver, act that also created legal kinship between the enslaver and the freedman.

The new religious identity of the Byzantine enslaved person also opened up possibilities for personal empowerment and social mobility. In fact, the new religious identity of the enslaved changed their legal status. Although slaves continued to be defined by law as property, the very fact that they were Christians turned them from objects to subjects because they were perceived and considered also as believers. Moreover, their religious identity as Christians conferred a legal personality through which they could realize their status as believers: marry, create a family, become churchmen or monks, and even act independently to be liberated.²³ These fundamental changes were due to the fact that the enslaved Christian was perceived not only as a subject of his enslaver, but also a subject of God. As such the question of his loyalty whether to his material master or to the heavenly master (*ho kurios, ó κύριος* in Greek) was open to interpretation. A number of Byzantine writers addressed this question in great detail, especially in light of the sentence from the Gospel according to Matthew 6:24 that it is not possible to worship two masters, God and Mammon. This verse was interpreted as a contradiction between loyalty to God and any material/corporeal master. Thus, for example, Gregory Bishop Nisa explains that the very fact that a person owns other persons is a violation of God's property right over all of humanity.²⁴ Although this view did not lead to anything close to an abolitionist movement, Byzantine Christianity nevertheless dealt with the question of authority: to whom man, whether enslaved or not, owed his primary loyalty: to an earthly or an eternal master.²⁵ This perspective also saw the enslaved as a subject: God's subject. An outgrowth of this approach was a legal development in the status of the enslaved.

One of the most interesting features of slavery in the medieval world concerns the development of access to the law for slaves. The roots of this approach can be traced back to the late Roman period.²⁶ It became more and more common with the recognition of the religious identity of the slave as a believer and a part of the religious community. So it was for example in regards to marriage. By its very definition as a legal contract, the institution of marriage was impossible for slaves, and in fact meaningless. Moreover, the enslavement of a married person immediately entailed the annulment of the marriage. However, the recognition of Christian marriage as a legal institution in Byzantium as an unbreakable legal relationship meant that the enslavement of a married person did not change the marriage, for example in case of prisoners of war. The Byzantine legislator has intervened in such cases by allowing marriage between spouses when one of them was enslaved by a third person.²⁷ Moreover, the Byzantine legislature increasingly interfered with a person's authority over his human property, authority that was traditionally considered private. For example, an eleventh-century law prohibited any possibility of marrying slave couples outside the Christian institution of marriage.²⁸

This law severely restricted enslavers who wanted to unite their slaves in families outside of Christian marriage. The legislative application of the Christian institution of marriage also in the case of slaves made these ties unbreakable. The sale of married slaves became impossible, and the manumission of part of the enslaver's family could become legally problematic.²⁹ The religious status of the enslaved made them therefore part of the religious society, and gave them a legal status that allowed them agency and opened up possibilities in regards to their private life.³⁰

Byzantine slaves therefore were defined by a legal status that we can understand as civil status, that is a category defined by legal status. By civil status I mean a legal definition that constitutes a distinct group of people in terms of duties, privileges, or other criteria. A legal definition indicates which criteria set a group of people as a civil category. The purpose of such a legal delimitation is to give a special status to this group of people. We need to distinguish between legal status and civil status, since the second can apply only to human beings as society members. In this way too, Byzantine law delimited the free-born and the enslaved by determining the criteria by which the enslaved was distinguished from all other members of society. In the same way, for example, the age criterion for minors, or that of sex for women, defined their respective civil status. Moreover, the civil status of Byzantine slaves was in movement because of their religious identity as Christians. This movement was a means of their social integration into the society of believers; sometimes it weakened the enslaver's property rights. This was already manifested, for example, in the asylum law of Justinian (527–565), which gave runaway slaves the possibility to become a monk or a clergyman without the permission of their owner.³¹ The owner could only demand them back for a short period of time and only if they proved that they had caused damage.

These legal changes that started from the sixth century and increased in the tenth century, reflect the development of the civil status of the enslaved. They stem from a new approach regarding the authority of the Byzantine state and law: the expansion of the civil status of the slave was done in parallel with the strengthening of the authority of the public authority at the expense of restricting private authority over human property. This was not a deliberate empowerment of the enslaved, but a result of the Byzantine imperial policy to increase the authority of the state and its legal regulation in a way that restricted private authority over "private subjects," meaning Byzantines who were not under the authority of the state, such as slaves. Slavery continued to exist, but those who were enslaved by private enslavers were not exclusively the private property of the enslaver, but also subjects of the authority and laws of the state and therefore of the emperor.

This legal process did not lead to an abolitionist attitude, but to a new definition of the enslaved: not merely as property, but as men and women who are part of the private household, and as Christians also part of the religious society. Even if the enslaved persons still had inferior legal status, were restricted in their movement and cruelly treated, the dependence of the family

organization on them along with the changes in their definition as members of the religious society, often led to their manumission. Manumission did not make the enslaved independent or free to go their own way. On the contrary, as freedmen the manumitted slaves continued to be part of the household of their enslaver/manumitter. They received economic autonomy, the autonomy that according to Byzantine wills was part of the expansion of the family's economic organization. The manumitted slaves were still very much dependent on their former enslaver, whom they continued to refer as "master" (*kurios*, κύριος in Greek). The option to be "free" and to go wherever one wanted was destructive, both economically and socially. It would have left the manumitted slave without a socioeconomic attachment and any means of subsistence. In fact, the dependency of the manumitted slaves on their enslaver opened up opportunities for their socioeconomic integration.

CONCLUSION

Enslavement entails an ongoing act of violence, and is always accompanied by the exploitation of human beings by other human beings. At the same time, conditions were created in Byzantium for interdependency between enslaved and enslaver: the enslaved were dependent on the enslaver for every detail of their personal life, and the enslaver depended on the enslaved on the success of their economic independence. The integration and empowerment of the enslaved became an interest to both enslaved and enslaver and created dynamics that led to the social integration of the first, an integration from which the second benefited. Moreover, this interdependency continued after manumission which opened more options for both sides. Manumitted slaves acted as empowered agents in the family household to which they belonged and of which they were a part. We would be wrong to think that manumitted slaves had better conditions if they lived a "free life" independently of their enslaver's household. A "free life" meant a hard and detached life from any social and economic framework, a homeless life, with no source of living and minimal living conditions. Such was the situation of the poor who lived in a daily war of survival on the margins of society. It is precisely dependency ties that have provided living conditions and opportunities of empowerment. The uniqueness of the case of Byzantine slavery lies in the fact that the manumission of the enslaved was worthwhile to both enslaved and enslaver because the first remained dependent on the household of the second. The empowerment of the first contributed to the empowerment of the second. These dynamics point to the transformation of the enslaved from being a passive victim into an active agent. In other words: in Byzantium, the empowerment of the enslaved was beneficial to the enslaver. Development in the legal status of the enslaved gave them more and more options when it came to their private lives, and was the engine behind their empowerment. The analysis of the case of Byzantine slavery provides a unique perspective on questions regarding slavery in

general. It shows that structural economic, social, and legal elements are what shapes the civil status of the enslaved.

NOTES

1. Youval Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, trans. Jane Marie Todd (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009); Alice Rio, *Slavery after Rome, 500–1100* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017); Carl Hammer, *A Large-Scale Slave Society of the Early Middle Ages: Slaves and their Families in Early Medieval Bavaria* (Aldershot: Ashgate Publishing, 2002); Matthew S. Gordon, *The Breaking of a Thousand Swords: A History of the Turkish Military of Samarra (AH 200–275/815–889 CE)* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2001); Yūsuf Rāgīb, *Actes de vente d’esclaves et d’animaux d’Égypte médiévale*, 2 vols. (Cairo: Institut français d’archéologie orientale, 2002–2006); Kurt Franz, “Slavery in Islam: Legal Norms and Social Practice,” in *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1000–1500 CE)*, eds. Reuven Amitai and Christoph Cluse (Brepols: Turnhout, 2017), 51–142; Mohamed Meouak, *Ṣaqāliba: eunuques et esclaves à la conquête du pouvoir. géographie et histoire des élites politiques “marginales” dans l’Espagne umayyade* (Helsinki: Academia scientiarum Fennica, 2004); Youval Rotman, *Slaveries of the First Millennium* (Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2021).
2. Youval Rotman, “The Medieval Slave Trade: Map, Data, Sources” (H-Slavery Resources, D. Prior, ed., 11 Jan. 2019, <https://networks.h-net.org/system/files/contributed-files/yrotman2cmedievalhumantrafficking2cmapanddata.pdf>); Christopher Paoella, *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020).
3. Michael McCormick, *Origins of the European Economy, AD 300–900* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001); Salah Trabelsi, “Commerce et esclavage dans le Maghreb oriental (VIIe-Xe siècles)” and Mohamed Meouak, “Esclaves noirs et esclaves blancs en al-Andalus umayyade et en Ifrīqiya fātimide,” in *Couleurs de l’esclavage sur les deux rives de la Méditerranée (Moyen Age - XXe siècle)*, eds. Roger Botte and Alessandro Stella (Paris: Karhala, 2012), 9–53.
4. Helga Köpstein, “Zum Bedeutungswandel von ‘sklabos’/sclavus”, *Byzantinische Forschungen* 7 (1979): 67–88. Marek Jankowiak, “What Does the Slave Trade in the Saqaliba Tell Us About Early Islamic Slavery?” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49, no. 1 (2017): 169–72; Meouak, *Ṣaqāliba*.
5. Youval Rotman, “Migration and Enslavement: The Medieval Model,” in *Migration History of the Medieval Afro-Eurasian Transition Zone*, eds. Lucian Renfandt, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller and Iannis Stouraitis (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 387–412; Paoella, *Human Trafficking*.
6. Rotman, “The Medieval Slave Trade.”
7. *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*, ed. Johannes Koder (Vienna: Verlag der Österreichischen Akademie der Wissenschaften, 1991); “Nomos geōrgikos”, ed. Walter Ashburner, in *Jus Graecoromanum*, eds. Iōannēs D. Zepos and Panagiōtēs Iōannou Zepos (Athens: Georgion Phexis & uiou, 1931), vol. 2, 67–71.

8. *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*; Alexander Kazhdan, "Slaves and misthioi in Byzantium ninth-eleventh century," *Uchenye zapiski Tul'skij gosudarstvennyj pedagogičeskij instituta* 2 (1951): 63–88 (in Russian).
9. *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*. See the thorough study of Daphne Penna, "The Role of Slaves in the Byzantium Economy, 10th–11th Centuries: Legal Aspects," in *Slavery in the Black Sea Region, c.900–1900: Forms of Unfreedom at the Intersection between Christianity and Islam*, ed. Felicia Roșu (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 63–89.
10. *Das Eparchenbuch Leons des Weisen*, §§2.9; 8.13.
11. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977).
12. "Nomos geōrgikos...". John of Ephesus, *Lives of the Eastern Saints*, ed. E. W. Brooks, *Patrologia Orientalis* (Paris: Firmin-Didot et Cie, 1923), vol. 17, 191–95. Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery*, ch. 3; Ghislaine Noyé, "Quelques observations sur l'évolution de l'habitat en Calabre du Ve au XIe siècle," *Rivista di studi bizantini e slavi* 25 (1988): 57–138.
13. Franz Dölger, *Beiträge zur Geschichte der byzantinischen Finanzverwaltung, besonders des 10. und 11. Jahrhunderts* (Hildesheim: Teubner, 1964), 3–9, 113–156; Charles M. Brand, "Two Byzantine Treaties on Taxation," *Traditio* 25 (1969): 35–60.
14. Eric McGeer, *The Land Legislation of the Macedonian Emperors* (Toronto: Pontifical Institute of Mediaeval Studies, 2000); Nikolaos Oikonomides, "The Social Structure of the Byzantine Countryside in the First Half of the 10th Century," *Byzantina Symmeikta* 10 (1996): 105–25; Leonora Neville, *Authority in Byzantine Provincial Society, 950–1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Paul Lemerle, *Cinq Études sur le XI^e s. byzantin* (Paris: CNRS, Paris, 1977).
15. Gertrude Robinson, *Cartulary of the Greek Monastery of St-Elias and St-Anastasius of Carbone* (Rome: Pontificium Istitutum Orientalium Studiorum, 1929), 179–84.
16. Lemerle, *Cinq Études*, 15–63; Claudia Rapp, "Zwangsmigration in Byzanz: Kurzer Überblick mit einer Fallstudie aus dem 11 Jahrhundert," in *Erzwungene Exile: Umsiedlung und Vertreibung in der Vormoderne*, ed. Thomas Ertl (Frankfurt A.M.: Campus, 2017), 59–80.
17. Jacques Lefort, Nikolaos Oikonomidès and Denise Papachryssanthou, eds., *Actes d'Iviron II: du milieu du XI^e siècle à 1204* (Paris: Lethielleux, 1990), 150–56, 170–83.
18. Paul Magdalino, "The Byzantine Aristocratic oikos," in *The Byzantine Aristocracy IX–XIII Centuries*, ed. Michael Angold (Oxford: B.A.R., 1984), 92–111 (repr. in Paul Magdalino, *Tradition and Transformation in Medieval Byzantium*, Aldershot, Hampshire: Variorum, 1991, pt. III).
19. *Agobardi Lugdunensis Opera omnia*, ed. Lieven van Acker (Turnhout: Brepols, 1981), 189–95; *Urkunden zur Älteren Handels- und Staatsgeschichte der Republik Venedig*, eds. G.L.F. Tafel and G.M. Thomas, 3 vols. (Amsterdam: Hakkert, 1964), vol. 1, §§3, 7, 12–14; *I trattati con Bisanzio 992–1198*, ed. Marco Pozza and Giorgio Ravegnani, *Pacta Veneta* 4 (Venice: Il Cardo, 1993), §1.
20. Peter Garnsey, *Ideas of Slavery from Aristotle to Augustine* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Jennifer A. Glancy, *Slavery in Early Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002).

21. Rotman, *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, 139–52.
22. *Codex Theodosianus*, ed. Theodor Mommsen (Berlin: Weidmann, 1962), IV.7.1; Fabrizio Fabbrini, *La manumissio in ecclesia* (Milan: Pubblicazioni dell'Istituto di diritto romano e dei diritti dell'Oriente mediterraneo, 1965); Fabrizio Fabbrini, "Un nuovo documento relativo alla manumissio in ecclesia," *Rendiconti della Classe di Scienze morali, storiche e filologiche* 16, nos. 5–6 (1961): 214–15. Ciro Giannelli, "Alcuni formulari relativi alla 'manumissio in ecclesia' tratti da eucologi italo-greci e slavi," *Rivista di cultura classica e medioevale* 1, no. 2 (1959): 127–47. *Ecloga: Das Gesetzbuch Leons III. und Konstantinos' V*, ed. Ludwig Burgmann (Frankfurt A.M.: Lowenklaug-Gesellschaft, 1983), §8.1; *Jus Graecoromanum*, vol. 2, 139 (*Prochiros Nomos*, §7.28).
23. See below fn. 27–30. Basile, *Lettres*, ed. Yves Courtonne, 3 vols. (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1957–1966), §115. Grégoire de Nazianze, *Lettres*, ed. Paul Gallay (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1964–1967), §79.
24. Gregory of Nyssa, *Homilies on Ecclesiastes*, ed. Stuart G. Hall (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1993), Homily §4.1 (ed. Lionel Wickham); Chris L. De Wet, *The Unbound God: Slavery and the Formation of Early Christian Thought* (London: Routledge, 2018). See also Ilaria L.E. Ramelli, *Social Justice and the Legitimacy of Slavery: The Role of Philosophical Asceticism from Ancient Judaism to Late Antiquity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016) for the proliferation of these ideas among monks.
25. *Life of St. Andrew the Fool*, ed. Lennart Rydén, 2 vols. (Uppsala: Uppsala University Library, 1995), chs. 1–5.
26. *The Digest of Justinian*, eds. Paul Krüger and Theodor Mommsen, trans. Alan Watson, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1985), XLVIII, 8, 4.
27. "Die Novellen des Kaiserin Eirene", ed. Ludwig Burgmann, in *Fonter Minores* 4 (*Forschungen zur Byzantinischen Rechtsgeschichte* 7) (1981), 26; *Les Nouvelles de Léon le Sage*, eds. Pierre Noailles and Alphonse Dain (Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 1944), §§100–101.
28. *Jus Graecoromanum*, vol. 1, 341–46. Köpstein, "Zur Novelle."
29. *Η Πεῖρα*—*The Peira: Ein juristisches Lehrbuch des 11. Jahrhunderts aus Konstantinopel—Text, Übersetzung, Kommentar, Glossar*, eds. Dieter Simon and Diether Roderich Reinsch (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2022), 342.
30. *Les Nouvelles de Léon le Sage*, §§11; 37; 38; 40; 49; 60; 69; 100; 101.
31. *Novellae Justiniani*, §123.

FURTHER READINGS

- Pahlitzsch, Johannes. "Slavery and the Slave Trade in Byzantium in the Paleologan Period." In *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1000–1500 CE)*, edited by Reuven Amitai and Christoph Cluse, 163–184. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017.
- Penna, Daphne. "The Role of Slaves in the Byzantium Economy, 10th–11th Centuries: Legal Aspects." In *Slavery in the Black Sea Region, c.900–1900: Forms of Unfreedom at the Intersection between Christianity and Islam*, edited by Felicia Roşu, 63–89. Leiden: Brill, 2021.

- Prinzing, Günter. “Skaven oder freie Diener im Spiegel der ‘Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit’ (PmbZ).” In *Prosopon Rhomaikon: Ergänzende Studien zur Prosopographie der mittelbyzantinischen Zeit*, edited by Ralph-Johannes Lilie, Alexander Daniel Beihammer, Bettina Krönung, and Caludia Ludwig, 129–173. Berlin: De Gruyter, 2017.
- Rotman, Youval. *Byzantine Slavery and the Mediterranean World*, translated by Jane Marie Todd. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009.
- . “Byzantium and the International Slave Trade in the Central Middle Ages.” In *Trade in Byzantium: Papers from the Third International Sevgi Göniül Byzantine Studies Symposium*, edited by Nevra Necipoglu and Paul Magdalino, 129–142. Istanbul Koç University Publications, 2016.
- Rotman, Youval. “Migration and Enslavement: The Medieval Model.” In *Migration History of the Medieval Afro-Eurasian Transition Zone*, edited by Lucian Renfandt, Johannes Preiser-Kapeller and Iannis Stouraitis, 387–412. Leiden: Brill, 2020.
- . *Slaveries of the First Millennium*. Leeds: ARC Humanities Press, 2021.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in Medieval Arabia

Magdalena Moorthy Kloss

INTRODUCTION

This chapter discusses slavery in medieval Arabia¹ by focusing on Yemen, the Arabian Peninsula's southwestern part. Sources from the eleventh to fifteenth centuries CE feature slaves in diverse life situations: as human commodities sold on public slave markets, commanders of cities, mothers of their masters' children, resisters to enslavement, laborers in kitchens and workshops, and as freed persons. The following case study will characterize the life trajectories of slaves in medieval Yemen and highlight three central aspects: their enslavement (*entry into slavery*), how they lived and worked as slaves (*experiences of slavery*), and the possibilities of altering their unfree status (*exits from slavery*). The evidence presented comes mostly from the Najahid (1021–1158) and Rasulid (1229–1454) eras of Yemen's medieval history. While offering a detailed account of slavery in these two Yemeni polities, this chapter will also discuss the phenomenon of slavery throughout medieval Arabia more broadly, highlighting temporal and geographical continuities and differences.

M. Moorthy Kloss (✉)

Institute for Social Anthropology, Austrian Academy of Sciences, Vienna, Austria
e-mail: magdalena.moorthy-kloss@oeaw.ac.at

ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

In the early 2000s, the Yemeni scholar Muḥammad Jāzīm published a fascinating collection of administrative documents from late thirteenth-century Yemen that had survived in a private library in Sana'a. Known as *Nūr al-ma 'arīf* ("The light of knowledge"),² this source provides rare information on slave trading practices across the Red Sea to Yemen, including routes and procedures, as well as prices and taxes paid for different categories of slaves. The following passage from *Nūr al-ma 'arīf* is part of a broader section on trade between Ethiopia and Yemen. Tellingly, slaves are listed here among many other "products" to be evaluated, sold, and taxed:

The good eunuch (*al-khādīm al-jayyid*) is expensive up to a hundred *wiqīya* [a common weight measure] in coins, and that is precious. [...] The eunuch of medium quality is for 50 or 60 *wiqīya*. The regular eunuch is for 40 *wiqīya*.

The uncastrated slaves (*al-'abīd al-fuhūl*): the good slave is the pure Ethiopian slave boy (*al-waṣīf al-ḥabashī al-ṣarīb*), such as the *jizlī* and the *amḥarī*, or the *saḥartī* or any kind (*jins*) as long as he is flawless. His price in Ethiopia is 20 *wiqīya*, and the one of medium quality 15 or 14, and the one of lesser quality 12, 11 or 10.

As for female slaves (*al-jawār*): the good slave girl of excellent quality (*al-jayyida al-waṣīfa al-'āl*) is for 20 *wiqīya*, and of medium quality for 15 or 16, and of lesser quality for 12 or 10.³

This short passage highlights many of the complexities characterizing the medieval slave trade to Arabia and thus requires some context. The Rasulids at whose court this document was written ruled over large parts of lower Yemen from 1229 until 1454. Of Turkoman descent, they had come to the country with the Ayyubids, their predecessors, whom they served as high military and administrative officers. Yemen's geographical location on both the Indian Ocean and the Red Sea meant that important maritime trade networks intersected there, linking up with caravan routes leading to Mecca and Medina, the holy sites of Islam. The Rasulids exploited this strategic advantage by actively supporting trade through the provision of administrative, infrastructural, and security services. The state in turn shared in the merchants' wealth by taxing them heavily.

According to medieval Islamic law, slaves could be bought and sold like any other property, although their humanity was acknowledged. In the above passage, slaves are divided into categories—female, male, and castrated male slaves (eunuchs)—and ranked by their perceived "quality"—low, medium, and high. Eunuchs were up to five times more expensive than other slaves, matching accounts from the Roman, Byzantine and Ottoman empires, all of which considered eunuchs to be the ultimate luxury possession.⁴ The reasons for the high value placed on eunuchs were twofold. The castration procedure,

despite being carried out in specialized centers in Ethiopia and elsewhere, was very dangerous, and many boys did not survive this mutilation. Furthermore, courts in the Islamic world had come to rely on the service of eunuchs, who were considered to be the perfect servants. In the Rasulid case, as we shall see below, eunuchs were important players at all levels of government and administration. From the perspective of slave traders, eunuchs were thus a high-risk commodity that potentially yielded high profits.

Ethnicity also impacted a slave's price: the highest value was attributed to a "pure Ethiopian slave boy" who was "flawless." The author of the above passage distinguished between three different Ethiopian ethnic affiliations—*jizlī*, *amḥarī*, and *saḥartī*—suggesting he had a fairly nuanced knowledge about the country's inhabitants. Ethnonyms used for slaves in Arabic sources underline the finding that most slaves in medieval Arabia were of African origin. Yemeni authors writing between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries mainly used three terms to describe African slaves: *habashī*, denoting individuals from today's Ethiopia and Eritrea, *zanjī*, roughly pointing to modern Somalia and coastal regions further south, and *nūbī*, indicating origins in today's southern Egypt and Sudan. The geographical meaning of these terms was approximate and fluctuated over time. What is more, it appears that many individuals were captured from populations living further in the African heartland, rather than in the coastal areas from where they were later trafficked to Arabia.⁵ The exact origins of enslaved Africans who labored in medieval Arabia therefore remain unknown. A new body of evidence that has recently been introduced into slavery research are genetic studies. This type of data shows that female African contributions to the gene pool of the Arabian Peninsula are on average triple that of the male contributions, pointing to slavery and specifically to concubinage (the sexual exploitation of female slaves by their masters). Most African genetic input into Arabia is of Ethio-Somali and Nilo-Saharan origin, roughly validating the geographical information given by medieval Arabic authors.⁶

Nūr al-ma 'ārif contains several other passages that offer striking insights into slave trading practices during the Rasulid period. The source shows that children were captured or bought from populations living in today's Ethiopia and Eritrea, and then transported by Ethiopian traders along commercial routes to Zayla⁷, a port city and slave trading hub commonly identified with today's Saylac in Somalia. There, they were sold to Yemeni merchants with the help of an Ethiopian intermediary known as *nazīl*. Yemeni traders then transported the slaves on boats carrying mixed cargo to Aden, Yemen's major port on the country's southernmost tip, and to the ports of Zabīd, one of two Rasulid capitals. Upon arrival, some slaves were immediately selected for government service by state officials and taken overland to Ta'izz, the dynasty's second capital, while all others were sold on the public slave market.

A graphic description of sale procedures on the slave market of Aden was recorded by Ibn al-Mujāwir, a thirteenth-century traveler in Yemen:

Selling slave girls. The slave girl is fumigated with an aromatic smoke, perfumed, adorned and a waist-wrapper fastened round her middle. The seller takes her by the hand and walks around the souk [market] with her; he calls out that she is for sale. The wicked merchants appear, examining her hands, feet, calves, thighs, navel, chest and breasts. He examines her back and measures her buttocks in spans. He examines her tongue, teeth, hair and spares no effort. If she is wearing clothes, he takes them off; he examines and looks. Finally, he casts a direct eye over her vagina and anus, without her having on any covering or veil. When he has examined, expressed his approval and bought the slave girl, she remains with him for about ten days. When [the buyer] has taken care of her, had his fill, become bored and tired of her and got what he wanted from her, his lust is at an end. Zayd, the buyer, says to ‘Amr, the vendor, “Indeed, sir, we have a case to settle in court!” So they attend in front of the judge and one makes a claim against the other, [suggesting there is] a defect [in the slave girl].⁷

Ibn al-Mujāwir’s distressing account closely matches the advice given in medieval Arabic slave-buying manuals, which recommend that prospective buyers inspect slaves’ private parts before making their choice. Doing so in public went against the principles of Islamic law and morality, but nevertheless seems to have been quite common in the medieval era. The latter part of Ibn al-Mujāwir’s report reveals his penchant for scandal, while also addressing a specific provision of Islamic law pertaining to the slave trade: the buyer had a right to annul the acquisition of a slave if a defect was discovered that had not previously been disclosed by the seller.⁸ Zayd, the buyer in this story, makes a mockery of this right by sexually exploiting the enslaved girl he had purchased and then attempting to return her. The author does not reveal how this legal dispute ended, but recounts a similar case that was dismissed in court. What is most striking about this description, however, are not the insights into customs and legal provisions surrounding the sale of slaves. The main character of this vignette is the anonymous enslaved girl, who first suffers objectification and humiliation through the actions of the seller and the prospective buyer, in full view of the public, and is then sexually exploited by her new owner. As Hannah Barker has pointed out, slaves were considered objects to be bought and sold, but at the same time, their human capacity to think and act independently was recognized and exploited.⁹ The moment of sale marked the point in the life of enslaved persons when they were almost fully reduced to commodities and their humanity was suppressed through humiliation and coercion. Ibn al-Mujāwir’s account does not tell us anything we do not know from other sources—enslaved girls and women were sold to satisfy the sexual appetites of their masters—but the detail and crudity of his description make the human suffering of this particular girl palpable. In light of this source, the common scholarly assertion that Islamic slavery was of a relatively harmless nature becomes difficult to sustain.¹⁰

Combined evidence from *Nūr al-ma ‘ārif* and Ibn al-Mujāwir has allowed for a vivid reconstruction of slave trading practices between East Africa and

Yemen during the Rasulid era. Looking at the medieval Arabian Peninsula more broadly, it is important to note that slave trading routes were not stable over time, but fluctuated according to political and economic developments. Overland slave trading networks in late antiquity connected Syria, Jordan, and Arabia. In fact, slave raiding practices of nomadic Arabs during that time probably served as a model to the early Muslim conquerors.¹¹ In pre-Islamic times, African slaves were shipped to Yemen and then transported northwards to the Hijaz¹² on caravan routes, rather than being “imported” directly through Red Sea ports in Arabia.¹³ Mecca was already a major commercial hub before the advent of Islam, and slaves were among the many commodities that changed hands on markets in and around the city. Most slaves were brought to the peninsula from East Africa via the Red Sea. As the *Periplus Maris Erythraei* attests, by the first century CE, the trafficking of humans across the Red Sea was an established practice.¹⁴ Slaves were usually carried on mixed-cargo ships in small numbers, and their acquisition was often arranged through personal networks rather than on larger slave markets. During the eighth and ninth centuries, two dynamics spurred the demand for African slaves in Arabia. A boom in mineral exploitations in today’s Asir region of Saudi Arabia increased the demand for cheap labor.¹⁵ At the same time, local rulers began assembling slave soldiers (mamluks), a practice first introduced by the Abbasid caliph al-Mu‘taṣim (r. 833–842). In Yemen, the Ziyadids (ca. 818–981) were the first dynasty to establish a mamluk army. According to the Yemeni historiographer ‘Umāra b. ‘Alī al-Ḥakamī (b.1120 or 1121), the Ziyadids imposed a tribute on the ruler of the Dahlak archipelago in the Red Sea that included 1000 male and female slaves identified as Ethiopian and Nubian.¹⁶ An eleventh-century traveler observed enslaved workers from Zanzibar and Ethiopia in the oasis of Al-Aḥṣā’ in today’s eastern Saudi Arabia, suggesting that African slaves were not only traded across the Red Sea, but also directly to the Persian Gulf.¹⁷ This evidence is also a rare glimpse into agricultural and rural slavery, both of which have likely been underestimated by modern scholars due to the urban and elite focus of most available sources.¹⁸ In the twelfth century, the Arab geographer Muḥammad al-Idrīsī describes how Arab traders lured children on the coast of present-day Kenya with dates, in order to capture and enslave them.¹⁹ Around the same time, letters from Jewish merchants attest that slaves were shipped from the Horn of Africa to Aden.²⁰

Not all slaves in medieval Arabia were African or of African origin. In fact, the enslavement of Arabs by Arabs was not uncommon until Muslim jurists ruled that only persons born into slavery and enemies captured in warfare could legally be enslaved.²¹ Although the medieval slave trade from India to the Arabian Peninsula still awaits thorough scholarly exploration, the appearance of Indian slaves in sources on medieval Arabia proves its existence. The Yemeni evidence shows that female slaves from India were prized as entertainers and concubines.²² In the thirteenth century, the traveler Ibn al-Mujāwir reports that enslaved boys (*ghilmān*) were imported from India to the Yemeni ports of Aden and Al-Shiḥr, even specifying the customs due on

slaves who were likely Goan.²³ Aden also served as an entrepôt for enslaved Indians destined for Egypt.²⁴ A fifteenth-century source describes the eunuchs guarding the Prophet Muhammad's tomb in Medina as being mostly Indian, but also of East and West African as well as of Byzantine origins.²⁵ Finally, Turkish slaves are occasionally mentioned in medieval Yemeni sources, and a handful of references to slaves from other parts of the world further complicate the picture.²⁶

Slave trading was not the only way in which people wound up as slaves in medieval Arabia. In pre- and early Islamic times, most slaves on the peninsula seem to have been Arab prisoners of intertribal warfare.²⁷ Between the third and sixth centuries, the Ethiopian kingdom of Aksum suffered a number of military defeats in South Arabia, likely increasing the African slave population there.²⁸ Military expansions during the early Islamic period (seventh to eighth century) provided many opportunities for the capture and subsequent enslavement of prisoners of war. Although figures are difficult to extrapolate from the available sources, the scale of these practices was undoubtedly significant. Once conquered populations had either embraced Islam or accepted the authority of their Muslim rulers, enslaving them became illegal. In this respect, it is instructive to briefly consider how the entry into slavery was regulated and restricted by Islamic law. Islam's view of slavery rests on two main sources, namely the Quran and the *hadith*. The principles stipulated in these sources are congruent and form the basis of Islamic law (*fiqh*), which was codified in the eighth and ninth centuries. Islamic law recognizes two ways of entering into slavery: only children born to enslaved parents and enemies captured in warfare could rightfully be slaves, meaning that previous practices such as debt bondage, enslavement as punishment for crimes, or self-sale were forbidden. Furthermore, as will be discussed below, medieval Islamic law promoted manumission and granted the children of concubines free status. These legal principles caused a steady reduction in the number of slaves but left open a loophole, since the supply of slaves from beyond the Islamic realm remained unregulated. Hence, while the normative framework established by Islamic law arguably sought to reduce the number of slaves in medieval Islamic societies, it ultimately led to the development of a commercialized slave trade.

EXPERIENCES OF SLAVERY

We know that in medieval Yemen, enslaved persons belonged to royal courts in large numbers and were also found in the households of local elites, but there is only minimal evidence for slave ownership among the broader population. Due to a strong bias toward a historiography of the elites, only slaves who closely associated with influential individuals appear regularly in narrative sources from medieval Yemen. This imbalance of evidence means that the lives of eunuchs and concubines can be reconstructed in much greater detail than those of low-ranking slaves. Administrative documents partly compensate for this shortcoming, offering glimpses into the lives of enslaved menial

workers. It is important to consider that slaves in medieval Yemen lived under vastly different conditions, but that they nevertheless shared the same state of unfreedom or partial freedom which set them apart from the free population. The study of slaves in relatively privileged positions thus also offers clues on the experience of enslaved persons in medieval Yemen more generally. Harnessing the complementary strengths of sources from the Najahid and Rasulid era allows us to gain important insights into the lived realities of slavery in medieval Yemen, illuminating a broad range of aspects of this phenomenon. For example, Rasulid works are rich in information on the lives of eunuchs serving at the Sultanid court. Furthermore, the administrative documents contained in *Nūr al-maʿārif* not only describe the slave trade across the Red Sea, but also offer rare information about slaves at the bottom of the social ladder. The surviving Najahid chronicle, on the other hand, offers a detailed account of the lives of (formerly) enslaved girls and women, a demographic that remains largely unmentioned in Rasulid sources.

Concubines

In the twelfth century, the Yemeni poet and scribe ʿUmāra b. ʿAlī al-Ḥakamī recorded a number of anecdotes featuring an enslaved singer known as Warda (Flower). Trained as an entertainer by her first owner, a well-known slave trader, she then became the concubine of a high-ranking military commander. Later, she attracted the attention of an influential vizier who devised an intricate plot in order to gain possession of her. In the following passage, Warda's second owner describes the moment when she appears amid other enslaved girls to entertain guests at a banquet, and later informs her that she will be given to the vizier as a present:

Then we ordered [Warda's] presence, as the tenth of ten [enslaved girls]. They kissed the hands of the vizier and began to sing in his presence, with uncovered faces. [...]. Then [the vizier] ʿUthmān became drunk and slept, and the women became drunk, except Warda. I had wanted her to be alert. I went to the privy, called for Warda and informed her of the story. She said: "I don't desire anything except my master."²⁹

After a number of scenes in which Warda merely appears as the voiceless object of men's desire, she finally speaks. Although the above quote is at best a re-narration by the author, perhaps even mere fiction, it neatly encapsulates the precariousness inherent in the lives of concubines. Warda has just discovered that she will be handed over from her second owner to her third. Her statement "I don't desire anything except my master" expresses her lack of choice and is masterfully diplomatic, in that it could be read as a statement of submission to any one of her previous or future owners. Medieval Islamic law legitimized and strictly regulated concubinage, the sexual exploitation of female slaves by their male masters. These relations were licit, and the children

born out of them were free and their father's legitimate offspring. A concubine who bore her master a child acquired the status of *umm walad* (literally "mother of the boy/child"), which meant that she could no longer be sold and automatically acquired her freedom upon her master's death. Statistical analyses of prosopographic evidence have recently shown that concubinage, which was rare in pre-Islamic Arabia, expanded dramatically in the conquest era due to the ready availability of female captives.³⁰ This dataset also shows that the number of concubines dropped significantly by the time of the Umayyad caliph Hisham's reign (724–43), when the major Islamic military expansion came to an end.³¹ The practice of concubinage exposed enslaved girls and women to sexual exploitation, while offering some of them opportunities for social advancement that were unavailable to other slaves. Al-Ḥakamī's account reveals that enslaved girls such as Warda were trained by slave traders and then sold to the elites as entertainers and concubines.³² This trajectory parallels practices in the Hijaz during the Abbasid era. Around the ninth century, Mecca and Medina became centers for the training of *quiyān*, enslaved girls and women who were then sold onto the Abbasid elites, whom they entertained with musical performances, poetry, and quick-witted banter.³³ For instance, an early eleventh-century slave trader relates that he bought nine-year-old girls and trained them for three years each in Medina and Mecca, upon which they arrived in Iraq perfectly equipped to carve out careers as *quiyān*.³⁴ What followed—both in Abbasid Iraq and in Najahid Yemen—was a life of precariousness in which concubines were frequently moved from one owner's household to the next. In Warda's case, she was owned by three men consecutively (that we know of) before finally gaining her freedom. After the vizier's death, Warda is described as choosing her own marriage partner. It is therefore likely that she had born the vizier a child and was manumitted according to the *umm walad* laws. A careful analysis of the available evidence reveals that Warda displayed remarkable ingenuity enabling her to endure the coercion of enslavement and to navigate the complex dependencies tying her to her former and current owners, before she finally attained greater agency and social standing later in life.

It is thanks to ʿUmāra b. ʿAlī al-Ḥakamī's twelfth-century chronicle *Al-Muḥīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, the only surviving source from the Najahid period, that we learn about the experiences of concubines like Warda. This work is a striking description of a society deeply impacted on all levels by enslaved and freed persons. Concubines and former concubines figure prominently in this work, allowing for a reconstruction of their lives in some detail. The opportunities for social advancement open to some concubines such as Warda were harnessed in an even more impressive fashion by a woman named ʿAlam (d. 1150). Her story is tightly intertwined with that of the Najahid Sultans, a dynasty founded by Ethiopian slave soldiers who had usurped power from their masters in 1021 and ruled parts of Southern Yemen until around 1158. The Najahids routinely took concubines as wives, likely because local elites shunned them due to their African slave origins. In this respect, ʿAlam's story

is not uncommon. She was an enslaved singer, concubine, and later wife of the fifth Najahid Sultan Maṣṣūr (d. 1130), whom she bore a son. What sets ʿAlam apart was her strong political engagement, which continued even after the death of her husband and son had deprived her of any direct link to the throne. The early twelfth century was a period of vicious strife at the Najahid court, with different factions of enslaved viziers vying for influence while the sultan's role slowly grew obsolete. As al-Ḥakamī notes, ʿAlam became one of the most powerful political figures of her time by placing her own male slaves in strategically important government and military positions:

Men from among the slaves (*ʿabīd*) of the free lady, queen Umm Fātik b. Maṣṣūr [i.e. ʿAlam] were raised in the palace of king Fātik b. Maṣṣūr. They were Ṣawāb, Rayḥān, Yumn, ʿAzz, and Rayḥān the Elder. These governors were dignitaries, important personalities. And among the non-castrated ones [were] Iqbāl, Masrūr, Bāriḥ and Surūr. He [Surūr] was the amir of the two parties, given his capabilities and affluence. This group were those who spoke with the sultan's tongue.³⁵

The deployment of trusted slaves enabled ʿAlam to exercise political influence in spheres that were inaccessible to women, such as the army and government. Al-Ḥakamī mentions elsewhere that ʿAlam had raised some of these slaves in the royal palace, thereby nurturing their careers from the very beginning.³⁶ ʿAlam's social standing is further underlined by the fact that she became the patroness of the yearly pilgrimage caravan from Yemen to Mecca and Medina, ensuring its safety through her presence.³⁷ The life stories of ʿAlam and Warda exemplify broader trends in the biographies of concubines in medieval Yemen. While they might have enjoyed a relatively privileged lifestyle compared to the conditions of low-ranking slaves, concubines had to endure sexual exploitation, usually by several consecutive owners, and their wellbeing was largely dependent on the goodwill of these men. At the same time, the biographies of individual concubines show that some of them were able to incrementally increase their status and independence by bearing their masters children, making strategic use of their intimate association with influential men, and using their own slaves to expand their political reach.

Eunuchs

At the end of the fourteenth century, the court historian ʿAlī b. Ḥasan al-Khazrajī recorded the death of Ahyaf, the most influential eunuch of the Rasulid era:

In this year [1385], the chief eunuch Amīn al-Dīn Ahyaf al-Mujāhidī died. He was resolute, courageous, tough, wayward, blood-shedding, murderous, crude, uncouth, resolute, determined, canny, haughty, of great prestige and of severe spirit. He was brave, fearless in battle, and a good advisor to the sultan.³⁸

Ahyaf was the figurehead among a number of eunuchs belonging to Rasulid Sultans who made stellar careers in the Rasulid army and administration. He served four consecutive Sultans, rising to the very top of the Rasulid military apparatus. Al-Khazrajī portrays him as a skilled military commander who was often charged with heading punitive campaigns against rebellious tribes. Rasulid sources show that promising young eunuchs were selected by government officials as soon as they arrived in Yemen, and were then trained by senior eunuchs in the royal palaces. Eunuchs were thought to display undivided loyalty to their owners, since they had been torn from their families of origin and were physically unable to start out their own families later in life. For this reason, they were considered the perfect servants worthy of their masters' trust. In the Rasulid era, the importance of eunuchs in the political and military apparatus greatly increased. They supervised slave soldiers, led military campaigns, and acted as governors of cities, castles, and administrative regions. A number of them even attained the position of amir, the highest military rank in Rasulid Yemen. Sultans also occasionally sent eunuchs as diplomatic envoys to Egypt. It is remarkable that enslaved persons of foreign descent were trusted to return from a mission abroad, rather than simply disappearing. Eunuchs also performed key roles in relation to Rasulid women and children. Administrative and narrative sources reveal that the households of Rasulid noblewomen comprised dozens of eunuchs whose roles included safeguarding the women's quarters, educating royal offspring, supervising sultanic kitchens and storehouses, and likely also training and supervising female slaves. Furthermore, each Rasulid noblewoman had a eunuch administrator (*zimām*) who was usually appointed by a male family member and managed her household. The importance of this relationship is epitomized by the fact that Rasulid royal women were known not by their given names, but by the name of their eunuch administrator. The wife of the seventh Rasulid sultan al-Ashraf Ismā'īl, for instance, was known by the name of Jihat Mu'ṭab, after her *zimām* Jamāl al-Dīn Mu'ṭab al-Ashrafi. This naming practice powerfully illustrates the role that eunuchs played in representing their mistresses in male-dominated spheres beyond the royal residences. Rasulid sultans often appointed their former educators and tutors as their wives' administrators. In this way, eunuchs accompanied their royal masters from childhood throughout their adult life, serving their wives and children as well. It is easy to imagine that these intimate responsibilities also enabled eunuchs to exercise a subtle influence on the ruling family. In sum, eunuchs were the only slaves serving in all spheres of Rasulid private and public life—managing the households of royal women, educating royal children, supervising male and female slaves, commanding mamluk armies, and occupying the highest political positions. These elite eunuchs must be seen as important players in the Rasulid system of government. Their potential success, however, came at the price of physical mutilation and was contingent on their absolute loyalty to their masters.

Slave Soldiers

Slave soldiers (also known as mamluks) are among the most commonly encountered slaves in medieval Yemeni sources. Their deployment by local rulers is attested from the ninth century onwards. The Najahid dynasty, itself established by Ethiopian slave soldiers who overthrew their masters, relied on Ethiopian and Nubian mamluks as well as on mercenaries from Central Asia known as *Ghuzz* to fend off rivals.³⁹ During the Rasulid era, the mamluks were essential in fighting internal and external enemies, but they also destabilized their masters' rule through frequent plots and revolts. Despite their centrality to the medieval history of Yemen, it is impossible to establish the basic facts about the lives of mamluks during that time. Not only is information on their training and living conditions in the military barracks virtually inexistent in the sources, their origins are also shrouded in mystery. The fact that they bore Turkic names prompts the assumption that they were of Central Asian descent, as was the case for most slave soldiers serving the Mamluk rulers in Egypt during the same time period.⁴⁰ However, it is also entirely possible that the Rasulids relied on African mamluks, just as preceding Yemeni dynasties had done, while giving them Turkic names to mark them off as military slaves.⁴¹ The mamluks of Rasulid Yemen not only elude scholarship, but they are also remarkably often described as revolting against their masters. For example, in 1322, a contingent of Rasulid mamluks rebelled, arrested the young sultan al-Mujāhid and attempted to install his uncle al-Manṣūr Ayyūb and later his cousin al-Zāhir on the throne. After these events, it took al-Mujāhid a decade to restore his sovereignty.⁴²

Female Slave Attendants and Domestics

The role of female slaves as attendants and domestics of elite women is amply attested, even though details on the work and life conditions of these girls and women remain unknown. As noted above, Islamic legal texts present domestic slavery as the norm, and it was likely the most common form of slavery in medieval Islamic societies.⁴³ Because their presence was taken for granted and considered to be irrelevant to historiography, enslaved domestics hardly figure in written sources and have thus frequently been underrepresented by modern historians.⁴⁴ On rare occasions, however, these women and girls are thrown into the limelight, allowing us to gain insights into their lives. The story of Nukhba is a case in point here. She was an enslaved girl (*jāriya*) who worked in the Rasulid castle of Ta'izz, which at the time was under siege. Nukhba had just brought the reigning Sultan Al-Mujāhid ʿAlī (r. 1321–1363) water to perform his ablutions when he was almost struck by a ballista and barely escaped death.⁴⁵ It was merely by being the only eyewitness to this event that Nukhba's existence was recorded, and that we learn about her service in the most intimate realms of the Sultanic residence. How many others like her toiled in the households of the elites and are forever lost to history? While

Nukhba is described here as serving the sultan, she actually belonged to the sultan's powerful mother, queen Jihat Ṣalāḥ. The households of elite women comprised large numbers of female slaves. The labor of these slaves enabled their mistresses to live the largely secluded lifestyle that was expected from women of high rank and honor. Women-owned domestics were not allowed to perform sexual work, but anecdotal evidence shows that they were at times gifted to men and thereby turned into concubines.⁴⁶ It should also be noted that although sex with male slaves was forbidden, both male and female slaves were at risk of sexual exploitation.⁴⁷

Other Types of Labor Performed by Slaves

It is likely that the labor of enslaved women and girls comprised many tasks in the household setting, as well as in agriculture and craftsmanship, that were simply not recorded by contemporary historians and scribes. Even male slaves who were engaged in menial work are rarely mentioned. Nevertheless, medieval Yemeni sources do offer occasional clues on those slaves toiling at the bottom of the social ladder. Scattered hints, most of them from *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, give some indication of the breadth of slave labor at the time. This information largely survived because at least some categories of slaves owned by the Rasulids received salaries and were given gifts during religious festivals. However, while male slaves at the Rasulid court frequently appear in salary and gift lists in *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, female slaves are virtually absent, suggesting that they likely were not paid for their work but were instead maintained within the royal court. A fascinating exception concerns enslaved girls who received payment for producing buttons made of silk thread, under the supervision of a male slave, likely a eunuch.⁴⁸ A handful of references also attest to the presence of female cooks and bread-makers in the royal kitchens. The work of male slaves in these kitchens is much better documented, and the range of salaries given to them suggests a diversification and hierarchization of tasks performed by them. The Yemeni sources analyzed also provide meager evidence that slaves were deployed in farming, especially in cattle husbandry.⁴⁹ It is likely that slaves also worked in the royal stables as well as in mining and hunting.⁵⁰ Furthermore, evidence from Geniza sources, a corpus of documents from the medieval Jewish community in Cairo, attests to the fact that merchants active in the Red Sea and the wider Indian Ocean world owned male slave agents who supported their business endeavors, sometimes even traveling abroad to trade on their behalf. The same practice existed among the *Kārimī*, a group of merchants active in the trade between Egypt and the Indian Ocean during the Ayyubid and Mamluk periods.⁵¹ Due to a lack of sources, the level of exploitation and violence suffered by slaves working in kitchens and workshops, on fields and ships is impossible to gauge. The available evidence only paints a partial picture that obscures almost every detail about the lives of these children, women, and men.

EXITS FROM SLAVERY

According to medieval Islamic law, slavery was considered to be a legal state, not an innate characteristic of the slave, and could therefore be reversed through manumission. The freeing of slaves was encouraged as an act of piety and recognized as a way of atoning sins, such as perjury or the violation of the Ramadan fast. Detailed legal provisions distinguished different kinds of manumission, such as a slave owner's testamentary provision that her slaves be freed upon her death, or contractual manumission, in which slaves bought their freedom for an agreed sum of money paid in installments. In the foundational texts of Islam, manumission was understood as a way for slaves to regain their freedom and become full members of the *umma*; for slave owners, it offered the opportunity to perform a good deed and atone for sins. However, the way manumission developed in Islamic legal thought and lived social practice effected slaves in ways that were more complex. Manumission in the medieval Islamic context was not simply the reversal of enslavement. Rather, it is better understood as a long journey on which the slave traveled toward greater freedom, gaining more agency and rights along the way. The promise of freedom could also be used by masters to command obedience from their slaves, thereby becoming a tool of suppression rather than liberation. Not all slaves who were on a path to manumission were eventually freed. For example, if a master's testament stated that his slaves be freed after his death, his heirs could still sell off these slaves to pay outstanding debts. Even achieving the status of freedman or freedwoman did not constitute full freedom in any modern sense. Rather, freed slaves remained connected to their former masters through bonds of clientage (*walāʾ*). This relationship was passed on from generation to generation, binding the families of former masters and former slaves together through responsibilities and rights toward each other. *Walāʾ* is modeled after kinship relations and is based on protection in exchange for submission. At its best, this relationship ensures that former slaves and their descendants are integrated into mainstream society through a connection to powerful patrons; at its worst, it can perpetuate exploitation and dependency for generations to come. Surprisingly, manumission is rarely discussed in medieval Yemeni sources. Exceptions include the fourteenth-century report that the Rasulid queen Jihat Taghā manumitted upon her death large numbers of slaves,⁵² and a mention of the freeing of a slave to atone for a sin.⁵³ Biographical dictionaries occasionally feature manumitted slaves who became saints or merchants. For example, Abū al-Ḍiyāʾ Jawhar ibn ʿAbd Allāh al-Ṣūfī was a slave who engaged in trade on behalf of his master, a merchant. He was later manumitted and became a famous Sufi saint.⁵⁴ If one traces the lives of individual concubines through al-Ḥakamī's chronicle of the Najahid era, it becomes clear that they were indeed manumitted—either after their master's death, as prescribed by Islamic law, or earlier. Whether and when the high-ranking eunuchs that figure so prominently in medieval sources on Yemen were manumitted remains a mystery. Only one eunuch named Niẓām

al- Dīn Mukhtaṣṣ (d. 1267) is known to have been freed by his master.⁵⁵ This remarkable silence around manumission could mean that it was rarely practiced in medieval Yemen, which however would be unlikely given its centrality in Islamic legal texts. Alternatively, it might have been such a standard occurrence that it deserved little mention by court chroniclers and scribes.

CONCLUSIONS

Slavery has long constituted a blind spot in the study of medieval Islamic societies, but a number of important works published since the 2000s have greatly contributed to our understanding of the phenomenon. Yet, few of these works focus on slavery in Arabia, where the birth of Islam in the early seventh century brought about changes in the practice of slavery that continued throughout the medieval period. Our understanding of slavery in medieval Arabia largely rests on the work of a few scholars, which are listed in the suggestions for further reading below. Elizabeth Urban has studied the changing roles of Muslims of slave origin in the early Islamic community. Majied Robinson has fruitfully applied statistical approaches to Arab genealogical literature, thereby illuminating the role of concubinage in the tribe of Muhammad from the sixth to the mid-eighth century. Hend Gilli-Elewy has analyzed a wealth of Arabic source material to uncover the origins of slaves living in Hijaz during the Prophet Muhammad's lifetime. Chase Robinson has examined practices of enslavement during the Islamic conquest period. Shaun Marmon's study of the eunuchs who guarded the Prophet Muhammad's tomb in Medina from the twelfth century onwards offers insights into slavery practices in both Egypt and the Hijaz. My own research focuses on the roles played by slaves at the Najahid and Rasulid courts of Yemen. Two recent works by Craig Perry and Jonathan Miran offer the larger transregional context for slave trading to Arabia in the medieval period. Additionally, scholars studying related topics such as historical commercial connections across the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean, the history of slavery in Africa, and slavery in Islamic law also offer important insights into the subject.

The story of how slavery developed in medieval Islamic societies begins in Arabia. It was here that the religious principles related to slavery were revealed through the Quran and first put to practice by the Prophet Muhammad and his disciples. The way in which the early community of Muslims (*umma*) related to slaves was both influenced by the region's previous history of slavery and constituted a significant break from it. The early *umma* consisted not only of free Arabs, but also included slaves and former slaves. A prominent example among them was Abu Bakra, an Ethiopian slave who joined the nascent Islamic community as an equal member after having been freed by the Prophet Muhammad. The *ḥadīth* relates that the Prophet Muhammad did not reject slavery outright, but urged his supporters to treat their slaves kindly and to manumit them. Urban has argued that the early *umma* was a "radically inclusive, faith-based community," a character that was lost by the

time the Islamic scriptural tradition became codified in the eighth to ninth centuries.⁵⁶ Slaves were first unconditionally welcomed to the early community of believers, but as the growing *umma* sought to define its boundaries, it became more difficult for slaves, former slaves, and their descendants to be considered full and equal members.

The conquest period of the seventh and eighth centuries saw a dramatic increase in the number of slaves owned by Muslim elites, due to the capture of large numbers of enemies in warfare. The proliferation of concubinage especially, which had been a modest phenomenon in pre-Islamic Arabia, would have far-reaching consequences for the nature of Islamic slavery, as well as for the composition of Muslim families and households. Islamic law, which was codified in the eighth and ninth centuries, reflects these developments, as jurists sought to translate the religious principles pertaining to slavery defined in the Quran and the *hadith* into a legal apparatus that would regulate lived practice. This apparatus established who could be a slave—only children born into slavery or enemies captured in warfare—and urged masters to treat their slaves kindly. Slave owners were obliged to secure the upkeep of their slaves and provide them with medical treatment. However, no legal sanctions punishing abusive slave owners were introduced. Islamic legal texts presuppose a setting of domestic slavery in which masters possessed a limited number of slaves whom they interacted with personally. This scenario was likely the standard in the formative period of Islam and throughout the medieval period, although a lack of sources precludes us from gaining a full picture of all aspects of slavery. The normative framework around concubinage and manumission in particular was elaborated in minute detail, while other aspects of slavery were largely disregarded in the legal literature. The legal texts failed to account for the fact that the reality of slavery expanded and changed over time and depending on the geographical context, resulting in a growing mismatch between norms and practice.⁵⁷

Yet, in the case of medieval Yemen, the sources prove that people were aware of the legal framework around slavery and largely sought to follow it. Around the mid-eighth century, after the great conquests were completed and Islamic polities had stabilized, slave trading replaced slave raiding as the main strategy for the acquisition of new slaves. Most slaves reached medieval Arabia from East Africa, having been trafficked as children first via overland routes that connected the African hinterland to the coast, and then across the Red Sea on mixed-cargo ships. Slaves from India appear regularly in sources on medieval Arabia, and enslaved individuals from Byzantium and other parts of the world are also occasionally mentioned. Evidence on the experiences of slavery in medieval Arabia is scattered and fragmentary. A heavy source bias toward male elite perspectives means that the lives of most slaves remained unrecorded. What is however clear is that slaves sustained the lavish lifestyle of Yemen's upper classes for centuries. As in other historical and geographical contexts, slavery in medieval Yemen was highly gendered. This fact is most starkly on display in the case of concubines and eunuchs, who were valued

for their sexuality and presumed lack thereof respectively. While concubines' bodies were exploited to generate pleasure and offspring for their masters, eunuchs were mutilated to increase their versatility and perceived trustworthiness as servants. Female slaves cooked and cleaned, worked in agriculture and crafts, provided entertainment and sexual gratification to their masters, and bore them children. Male slaves also performed menial, domestic, and agricultural duties, fought and died for their masters, traded on their behalf, and represented their interests as high army and government officials. Most slaves lived within their masters' households, a fact that should not automatically be considered as limiting the level of exploitation and violence they endured. The legal avenues to freedom were many, but the extent to which they were available to individual slaves depended on their status and on the benevolence of their masters.

Research for this article was conducted within the program "*Visions of Community - Comparative Approaches to Ethnicity, Region and Empire in Christianity, Islam and Buddhism*," funded by the Austrian Science Fund (SFB 35). I am grateful to my colleagues at the Austrian Academy of Sciences' *Institute for Social Anthropology* for their support throughout this project. I thank Hannah Barker and Craig Perry for their valuable feedback on the draft chapter. Special thanks to Juliane Schiel and Damian Pargas for bringing together this volume and for organizing the writers' workshop.

NOTES

1. For the purposes of this chapter, the term "Arabia" will be used to denote the geographical area of the Arabian Peninsula, and the medieval period is defined broadly as the time between 500 and 1500 CE. Daniel M. Varisco and Thomas Bauer have convincingly challenged the term "medieval" in reference to Islamic history, but I consider the term to be useful in a comparative context such as this handbook (Daniel M. Varisco, "Making 'Medieval' Islam Meaningful," *Medieval Encounters* 13, no. 3 (Sept. 2007): 385–412. Thomas Bauer, *Warum es kein islamisches Mittelalter gab - Das Erbe der Antike und der Orient* (München: C. H. Beck, 2018).
2. Anonymous, *Nūr al-ma'ārif fi nuẓum wa-qawānīn wa-a'rāf al-Yaman fi al-ʿahd al-muẓaffarī al-wārif* (Lumière de la connaissance. Règles, lois et coutumes du Yémen sous le règne du sultan rasoulide al-Muẓaffar), ed. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm Jāzim, 2 vols. (Sana'a: Centre français d'archéologie et de sciences sociales, 2003).
3. Anonymous, *Nūr al-ma'ārif*, I.362. Medieval Yemeni sources often give the plural of *jāriya* as *jawār* instead of the standard plural form *jawāri*.
4. David Ayalon, *Eunuchs, Caliphs and Sultans: A Study in Power Relationships* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1999), 63; Ehud Toledano, "The Imperial Eunuchs of Istanbul: From Africa to the Heart of Islam," *Middle Eastern Studies* 20, no. 3 (1984): 380.
5. Ayda Bouanga, "Gold, Slaves, and Trading Routes in Southern Blue Nile (Abbay) Societies, Ethiopia, 13th–16th Centuries," *Northeast African Studies* 17, no. 2 (2017): 31–60.

6. For an overview of this research, see Craig Perry, “Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Western Indian Ocean World,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, eds. Craig Perry et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 149.
7. Yūsuf b. Ya‘qūb Ibn al-Mujāwir, *A Traveller in Thirteenth-Century Arabia: Ibn al-Mujāwir’s Tārīkh al-mustabṣir*, ed. G. Rex Smith (Burlington, UK: Ashgate, 2008), 162.
8. Yahyā b. Sharaf Al-Nawawī, *Minhāj al-ṭālibīn wa ‘umdat al-muftīn*, ed. Muḥammad Ṭāhir Sha‘bān (Beirut: Dār al-Minhāj, 2005), 220–1.
9. Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020), 98.
10. E.g. Jerzy Zdanowski, *Speaking with their Own Voices. The Stories of Slaves in the Persian Gulf in the 20th Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2014), 50.
11. Noel Lenski, “Captivity and Slavery Among the Saracens in Late Antiquity (ca. 250–630 CE),” *AnTard* 19 (2011): 237–66.
12. The Hijaz (also spelled Hejaz) is a region of Arabia located in the northwestern part of what is today Saudi Arabia. The term usually designates the coastal areas on the Red Sea, roughly between the Gulf of Aqaba to the North and ‘Asīr to the South.
13. Hend Gilli-Elewy, “On the Provenance of Slaves in Mecca during the Time of the Prophet Muhammad.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017): 166.
14. Richard Pankhurst, “Across the Red Sea and Gulf of Aden: Ethiopia’s Historic Ties with Yaman,” *Africa: rivista trimestrale di Studi e documentazione dell’istituto italiano per l’Africa e l’Oriente* 57, no. 3 (2002): 398.
15. Timothy Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate: AD 500–1000* (Cairo: American University Cairo Press, 2012), 127–32.
16. ‘Umāra b. ‘Alī al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, ed. Henry Cassels Kay (London: Arnold, 1892), 6.
17. Nasir-i Khusraw, *Nasir-i Khusraw’s Book of Travels* (Costa Mesa: Mazda Publishers, 2001), 112.
18. Chase Robinson, “Slavery in the Conquest Period,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017): 159.
19. Abū ‘Abd Allāh Muḥammad b. Muḥammad al-Idrīsī. *Kitāb nuzhat al-mushtāq fī ikhtirāq al-āfāq*, ed. Alessio Bombacci et al., vol. 3 (Napoli: Istituto universitario orientale di Napoli, 1970), 58–66.
20. Shelomo D. Goitein and Mordechai A. Friedman. *India Traders of the Middle Ages: Documents from the Cairo Geniza (India Book)* (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 453.
21. Robinson, “Slavery in the Conquest Period,” 158; Gilli-Elewy, “On the Provenance of Slaves,” 164–8.
22. Al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, 65; Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders*, 10, 481.
23. Ibn Al-Mujāwir, *Tārīkh al-mustabṣir*, 140–3.
24. Perry, *The Daily Life of Slaves*, 63; Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Tārīkh al-mustabṣir*, 146.
25. Al-Sakhāwī in Shaun E. Marmon, *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society* (Oxford University Press, 1995), 39.

26. E.g. Badr al-Dīn Ibn Ḥātim, *Al-simṭ al-ghālī al-thaman fī akhbār al-mulūk min al-ghuzz bi-l-Yaman*, ed. G. Rex Smith (London: Luzac and Co., 1974), 179; ‘Alī b. Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Uqūd al-lu’lu’iyya fī ta’rīkh al-dāwla al-rasūliyya* (The Pearl-Strings; a history of the Resūliyy Dynasty of Yemen), ed. James W. Redhouse and Alexander Rogers, 5 vols. (Leyden: Brill and London: Luzac, 1906), II.294.
27. Gilli-Elewy, “On the Provenance of Slaves”, 164.
28. Power, *The Red Sea from Byzantium to the Caliphate*, 95.
29. Al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, 81.
30. Majied Robinson, “Statistical approaches to the rise of concubinage in Islam”, In *Concubines and Courtesans: Women and Slavery in Islamic History*, eds. Matthew S. Gordon and Kathryn A. Hain (Oxford University Press India, 2017), 17.
31. Elizabeth Urban, *Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves and the Sons of Slave Mothers* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020), 112.
32. E.g. Al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, 38, 72, 78, 88.
33. E.g. Julia Bray, “Men, Women and Slaves in Abbasid Society,” In *Gender in the Early Medieval World. East and West, 300–900*, eds. Leslie Brubaker and Julia M. H. Smith (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); Matthew S. Gordon, “The Place of Competition: The Careers of ‘Arīb al-Ma’mūniya and ‘Ulayya Bint al-Mahdī, Sisters in Song,” in *Occasional Papers of the School of ‘Abbasid Studies*, vol. 135 (Cambridge: Orientalia Lovaniensia Analecta, 2004), 62–81.
34. Ibn Buṭlān in Antonella Gherseti, *Trattato generale sull’acquisto e l’esame degli schiavi* (Catanzaro: Abramo, 2001), 76–7.
35. Al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, 82.
36. Al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, 86.
37. Al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, 71.
38. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Uqūd al-lu’lu’iyya*, II.183.
39. Al-Ḥakamī, *Al-Mufīd fī akhbār Zabīd*, 77.
40. In scholarship on Islamic history, slave soldiers are usually referred to as *mamluks*, while the eponymous Sultanate (648–922/1250–1517) is capitalized (*Mamluks*).
41. Similarly, non-Turkic mamluks in medieval Egypt were given Turkic names as markers of group identity. David Ayalon, “Names, Titles and Nisbas of the Mamluks,” in *The Mamluk Military Society*, Collected Studies Series 104 (London: Variorum reprints, 1979), 194–95.
42. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Uqūd al-lu’lu’iyya*, 1906, II.5 ff.
43. E.g. Al-Nawawī, *Minhāj al-ṭālibīn*.
44. Craig Perry, *The Daily Life of Slaves and Global Reach of Slavery in Medieval Egypt, 969–1250* (PhD diss., Emory University, 2014), 68.
45. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Uqūd al-lu’lu’iyya*, II.20.
46. For example, the daughter of a Najahid prince tried to evade the sexual advances of a powerful vizier by handing over to him “forty virgins from among her *jawārī*.” (Al-Ḥakamī, 73).
47. Shaun Marmon, “Intersections of Gender, Sex, and Slavery: Female Sexual Slavery”, in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 2: AD 500–AD 1420*, ed. Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engermann, and David Richardson (Cambridge University Press, 2021).

48. Anonymous, *Nūr al-ma‘ārif*, I.104.
49. Ibn Ḥātim, *Al-simt al-ghālī*, 110–2; Anonymous, *Nūr al-ma‘ārif*, I.373; Al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Uqūd al-lu‘lu‘iyya*, II.217; and Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Tārīkh al-mustabṣir*, 186.
50. Ibn al-Mujāwir, *Tārīkh al-mustabṣir*, 145; Muḥammad aṭ-Ṭayyib b. ‘Abd Allāh Bā Makhrama, “Tārīkh taghr ‘Adan”, in *Arabische Texte zur Kenntnis der Stadt Aden im Mittelalter*, ed. Oscar Löfgren (Leipzig: Harrassowitz, 1936), A.9; and Anonymous, *Nūr al-ma‘ārif*, I.294. II.353, I.126, I.175.
51. Goitein and Friedman, *India Traders*, 66 ff. Shelomo D. Goitein, *Letters of Medieval Jewish Traders* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1973), 13; Ṣubḥī Labīb, *Handelsgeschichte Ägyptens im Spätmittelalter: 1171–1517* (Wiesbaden: Steiner, 1965), 112, 287, 489.
52. ‘Alī b. Ḥasan al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Iqd al-fākhīr al-ḥasan fī ṭabaqāt akābir ahl al-Yaman, wa huwa ṭirāz a‘lām al-zaman fī ṭabaqāt a‘yān al-Yaman*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh b. Qā’id ‘Abbādī et al. (Sana’a: Maktabat al-jil al-jadīd, 2009), 2502.
53. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Uqūd al-lu‘lu‘iyya*, II.175.
54. Abū l-‘Abbās Aḥmad b. Aḥmad al-Sharjī al-Zabīdī, *Ṭabaqāt al-khawāṣṣ ahl al-ṣīdq wa-l-ikhblās*, ed. ‘Abd Allāh al-Ḥibshī (Ṣan‘ā’: Al-dār al-yamaniya li-l-nashr wa al-tawzi ‘, 1992), 120–21.
55. Al-Khazrajī, *Al-‘Iqd al-fākhīr*, 1688.
56. Urban, *Conquered Populations*, 50.
57. Kurt Franz, “Slavery in Islam: Legal Norms and Social Practice”, in *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1000–1500 CE)*, eds. Reuven Amitai and Christoph Cluse (Turnhout: Brepols Publishers, 2018), 51–141.

FURTHER READINGS

- Gilli-Elewy, Hend. “On the Provenance of Slaves in Mecca during the Time of the Prophet Muhammad.” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017): 164–68.
- Marmon, Shaun E. *Eunuchs and Sacred Boundaries in Islamic Society*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995.
- Marmon, Shaun E. “Intersections of Gender, Sex, and Slavery: Female Sexual Slavery.” In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery: Volume 2: AD 500–AD 1420*, edited by Craig Perry, David Eltis, David Richardson, and Stanley L. Engerman, 185–213. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Miran, Jonathan, “Red Sea Slave Trade.” In *The Oxford Encyclopedia of Slavery, the Slave Trade, and the Diaspora in African History*, edited by Martin Klein. Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming.
- Moorthy Kloss, Magdalena. “Eunuchs at the Service of Yemen’s Rasūlid Dynasty (626–858/1229–1454).” *Der Islam* 98, no. 1 (2021): 6–26. <https://doi.org/10.1515/islam-2021-0002>
- Moorthy Kloss, Magdalena. Race and the Legacy of Slavery in Yemen. *Journal article in History and Anthropology*. London: Taylor & Francis, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02757206.2023.2164927>
- Perry, Craig. “Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Western Indian Ocean World.” In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, vol. 2: AD 500–1420*, edited by Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley Engerman, and David Richardson. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.

Robinson, Chase. "Slavery in the Conquest Period." *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 49 (2017): 158–63.

Robinson, Majied. "Marriage in the Tribe of Muhammad: A Statistical Study of Early Arabic Genealogical Literature." Berlin: De Gruyter, 2020.

Urban, Elizabeth. "Conquered Populations in Early Islam: Non-Arabs, Slaves and the Sons of Slave Mothers." Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2020.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

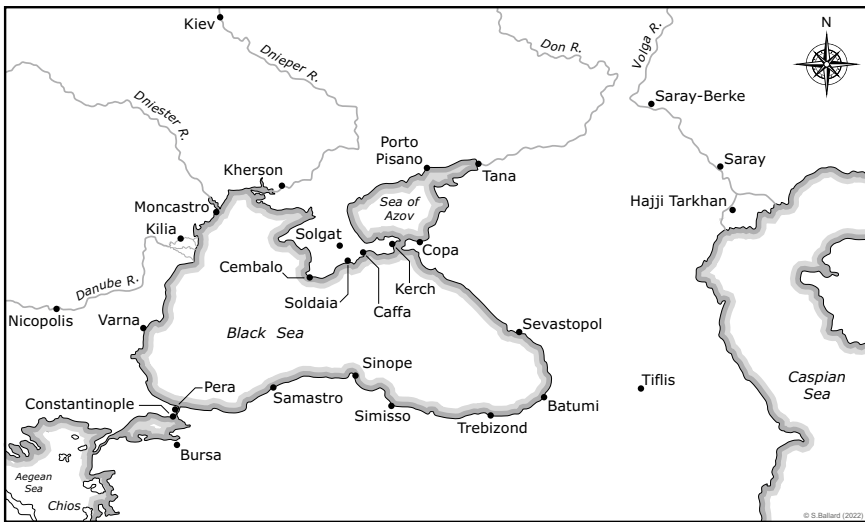
The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the Black Sea Region

Hannah Barker



H. Barker (✉)
Arizona State University, Tempe, AZ, USA
e-mail: hannah.barker.1@asu.edu

INTRODUCTION

Slavery pervaded the medieval Black Sea, as it did most parts of the medieval world, and was practiced there in a variety of forms. In order to trace the full range of slave-related activity in the region, one may begin with Joseph Miller's call to treat slavery as a matter of strategic decision-making on the part of both enslavers and enslaved within specific historical contexts that shaped their actions and that they intended their actions to shape. In other words, slavery should be considered both a cause and an effect of historical change, not a static system of power relations. According to Miller, "the definable and distinguishing position of slavers is their marginality;" from this position, slavers adopt slaving as a strategy "to convert their marginality toward centrality."¹ The experiences of the enslaved are characterized by "isolated helplessness, or helpless isolation;" their primary strategies, therefore, aim "to overcome their initial isolation, to make human contacts with whomever they find accessible, to build committed relationships of whatever sorts, and to defend whatever connections they manage to make with whatever means may be available."²

From this perspective, the Black Sea may seem a slaving zone *par excellence*, a region on the margins of conquests (Arabs, Magyars, Mongols), empires (Byzantine, Abbasid, Ottoman, Russian), and trade routes (the northern arc, the silk roads, the Italian shipping networks). Making slaves and trading them were certainly strategies that inhabitants of the Black Sea used to center themselves and gain leverage over the powers that surrounded them. Yet inhabitants of the Black Sea also found themselves targeted for enslavement, isolated and scattered to the far ends of the medieval world in service to the strategies of others. As Miller intended, this strategy-focused perspective forces us to ask *which people* in the Black Sea benefited from slaving and *which people* were targeted.

In the chapter that follows, I will outline some of the strategies associated with slaving in the Black Sea from about 500 to about 1500 CE. Although the survey format emphasizes commonalities, it is essential to remember that the strategies of Black Sea slavers changed over time and varied across cultures. Rus' merchants of the tenth century lived in a different world than Mongol soldiers of the thirteenth century, and their slaving strategies differed accordingly. In addition, because the surviving source base is richer after 900 CE, my survey will skew toward the end of the period in question.

A greater challenge is to address the experiences of the enslaved. Although the majority of surviving sources from medieval Black Sea were written by enslavers, there are a few exceptions. I have chosen to highlight three that describe entrances into, experiences of, and exits from slavery in some detail. The first was written by Kirakos Gandzakets'i, an Armenian monk and chronicler who described his own capture, enslavement, and escape during the Mongol conquest of Armenia in 1236.³ The second was Johann Schiltberger, a Bavarian soldier captured at age sixteen during Bayezid I's victory over Sigismund of Hungary's crusading army at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396.⁴

Johann served as a military slave for over twenty years, passing from court to court as a gift or prize until he made his escape via the Black Sea and recounted his experiences in writing. The third was Giorgio, kidnapped at age six from the Crimean port of Caffa and enslaved as a domestic in Chios and Ancona. Ten years later, in 1460, he narrated his story in a petition for freedom addressed to the government of Siena.⁵ Note that although women constituted the majority of those enslaved within and exported from the Black Sea, the written record of their experiences is more fragmentary than that of enslaved men. This is unfortunate because it was the fetishization of enslaved women in the Ottoman harem that led early racial scientists to choose “Caucasian” as the generic name for their newly imagined white, and therefore inherently beautiful, race.

ENTRANCE INTO SLAVERY

Free people might become enslaved in the Black Sea in a number of ways. Violent capture was the most common. Taking captives in war as well as targeting human beings alongside cattle and other valuables in raids were widespread practices throughout the medieval world. Every state in the region, as well as various non-state-based societies and small groups of raiders acting on their own initiative, shared in this predatory attitude toward the vulnerable.

A few examples will illustrate the point. In the ninth century, Magyars habitually raided coastal Slavic settlements, bringing their captives to the Byzantine port of Kerch to sell in exchange for brocade, woolen cloth, and other goods.⁶ Riverine Slavic settlements were attacked by the Rus', who took their captives to Khazar and Bulghar entrepots to sell.⁷ But the Rus' did not consider themselves bound either to the rivers as routes or to the Slavs as victims; in 943, they carried out a particularly large and violent raid on the south coast of the Caspian Sea, carrying off people who would normally have been slave-buyers.⁸

In the twelfth century, as the polity of Kievan Rus' began to collapse, Rus' princes seized and enslaved each other's subjects in the course of their infighting. So did their occasional allies, the Polovtsy (also known as Cumans or Kipchaks), who also took slaves in campaigns against their Turkic neighbors. Hunter-gatherer groups known as the Ves and the Yughra, living on the Kama River and in the Belozersk region respectively, raided for slaves to exchange for swords imported from the Islamic world via the Bulghars.⁹ The khan of the Bulghars conducted his slave raids seasonally, “in the winter, [when] the cold is so intense that wood splits. It is at this season of great cold that the king sets out on raids against the infidel and captures his women, his sons, his daughters and his horses.”¹⁰ The cold may have prevented his targets from evading capture or fleeing during the subsequent forced march.

The most notorious slavers of the thirteenth century were the Mongols. Kirakos Gandzakets'i, an Armenian monk, gave a detailed account of his own capture during the Mongol conquest of Armenia in 1236. He had been studying with a senior monk and historian named Vanakan when villagers

fleeing a Mongol unit led by Molar-*noyin* took refuge in Vanakan's cave. They had no food or water, and the summer heat was intense. After several days, the villagers pleaded with Vanakan to "go and save all of our lives, descend to them and make friends with them."¹¹ He agreed and went with two priests to persuade Molar-*noyin* that they were "neither soldiers nor lords of goods, but exiles and foreigners assembled from many lands for studying our religion." Then the rest surrendered: "We descended, quaking, like lambs among the wolves, frightened, terrified, thinking we were about to die, each person in his mind repeating the confession of faith in the Holy Trinity." The Mongols gave the captives water, confined them in a church, then forced them to march for several days to the main encampment.

In the early fourteenth century, according to a Franciscan friar appointed bishop of the Circassian port of Sevastopol, raiders were "selling Christians for a price on market days, where they are dragged with a rope tied from the tail of a horse to the neck of those who are sold."¹² A Dominican friar appointed archbishop of Sultaniyyah in the late fourteenth century explained where these captives came from: Circassian nobles "go out from one village to another publicly, or else secretly if they can, and violently seize children and adults of the other village, and immediately sell [them] to merchants by the sea. And in the same way as the Tatars were accustomed to sell theirs, so too these wretched people."¹³

Unlike the unfortunate Circassian villagers, Johann von Schiltberger was captured as a combatant in the Battle of Nicopolis in 1396. After the battle, when Bayezid "saw that so many of his people were killed, he was torn by great grief, and swore he would not leave their blood unavenged."¹⁴ Johann's captor bound all three of his captives with the same rope and brought them before the emperor, where he was ordered to kill them. "Then they took my companions and cut off their heads, and when it came to my turn, the king's son saw me and ordered that I should be left alive, and I was taken to the other boys, because none under twenty years of age were killed, and I was scarcely sixteen years old." As part of the spoils, Johann was eventually claimed by the sultan and taken to the imperial palace in Bursa.

Even during peacetime, the inhabitants of the Black Sea were vulnerable to kidnapping. A tenth-century treaty between the Rus' and Byzantines banned the enslavement of shipwreck survivors discovered along the coast near Kherson; almost five hundred years later, enslavement still threatened shipwreck survivors on the Circassian coast.¹⁵ In the fourteenth century, Italian shippers, already involved in the export of slaves, sold their free passengers too. For example, a group of Tatars who thought they had arranged passage from Porto Pisano to Caffa on a Venetian ship were instead sold as slaves by the pilot and two sailors in 1373.¹⁶ This case is documented only because the enslavers were denounced to the Venetian authorities, found guilty, fined, imprisoned, and banned from future voyages in the Black Sea.

Most kidnappers were not punished. In 1460, a boy named Giorgio testified in Siena about the circumstances of his enslavement. At the age of six, he had

been playing on the shore near Caffa with a group of boys. “A ship of Genoese being in port, it sent a gondola to land with several men and secretly captured me and another boy, who was with me, age ten years or so, and then we rose and betook ourselves to Chios of the Levant, and there I submitted, or indeed my masters assigned me, to one Lorenzo da Richasole of Florence.”¹⁷ What else could a six-year-old do? Although there was a Genoese statute against enslaving the free inhabitants of Caffa, Giorgio may not have been aware of it. Even if he had been, he could not file a petition for freedom until he turned fourteen. In the end, he presented his petition at age sixteen. The outcome is unknown, but if he were successful, his original kidnappers would still have remained anonymous and unpunished.

Non-violent modes of enslavement were spelled out in the various legal codes that governed Black Sea communities. These included the expanded redaction of the *Russkaia Pravda*, the four major schools of Sunni Islamic law, the *ius commune* that prevailed in Latin communities, and the Mongol *Yasa*.¹⁸ Marriages between enslaved people were legally and religiously recognized, and the children of enslaved parents were automatically born into slave status. In general, the children of an enslaved woman and a free man were considered free, either immediately (Islamic and Mongol law) or at the death of their father (the *Russkaia Pravda*). The possibility of an enslaved man having a child with a free woman was not acknowledged. Islamic and Mongol law also permitted the children of enslaved women and free men to inherit, but the *Russkaia Pravda* conflicted with Russian ecclesiastical law on this point.¹⁹

The exception was the Latin *ius commune*, which stipulated that a child must always follow the status of its mother. Free Latin men who wanted to claim their children from enslaved women therefore found ways to circumvent the law. For example, in a letter from 1345, the Venetian merchant Francesco Bartolomei asked his correspondent to alter the testament of his deceased brother Petro. Petro had been a merchant in Tana, where “he bought a slave with whom he slept and so a child was born,” a boy whom they named Pascuale. A life in slavery was not what Petro wanted for his son, but two months after the boy’s birth, Petro fell seriously ill. Before his death, Petro first drew up a testament, then decided to “marry his slave, the mother of the boy, in the presence of good witnesses... he did this for his soul and because the boy was legitimate.”²⁰ Yet Tana was experiencing political turmoil, and Francesco feared that the witnesses to Petro’s marriage might die. He therefore asked his correspondent to alter Petro’s testament. Instead of “I leave to my natural son Pascuale,” could it be changed to say “I leave to my legitimate son Pascuale”? After all, despite the penalties for tampering with a notarial document, Francesco argued that this second statement was the truth,²¹ “and it is a thing that does not turn to the detriment of anyone.”

People born free could be enslaved through legal means as well. Allegations of child sale were levied against parents in the Black Sea, but internal evidence to support it is limited.²² Under certain circumstances, free people could also choose to enslave themselves. Self-sale was possible under the Latin

ius commune. The Russkaia Pravda recognized three forms of self-enslavement for free men: selling oneself, marrying an enslaved woman, or undertaking to work as an estate manager or household steward.²³ The Yasa forbade free Mongol men from becoming domestic servants, perhaps to prevent them from evading military service. Islamic law forbade the sale of free people into slavery, though in practice there were exceptions. The most famous was Qawṣūn, a young man who traveled to Cairo in the entourage of the daughter of Özbek Khan of the Golden Horde.²⁴ One day he went up to the citadel, either as a merchant selling leather goods or in the company of slave traders. There he encountered the sultan and was persuaded to sell himself into military slavery. His price was sent to his brother Şuşūn in the Black Sea. Later, when Qawṣūn had become well-established in Cairo, he sent for his brother and cousin and appointed them military commanders.

Enslavement was also used as a punishment, individual or collective. The Árpád kingdom of Hungary enslaved clerics convicted of theft, women who left their husbands three times, and those who could not pay judicial fines. In the Russkaia Pravda, enslavement was the penalty for various kinds of debt, including merchants who lost the goods of others through drinking or gambling; merchants who borrowed money from foreigners and then went bankrupt; and indentured laborers who stole or tried to escape their contracts.²⁵ Early Muscovite law allowed enslavement for murder and for thieves on their second offense.²⁶ After the Mongol conquest of Rus' principalities in the early thirteenth century, Mongol tax farmers enslaved those who could not pay what they owed. This led to a revolt in 1262, after which enslavement for tax debt seems to have ceased. Nevertheless, in 1348, a Venetian merchant was threatened with enslavement by Tatar authorities after having been imprisoned twice for debt in Tana.²⁷

EXPERIENCE OF SLAVERY

Enslaved people in Black Sea societies were used for a wide range of purposes. In addition to performing domestic, sexual, reproductive, artisanal, agricultural, administrative and military labor, slaves functioned as commodities, financial assets, and symbols of prestige. Slave ownership was not limited to wealthy elites. Slaves appeared in urban and rural settings; in sedentary and nomadic cultures; and in the possession of women and men.

Female slaves who belonged to women were expected to provide them with personal service, companionship, and assistance in their work. Enslaved women performed domestic tasks such as preparing food, making and washing clothes, cleaning, and child care. When the Moroccan traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa visited the wives of Özbek Khan of the Golden Horde, he found one cleaning cherries with fifty slaves and another embroidering cloth with twenty slaves.²⁸ Even the wives of traders and ordinary people had three or four slave attendants to carry the trains of their garments when they went out. He also

observed that ordinary Mongol women owned male slaves who accompanied them to the market with sheep and milk to sell.²⁹

In the Black Sea, as in most of the medieval world, an enslaved woman who belonged to a man was understood to be sexually available to him regardless of her consent. As discussed previously, any children that she bore him would most likely be born free and raised as his heirs. As a result, the boundaries between different kinds of labor could become blurred. Nursing a free infant, for example, was only possible if an enslaved woman had already given birth to a child of her own. While the companions of the king of the Rus' in the tenth century were each reported to own two slave women, one for sex and the other "to wait on him, wash his head, and provide him with food and drink," a Rus' merchant would use just one woman for sex, carrying the washbasin, serving food, and as a commodity to sell.³⁰

Slaves also engaged in agricultural and artisanal work. In nomadic societies, male slaves herded cows and sheep but not horses. In sedentary societies, slaves worked on farms. Even the Mongols moved captured farmers to devastated areas to rebuild them. The princes of the Rus' used elite slaves to manage their estates; those slaves could also be authorized to trade on behalf of their owners. They appear most frequently in princely testaments, which often provided for the manumission of enslaved estate managers, household stewards, and treasurers. Boyar households probably also used slaves as stewards and estate managers but on a smaller scale.

The production of wax and honey, two major exports of the Black Sea region, intersected with slavery as well. In addition to estate managers, Rus' princely testaments mentioned slaves as beekeepers. Abū Hāmid al-Garnatī, a traveler from Granada who visited Hungary in the mid-twelfth century, purchased an eight-year-old slave girl whom he set to process honey and wax: "one day I bought for half a dinar two jars full of honeycomb with its wax and I said to her: 'I want you to purify this honey and extract the wax.' Then I went out and sat on a bench at the door of the house, where people were gathered. After sitting with them for a while, I went back into the house and saw five disks of wax as pure as gold and two jars full of liquid honey that seemed like rose water. The honey had been purified and returned to the two jars, all within an hour."³¹ Finally, in 1360–1361 in the port of Kilia, merchants from Hungary, Caffa, and Piacenza pledged slaves as surety against the loans which they used to buy wax and honey for export.³²

Rulers had many additional uses for slaves. Female slaves were sometimes sacrificed during elite funerals, most notably by tenth-century Rus' leaders.³³ Thirteenth-century Mongol commanders absorbed captured units into their own forces; employed slaves received as tribute from the Rus' for military service; and sent captives ahead of their main forces as arrow fodder, to test the safety of river and swamp crossings, or to inflate the size of their armies. Johann Schiltberger, the captive taken at the Battle of Nicopolis, served the Ottoman sultan Bayezid I for twelve years, first running before him, "it being

the custom that the lords have people to run before them,” then riding with him as part of his guard.³⁴

Eunuchs were comparatively rare and expensive because of the high mortality rate associated with castration. In the ‘Abbasid and Ottoman courts, eunuchs acted as gatekeepers between the inner and outer parts of the household. In the Byzantine court, they mediated access to the sacred person of the emperor as well as guarding imperial women. According to the sixth-century Byzantine historian Prokopios, the kings of Abkhazia enriched themselves by castrating Abkhaz boys and selling them to the Byzantine court until Justinian sent Euphratas, one such eunuch, to stop the practice.³⁵ The Khazar court operated on a similar model, with eunuchs attending the king and his wives and concubines. Mongol khatuns also had eunuchs among their attendants. But because they were traded as slaves across cultural and linguistic boundaries, eunuchs were equipped to mediate in other ways too. In the ninth century, Slavic-speaking eunuchs acted as interpreters between Rus’ merchants and their customers in Baghdad.³⁶

Slaves, especially those from far-away places, could be publicly displayed or exchanged as gifts to demonstrate prestige. When the Grand Prince Igor’ received Byzantine emissaries to ratify a treaty in Kiev in 944, he gave them gifts of fur, wax, and slaves.³⁷ Upon the occasion of Berke Khan’s conversion to Islam, the Mamluk sultan Baybars sent him gifts including slaves of African origin and enslaved cooks. Berke’s successors in the Golden Horde reciprocated with gifts of Black Sea slaves.³⁸ When elite women married, their dowries included people as well as livestock and goods. The human dowry or *inje* of a Mongol khatun might include slaves and domestic servants as well as a share of her father’s free subjects who formed part of her retinue.³⁹ According to the fourteenth-century traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, the wives of Özbek Khan of the Golden Horde had retinues of several hundred slave soldiers; four hundred slave girls; three hundred slave boys; ten or fifteen Greek and Indian eunuchs; and eight or ten slave girls as attendants.⁴⁰ His third wife Bayalūn, herself a Byzantine princess, had Nubian slave women in her retinue as well as Greeks and Turks.⁴¹ Özbek Khan’s daughter, in turn, brought hundreds of Black Sea slaves to Egypt when she arrived to marry the Mamluk sultan al-Nāṣir Muḥammad ibn Qalawūn.

The Mongols were known to seek out educated people and skilled artisans among their captives. Those who learned the Uighur script were incorporated into the bureaucracy. For instance, when the Armenian monk Kirakos and his fellow captives reached the Mongol encampment in 1236, “they took me from my companions to serve their secretarial needs, writing and reading letters. During the day they made me travel with them and in the evening they would bring us to the *vardapet* [Vanakan], with a pledge.”⁴² Poets, musicians, chemists, astronomers, physicians, and others with unusual skills were often sent to the capital cities of the Mongol empire. Perhaps the most interesting example of this phenomenon was the creation of workshops in which enslaved artisans produced luxury goods such as *nasīj* (cloth of silk and gold)

to be distributed by the Mongol khans. Artisans captured in different areas were brought together in these workshops, where they learned new techniques and created distinctive styles.⁴³ These enslaved artisans and bureaucrats were usually allowed to bring their families or create new ones, receive money for their work, and enjoy a certain degree of freedom of movement.

Finally, a significant number of slaves moved through the Black Sea as commercial and financial assets. Soldiers and raiders took people, as they took silver, gold, and cattle, in the expectation that these forms of loot could be easily converted into money through sale or ransom. After a raid or battle, captives were divided among the participants to compensate them for their work. Slaves could be used in lieu of money to make other payments too. Until 1262, Russian vassals paid tribute in silver, fur, and slaves to their Mongol lords. In 1415, the scribe of a Venetian ship in Tana used a female slave to make partial payment on a loan that would come due when he returned to Constantinople.⁴⁴ The commander of the Burgundian fleet during the crusade of Varna in the 1440s used five female slaves to repay money which he had borrowed in Trebizond to purchase supplies for his galleys.⁴⁵ As mentioned previously, slaves could also be pledged as security for loans, such as the silver borrowed by merchants in Kilia to finance the honey and wax trade. And they could be rented: in 1448, a woman identified as “Chexum Bicha Usdena, a Goth or Circassian, called Caterina in our idiom, an inhabitant of Tana” rented her male slave Semen to a Venetian merchant for 120 bezants per year.⁴⁶

Merchants treated slaves as commodities to be traded for profit, sometimes over long distances. In the early ninth century, captives taken in northern Europe passed via Scandinavia and the Baltic Sea into the river systems of eastern Europe, through the Black and Caspian Seas, and thence to the slave markets of Constantinople and Baghdad. Rus’ traders dominated the northern sections of this route, while Khazars dominated the southern sections. The traveler Ibn Faḡlān observed that when Rus’ merchants reached Khazar settlements, their first act was to offer food and drink to wooden figures of their gods, praying: “Lord, I have come from a distant land, with such and such a number of female slaves and such and such a number of sable pelts... and I have brought this offering... I want you to bless me with a rich merchant with many dinars and dirhams who will buy from me whatever I wish and not haggle over any price I set.”⁴⁷ In the late ninth century, control over the southern parts of the route passed to the Bulgars.

At every stage, local raiders added new slaves to the supply and local buyers purchased some of the slaves passing through. For example, an episode from the *Laxdæla Saga* portrays an Icelandic farmer buying an enslaved Irish woman from Gilli the Russian, a slave trader with a Gaelic name and a Russian epithet, at an assembly called by the Norse king.⁴⁸ The woman was very beautiful and Gilli was reluctant to sell her. Presumably he meant to take her south to the Volga, where she would fetch a high price, but the Icelander had enough silver on hand to make an immediate sale worthwhile.

The Mongol propensity to move slaves around their empire has already been discussed. Thus, people captured in eastern Europe were taken long distances through the Silk Road trade network, and vice versa. Indian eunuchs appeared in the retinues of the khatuns of the Golden Horde, and an Indian girl was sold in Caffa in 1289.⁴⁹ In 1302, a woman identified as Chinese (*de partibus Catajo*) was sold in Genoa.⁵⁰ On the other hand, William of Rubruck, a traveler to the court of Möngke Khan in the mid-thirteenth century, met a woman there, a slave of one of the khatuns, who had been captured in Hungary and found a husband among the other slaves, a Ruthenian who built houses.

Finally, the long-distance trade in slaves between the Black Sea, Egypt, and Africa during the thirteenth through fifteenth centuries deserves comment. The close relationship between the Golden Horde and the Mamluks, including the exchange of slaves as gifts, has already been mentioned. Those exchanges brought small numbers of African slaves, male and female, to the Mongol court, where their presence undoubtedly contributed to the khan's prestige by illustrating the long range of his influence. But slaves moved in the other direction as well. The Mamluk rulers themselves were former slaves, many with origins in the Black Sea. Baybars, the first Mamluk sultan, had been captured as a child during the Mongol conquest of the Kipchak steppe and sold to the Ayyubid sultan of Egypt. From the markets of Egypt, slaves from the Black Sea region were exported as far away as the West African kingdom of Mali, where the ruler's retinue included about thirty military slaves, "Turks and others who are bought for him in Egypt."⁵¹ As in the Mongol court, the presence of "exotic" slaves confirmed the ruler's prestige by displaying his power over distant peoples.

Rulers surrounding the Black Sea treated the long-distance slave trade as a rich source of tax revenue. Slavic kings taxed Rus' slave traders by taking one of every ten slaves.⁵² In the second half of the fourteenth century, the Genoese began to collect a head tax on slave sales and possession in their principal colony of Caffa, generating annual revenues of 13,666 aspers (in 1465) to 219,332 aspers (in 1446).⁵³ They also taxed slave sales and possession through the port of Copia. At the same time, Genoa created the Office of Saracen Heads of St. Antony to tax Muslim travelers. In this way they raised significant sums by taxing, among others, Muslim merchants taking Muslim slaves to the Mamluks.

EXIT FROM SLAVERY

The status of people enslaved in the Black Sea could be changed in several ways, but only a few of them were within the enslaved person's control. Change of status was an individual matter; enslaved groups were usually not given their freedom collectively. Also, in almost all cases, release from slavery was not automatic but required a conscious act of intervention. The

following discussion will therefore focus on the different actors and types of interventions that could change an enslaved person's status.

Perhaps the most common type of status change was manumission. This act could be initiated only by the enslaved person's owner, but all Black Sea societies recognized the concept of manumission and the right of slave owners to perform it. Some legal systems (Rus') enacted manumission by oath, while others (Latin) enacted it in written documents. Manumission could also be performed posthumously through a testament.

Some manumissions were unconditional. Such acts might express piety, gratitude, or celebration. Tomaxius Zariexa, a Venetian inhabitant of Tana in 1407, freed two slave women, Agnes (formerly Saraimelich) and Magdalena (formerly Suer), who seem to have been the mothers of his two daughters, "for the remedy of my soul."⁵⁴ In 1436, Antonelus Crescono freed his slave Magdalena with bequests of money and land for her dowry.⁵⁵ Muscovite princes often manumitted enslaved estate managers and their families in testaments for pious reasons.

Other manumissions imposed conditions of varying severity and complexity. Hungarian manumissions usually required the enslaved person to repay their price or make regular gifts to a church. In 1290 in Caffa, Iacobus was freed on the condition that he serve Stephanus the Armenian and his wife for the duration of their lives.⁵⁶ In 1362 in Tana, a Venetian stipulated that his slave Aza should be freed if she agreed to become Christian; otherwise, he instructed his executors to sell her at their discretion.⁵⁷

Another common method for changing an enslaved person's status was ransom. The distinction between captivity and slavery was blurry, but as a rule of thumb, captivity was understood by both the captive and the captor to be temporary, while slavery was understood by both the enslaved and the enslaver to be permanent. Turkic languages made a distinction between slaves that could be sold and slaves held as political hostages, pledges, or prisoners.⁵⁸ However, these understandings sometimes turned out to be mistaken. Thus people who believed themselves permanently enslaved were sometimes freed, while people who expected to be ransomed sometimes fell into permanent slavery.

Captives and slaves could attempt to facilitate their own ransoms by writing to family members, business partners, and state agents, though there was no institutionalized system of ransom as in the western Mediterranean or during the Ottoman-Russian period.⁵⁹ Nicholeto Gata, a Venetian merchant, was threatened with sale by Mongol authorities after having been imprisoned twice for debt in Tana. He turned to his business partners for help, believing that he could settle his affairs for 20 sommi.⁶⁰ Maria, a Russian woman enslaved by a Venetian in Tana, contacted her brother Samuel. By the time he made a down payment on her ransom, however, three years had passed and Maria had given birth to her enslaver's daughter. He refused to release her until she had nursed the child for an additional two years.⁶¹ For unexplained reasons, an

Italian crossbowman and a shopkeeper named Usayno (Husain) the Saracen collaborated to ransom an enslaved Alan man in Tana in 1451.⁶²

If no one agreed to pay a ransom or if the captor refused to accept it, then that route to freedom was closed. Returning to the story of Kirakos, the Armenian monk captured and employed as a scribe by the Mongols, a ransom by pious Armenians was arranged for his teacher Vanakan but not for Kirakos because “we [the Mongols] need him to read and write letters. No matter what sum you offer, we will not give him up.” Molar-*noyin* instead offered Kirakos a wife, his own tent, and a horse to help reconcile him to slave status. But Kirakos was not satisfied and ended up regaining his freedom through escape.

When large groups of people were taken *en masse*, especially during a military conflict, state officials might pay their ransom or negotiate their release as part of a peace treaty. On the other hand, some captors refused ransoms, either to make a political point or because they needed to raise money more quickly than the ransom process would allow. Aleksandr Nevskii, saint and prince first of Kiev and then of Novgorod during the Mongol invasion, made great efforts to ransom the Rus’ taken captive by Batu’s army. Italian merchants captured by Janibek, khan of the Golden Horde, in Tana in 1343 were released four years later as a result of peace negotiations. Yet when Timur (Tamerlane) conquered Tana in 1395, he preferred to keep its Italian residents as slaves and refused to accept a ransom for them. The Ottomans agreed to release captives taken during their conquest of Caffa in 1475 in a context of territorial expansion, but not after their victory at the battle of Nicopolis in 1396 in the context of holy war.

The third method of changing an enslaved person’s status, escape, could be initiated by the enslaved without the cooperation of their enslavers. Most records of escape in the Black Sea concern people who crossed jurisdictional boundaries. This makes sense both as a strategy of the enslaved to gain free status and as an artifact of the archival process, since escape across jurisdictions generated conflict and paperwork.

States around the Black Sea addressed the potential for conflict over fugitive slaves in their treaties and legal codes. Slaves who escaped from Rus’ owners or merchants in the Byzantine territory would be returned, and vice versa.⁶³ Within Rus’ territory, the escape of a slave was to be announced in the market place. If the slave had taken refuge with someone, that person had three days from the time of the announcement to return the slave.⁶⁴ People who voluntarily returned fugitive slaves to their owners were rewarded. Otherwise, there were detailed provisions governing the reclamation of fugitive slaves and punishment for those who helped them.⁶⁵

Slaves who fled from Caffa to Solgat, the Golden Horde’s regional capital in Crimea, and vice versa, were covered by a treaty dating to 1380–1381.⁶⁶ They should be returned to their owners for a fee of 35 aspers, with any disputes to be adjudicated by the Genoese consul of Caffa. Slaves who escaped to Caffa “from the countryside or the Ordo, but not from Solgat” entered a grey area.

They were understood to be free, but if their owners managed to find them, “the *sindicatori* are held to sell the said slave at a public auction and give his price to the said master of the said slave.” Slaves who escaped within the city of Caffa could take refuge in the home of the bishop. The bishop was required “to give notice to the *sindicatori* [Genoese authorities] without delay... and to baptize them within three days, then to present them immediately before the said *sindicatori*, who ought to sell such male and female slaves and pay their proceeds to their masters.” Thus, at least in theory, escape within the city of Caffa or its immediate hinterland entailed a change of enslaver but not of status.

I have found one case in which this law was tested. In 1450, the Genoese consul in Tana, Iohannes Spinola, issued a decision in the case of “a certain Ivan, Ruthenian or Russian, about twenty years old, formerly the slave of a certain Saracen named Ari Gozza, baker, inhabitant in this place of Tana,” who had appeared before him to be resold.⁶⁷ “On account of [Ivan’s] zeal for Christianity, which he had enjoyed from his youth, born from worshippers of Christ, and... marked by baptism and the sign [of the cross],” he had fled from his Muslim owner to Erasmo Salomone, the Franciscan chaplain for the Genoese in Tana. Under Erasmo’s protection, he took the name Franciscus “as is customary.” Then the speaker (it is not clear whether this was Ivan/Franciscus, Erasmo, or someone else) requested that the consul, “according to law as much as custom, attributed to him in such things and similar things... carry out and manage the sale of his slave.” In other words, the friar, acting in place of a bishop, had fulfilled the same legal obligations that applied to fugitives between the Tatar and Genoese communities in Caffa. The consul in Tana, however, decided not to sell Ivan/Franciscus. Instead, he granted him an unconditional manumission. Although failing to compensate a slaveowner for the loss of his slave might have had serious repercussions, in this case it apparently did not.

Enslaved people being exported sometimes found opportunities to escape while in transit, a situation in which the forms of coercion and surveillance that enslavers normally used to control slaves’ behavior might slip. In 1395, the Dominican bishop of Caffa arranged for two slaves, a man, and a woman, to be shipped to a contact in Genoa, but after they had crossed to the southern coast of the Black Sea, the man jumped from the ship and fled inland.⁶⁸ In 1437, two male slaves in transit from Caffa to Genoa also seized the opportunity to flee along the southern coast when plague broke out on their ship.⁶⁹ The merchant charged with their transport searched for three days and nights but could not find them.

Other slaves sought ships to carry them away from their places of enslavement. After two decades as a military slave, Johann Schiltberger escaped with four companions at a moment when their owner was fleeing into political exile along the Circassian coast.⁷⁰ The fugitives first headed to the port of Batumi and “begged that we should be taken across [the sea], but it was not granted to us.” Then they rode along the coast for four days until they saw a cog

about eight miles out to sea. That night they made a fire, and the captain sent a skiff to investigate. “They asked what sort of people we were? We said we were Christians, and were made prisoners when the king of [Hungary] was defeated at Nicopolis, and had come so far with the help of God; therefore, might we not go over the sea, as we had dependence and hope in God, that we should yet return to our homes and to Christianity. They would not believe us, and asked if we could repeat the Pater Noster, the Ave Maria, and the Belief? We said, ‘Yes’, and repeated them. They then asked how many of us there were? We said, ‘Five’. They told us to wait on the mountains.” In the end the captain agreed to take them to Samastro and eventually to Constantinople. A Turkish boy who escaped from the Moroccan traveler Ibn Baṭṭūṭa may have had a similar strategy; he fled from Saray Berke toward the Caspian coast at Hajji Tarkhan but was recaptured after three days.⁷¹ An even more daring Tatar man named Georgio escaped from Bussana, a small port west of Genoa, with the intention of traveling all the way back to the Black Sea.⁷² It is not clear whether he succeeded.

Finally, enslaved people were sometimes able to gain freedom by petition. This process could be initiated by a slave, but the final decision concerning freedom rested in the hands of a judge. The petition of Giorgio, the boy kidnapped from the coast near Caffa, has already been mentioned. Another case was that of Cecilia, “the daughter of Theodorus the Greek, an inhabitant of Caffa.”⁷³ Her petition was phrased in a distinctive way: she instructed her representative “to proclaim freedom on her behalf against Georgius Stella, notary, who, as she asserts, is striving to hold her as a *de facto* slave.” Whoever was responsible for this wording was careful not to use any phrase that would reify Cecilia’s enslavement or imply even the most provisional acceptance of it.

CONCLUSION

Slavery in the medieval Black Sea had an enduring legacy. The Ottoman takeover of port cities during the 1470s reoriented the slave trade again, this time to serve the needs of the court at Istanbul and the broader empire. Crimean Tatar raids on the Polish and Ukrainian populations increased. As the emerging Russian state challenged Ottoman control of the north coast of the Black Sea and the Caucasus, these rivals developed a system for managing the ransom and exchange of captives. Meanwhile, Mediterranean slaveholders from Egypt to Iberia turned decisively toward Africa, East and West, for domestic slaves and eventually for military slaves.

It was in this context that one of the early racial scientists, Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, selected the skull of an enslaved Georgian woman as his exemplar of white beauty and therefore supremacy.⁷⁴ Women from this region had been enslaved, sexually exploited, and fetishized both locally and globally for centuries before the Ottoman or Russian empires existed. Men from the Black Sea had also been enslaved for centuries, sought out especially as eunuchs for

the Byzantine court and as soldiers for the Mamluk army. Yet by the eighteenth century, western Europeans had come to focus on enslaved women, especially Georgians and Circassians, in association with the Ottoman harem. They became objects of orientalist sexual fantasy, most famously in artistic depictions of odalisques but also in verbal descriptions composed by European travelers to the Caucasus. These attitudes were reinforced by the immersion of educated western European men in ancient Greek texts, like Euripides' *Medea* and Aristotle's *Politics*, that associated Scythians from the Black Sea with slavery, sexuality, and barbarism.⁷⁵

Blumenbach used this fetishization of enslaved Georgian and Circassian women to promote his racial theories. Although he could not access the corpses of women from the Ottoman court, he was aware that women from the Caucasus were marketed in more than one place and managed to procure a sample for his collection from Russia. In his treatise *On the Natural Variety of Mankind*, Blumenbach introduced the skull of "a young Georgian female, made captive in the last Turkish war by the Russians, and brought to Muscovy. There she died suddenly, and an examination was made of the cause of death by Hildebrandt, the most learned anatomical professor in Russia. He carefully preserved the skull for the extreme elegance of its shape, and sent it to St Petersburg to de Asch," who forwarded it to Blumenbach at the University of Göttingen.⁷⁶ The image commissioned to accompany the skull was "an Eastern scene... the whole breathing as much as possible the finest voluptuousness... [like] something out of Niebuhr's *Travels* or still more precisely out of Russel's *Natural History of Aleppo*."⁷⁷ In his note stored with the skull, Blumenbach wrote that it confirmed "the beauty of the Georgians... [and] the delightful charms of their women."⁷⁸ In this way, by drawing on the fantasy of the beautiful enslaved Georgian woman to center his classification system within the eighteenth-century scientific discourse on race, Blumenbach transformed the geographical term "Caucasian" into a generic term for white people.

The association between "Caucasian," whiteness, and beauty emerged from a web of enslavers' strategies: the writers and artists who used sexualized depictions of Circassian and Georgian women to attract an audience; the Russian soldiers who demonstrated their power over both Georgians and Ottomans by taking this particular Georgian woman captive; the anatomy professor in Moscow who honed his expertise by dissecting her body; the baron in St. Petersburg who cultivated his scholarly network by sending her skull to Germany; and Blumenbach, the professor who presented her skull as the elegant centerpiece of his racial classification system. In turn, the association between "Caucasian," whiteness, and feminine beauty was used strategically by enslavers in other contexts to justify their oppression of other groups in Blumenbach's racial hierarchy, especially black Africans.

Recentring this story on the enslaved Georgian woman rather than her skull highlights the gap between the racialized meaning of "Caucasian" and the reality of people targeted for enslavement in the Caucasus. We know

nothing about this woman's name, parents, self-ascribed identity, or the community in which she grew up. Her experience of slavery is also obscure: a violent experience of capture, a journey from Georgia to Moscow, a sudden death caused by venereal disease,⁷⁹ and a ghost value attached to her bones which made them vulnerable to public display as late as the 1980s.⁸⁰ The identity of this woman as an individual, her unique life story, was erased by Blumenbach to make her a fitting representative of his newly invented group. Yet if the characteristic strategy of the enslaved is to seek connection, then at a minimum we can render this anonymous woman less isolated by connecting her experiences not only to those of her contemporaries taken captive in the Russo-Turkish wars, but also to the long history of slaving and enslavement in the Black Sea.

NOTES

1. Joseph Miller, *The Problem of Slavery as History: A Global Approach* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2012), 24, 29.
2. Miller, *The Problem*, 31, 33.
3. Kirakos Gandzakets'i, *History of the Armenians*, trans. Robert Bedrosian (New York: Sources of the Armenian Tradition, 1986), Chapter 24.
4. Johann Schiltberger, *The Bondage and Travels of Johann Schiltberger, A Native of Bavaria, in Europe, Asia, and Africa, 1396–1427*, trans. J. Buchan Telfer, ed. Philip Brunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).
5. Giulio Prunai, "Notizie e documenti sulla servitù domestica nel territorio senese (secc. VIII–XVI)," *Bulletino senese di storia patria* n.s. 7 (1936): 415–6, doc. 45.
6. Paul Lunde and Caroline Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān and the Land of Darkness: Arab Travellers in the Far North* (London: Penguin Books, 2012), 122–123, citing Ibn Rusta.
7. Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 126, citing Ibn Rusta.
8. Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 145–152, citing Mas'ūdī and Miskawayh.
9. Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 72, citing al-Garnatī.
10. Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 67, citing al-Garnatī.
11. Gandzakets'i, *History*, Chapter 24.
12. Friedrich Kunstmann, "Studien über Marino Sanudo den aelteren," *Königliche bayerische Akademie der Wissenschaften; Philosophische philologische und historische Klasse* 7 (1855): 817–8.
13. Anton Kern, "Der 'Libellus de notitia orbis' Iohannes' III. (de Galonifontibus?) O.P. Erzbischofs von Sulthanyeh," *Archivum fratrum praedicatorum* 8 (1938): 110.
14. Schiltberger, *The Bondage*, 4–7.
15. Daniel Kaiser, *The Laws of Rus'—Tenth to Fifteenth Centuries* (Salt Lake City: Charles Schlacks Jr., 1992), 11; Kern, "Der 'Libellus,'" 111.
16. Sergei Karpov, *La navigazione veneziana nel Mar Nero XIII–XV sec.* (Ravenna: Edizioni del Girasole, 2000), 61.
17. Prunai, "Notizie," 415–6, doc. 45.
18. Byzantine law is addressed in another chapter. Kaiser, *The Laws*, xlv, 20–34; Robert Brunschvig, "'Abd,'" in *The Encyclopaedia of Islam*, 2nd ed. (Leiden:

- Brill, 1960), 1:24–40; R. H. Helmholz, “The Law of Slavery and the European *Ius Commune*,” in *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*, ed. Jean Allain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 17–39; George Vernadsky, “The Scope and Contents of Chingis Khan’s *Yasa*,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 3 (1938): 337–60.
19. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 31 vs. 63.
 20. Raimondo Morozzo della Rocca, *Lettere di mercanti a Pignol Zucchetto (1336–1350)* (Venice: Comitato per la pubblicazione delle fonti relative alla storia di Venezia, 1957), 33–6, doc. 14.
 21. This is debatable. A child born to married parents was legitimate. A child born to parents who could have been married but were not was natural. Marriage between free and enslaved people was legal as long as the free partner was aware of the enslaved partner’s status, but Pascuale’s parents had married after he was born. It was possible to have a natural child declared legitimate by an ecclesiastical authority after the fact, and this was clearly Petro’s wish, but he had not had time to carry it out before his death.
 22. Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*, 125–8.
 23. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 32.
 24. Khalīl ibn Aybak al-Ṣafādī, *Kitāb al-Wāfī bi-al-Wafayāt* (Wiesbaden: Franz Steiner, 1962), 24: 277–80; Taqī al-Dīn Aḥmad al-Maqrīzī, *Kitāb al-khiṭaṭ wa-al-athār fī Miṣr wa-al-Qāhirah*, ed. Ayman Fu’ad Sayyid (London: Al-Furqan Islamic Heritage Foundation, 2002–2004), 4: 224–6. See also Donald Little, *A Catalogue of the Islamic Documents from Al-Haram aš-Šarīf in Jerusalem* (Beirut: Orient-Institut der Deutschen Morgenländischen Gesellschaft, 1984), 380, doc. 683 in which a man named Tughā Timur ibn Karlabi sold himself and his wife into slavery. Tughā Timur’s father received their price.
 25. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 26–28, 32; Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 76, citing al-Garnatī.
 26. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 108, 112.
 27. Morozzo della Rocca, *Lettere*, 118, doc. 63.
 28. H. A. R. Gibb, trans., *The Travels of Ibn Baṭṭūṭa, A.D. 1325–1354* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1959), 2: 487–488.
 29. Gibb, trans., *The Travels*, 481.
 30. James Montgomery, trans., “Mission to the Volga by Aḥmad ibn Faḍlān,” in *Two Arabic Travel Books*, ed. Philip Kennedy and Shawkat Toorawa (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 243, 253.
 31. Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 81, citing al-Garnatī.
 32. Michel Balard, *Gènes et l’Outre-mer* (Paris: École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1980), 2: 193–4, doc. 122; Geo Pistarino, *Notai genovesi in oltremare: Atti rogati a Chilia da Antonio di Ponzò (1360–61)* (Genoa: Università di Genova, Istituto di Paleografia e Storia medievale, 1971), 63–65 and 72–73, docs. 39 and 43.
 33. Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 127, 159; Montgomery, trans., “Mission,” 245–53.
 34. Schiltberger, *The Bondage*, 7.
 35. Prokopios, *History of the Wars, Books VII and VIII*, trans. H.B. Dewing (London: William Heinemann, 1928), book VIII.
 36. Lunde and Stone, eds., *Ibn Fadlān*, 112.
 37. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 12.

38. Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*, 71.
39. Evans, "The Womb of Iron and Silver," 110.
40. Gibb, trans., *The Travels*, 484–86, also 498.
41. Gibb, trans., *The Travels*, 488.
42. Gandzakets'i, *History*, Chapter 24.
43. Thomas Allsen, *Culture and Conquest in Mongol Eurasia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The earlier Türk state also created communities of captured weavers and blacksmiths.
44. Nina Prokofieva, "Akti venetsianskogo notariya v Tane Donato a Mano (1413–1419)," *Prichernomorie v srednie veka 4* (2000), doc. 73.
45. Henri Taparel, "Un Épisode de la politique orientale de Philippe le Bon: Les bourguignons en Mer Noire (1444–1446)," *Annales de Bourgogne* 55 (1983): 21.
46. Venice, Archivio di Stato di Venezia (ASVe), Cancellaria inferiore, Notai, b.148, N.6, reg. 2, fol. 39r–v. Notary Pietro Pelacan (1448 May 29). The term *uzden* suggests that she was a free peasant from the North Caucasus. Thanks to John Latham-Sprinkle for this information.
47. Montgomery, trans., "Mission," 243–5.
48. <https://medievalslavery.org/europe/source-anonymous-laxdaela-saga-early-1200s/>.
49. Balard, *Gênes*, 1:150–151, doc. 388.
50. Genoa, Archivio di Stato di Genova (ASG), Notai Antichi 137, fol. 49v–50r. Notary Conrado Castello de Rapallo (1302 May 7).
51. N. Levtzion and J. F. P. Hopkins, eds., *Corpus of Early Arabic Sources for West African History* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2000), 265, citing al-ʿUmarī.
52. Montgomery, trans., "Mission," 239.
53. Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise*, 138–9. Aspers were silver coins issued by various polities surrounding the Black Sea. In 1436, a Venetian ducat was worth 35 aspers. Peter Spufford, *Handbook of Medieval Exchange* (London: Offices of the Royal Historical Society, 1986), 290. In 1447, slaves auctioned by the commune of Caffa cost about 1000 to 1500 aspers. ASG, Banco di San Giorgio, Sala 34, 590/1235 (Caffa Massaria), fol. 21v, 54v, 57v.
54. Sandro de' Colli, *Moretto Bon, Notaio in Venezia, Trebisonda e Tana (1403–1408)* (Venice: Comitato per la pubblicazione delle fonti relative alla storia di Venezia, 1963), docs. 26, 27.
55. ASVe, Cancellaria inferiore, Notai, b.231, N.3, reg. 1, f.8v–9v. Notary Nicolaus de Varsis (5 June 1436).
56. Balard, *Gênes*, 1:347, doc. 846.
57. Charles Verlinden, "Le recrutement des esclaves à Venise aux XIV^e et XV^e siècles," *Bulletin de l'institut historique belge de Rome* 39 (1968): 195, doc. 116.
58. Golden, "The Terminology," 42.
59. Tenth-century Rus'-Byzantine treaties did address the possibility of mutual ransom. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 6, 10.
60. Morozzo della Rocca, *Lettere*, 118.
61. Prokofieva, "Akti," doc. 20.
62. ASVe, Cancellaria inferiore, Notai, b.148, N.6, reg. 2, fol. 60v–61r. Notary Pietro Pelacan (12 July 1451).
63. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 6, 10.

64. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 23.
65. Kaiser, *The Laws*, 33.
66. C. Desimoni, "Trattato dei genovesi col Chan dei Tartari nel 1380–1381 scritto in lingua volgare," *Archivio storico italiano* 20 (1887): 164; Amadeo Vigna, "Statuto di Caffa: Codice diplomatico delle colonie tauro-ligure," *Atti della società ligure di storia patria* 7, no. 2 (1879): 634–5.
67. ASVe, Cancelleria inferiore, Notai, b.148, N.6, reg. 2, fol. 55v–56r. Notary Pietro Pelacan (16 Dec. 1450).
68. ASG, Notai Antichi 402, fol. 108r-v. Notary Bartolomeo Gatto (1 Sept. 1395).
69. Domenico Gioffrè, *Il mercato degli schiavi a Genova nel secolo XV* (Genoa: Fratelli Bozzi, 1971), 157.
70. Schiltberger, *The Bondage*, 99–100.
71. Gibb, trans., *The Travels*, 517.
72. ASG, Notai Antichi 397, fol. 203r–v. Notary Bartolomeo Gatto (31 Oct. 1376).
73. ASG, Notai Antichi 497, doc. 50. Notary Giacomo di Camulio (26 Mar. 1397).
74. Nell Irvin Painter, *The History of White People* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2010), 43–90.
75. Shelley Haley, "Self-Definition, Community, and Resistance: Euripides' 'Medea' and Toni Morrison's 'Beloved'," *Thamyris* 2, no. 2 (1995): 177–206.
76. Johann Friedrich Blumenbach, "On the Natural Variety of Mankind, ed. 1795," in *The Anthropological Treatises of Johann Friedrich Blumenbach*, ed. and trans. Thomas Bendyshe (Boston: Longwood Press, 1978), 162. The war in question was Catherine the Great's second Caucasian campaign against the Ottomans.
77. F. W. P. Dougherty, ed., *Commercium epistolicum J.F. Blumenbachii* (Göttingen: Niedersächsische Staats- und Universitätsbibliothek Göttingen, 1984), 156.
78. Dougherty, ed., *Commercium*, 148.
79. *Ibid.*
80. Dougherty, ed., *Commercium*, 148, no. 178 is the skull itself, displayed in the foyer of Göttingen's university library in 1984. Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017), 7.

FURTHER READINGS

- Balard, Michel. *La Romanie génoise (XIIe – début du XV siècle)*. Genoa: Società ligure di storia patria, 1978.
- Barker, Hannah. *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.
- Biran, Michal. "Encounters among Enemies: Preliminary Remarks on Captives in Mongol Eurasia." *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 21 (2014–2015): 27–42.
- Evans, Nick. "The Womb of Iron and Silver: Slavery in the Khazar Economy." In *From the Huns to the Turks—Mounted Warriors in Europe and Central Asia. Von den Hunnen zu den Türken—Reiterkrieger in Europa und Zentralasien*, edited by F. Daim, H. Meller and W. Pohl, 107–115. Halle: Landesamt für Denkmalpflege und Archäologie Sachsen-Anhalt, 2021.

- Golden, Peter. "The Terminology of Slavery and Servitude in Medieval Turkic." In *Studies on Central Asian History in Honor of Yuri Bregel*, edited by Devin DeWeese, 27–56. Bloomington: Research Institute for Inner Asian Studies, 2001.
- Langer, Lawrence. "Slavery in the Appanage Era: Rus' and the Mongols." In *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History, 1200–1860*, edited by Christoph Witzernath, 145–170. Farnham: Ashgate, 2015.
- Noonan, T. S. "Why Dirhams First Reached Russia: The Role of Arab-Khazar Relations in the Development of the Earliest Islamic Trades with Eastern Europe." *Archivum Eurasiae Medii Aevi* 4 (1984): 151–282.
- Perry, Craig, David Eltis, Stanley Engerman, and David Richardson, eds. *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 2, AD 500–AD 1420. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Roşu, Felicia, ed. *Slavery in the Black Sea Region, c.900–1900: Forms of Unfreedom at the Intersection between Christianity and Islam*. Leiden: Brill, 2022.
- Tardy, Lajos. *Sklavenhandel in der Tartarei: Die Frage der Mandscharen*. Translated by Mátyás Esterházy. Szeged: Universitas Szegediensis de Attila József nominata, 1983.
- Zevakin, E. S., and A. Penčko. "Ricerche sulla storia delle colonie genovesi nel Caucaso occidentale nei secoli XIII–XV." Translated by Maria Teresa Dellacasa. In *Miscellanea di studi storici*, 7–98. Genoa: Fratelli Bozzi, 1969.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the Western Mediterranean

Juliane Schiel 

INTRODUCTION

The history of the Mediterranean Sea has always been closely linked to the history of human trafficking and slavery. From ancient times until today, people have been transported across the sea against their will to serve others with their bodies and labor. They have been used as goods, as currency for other goods, or as gifts for the purpose of establishing and maintaining social networks and diplomatic relations. The naming and legal framework as well as the social settings and contexts of exploitation have changed over time. From slavery in the wealthy city-states of ancient Greece and the Roman colonate system through the use of enslaved workers in the urban and agricultural economy of Byzantium and the military and imperial slavery system in early Muslim societies to the import of slaves to Southwestern Europe as cheap labor or status icons and the ransom economy between Christian and Muslim parties: The Mediterranean has continually represented a hub for human exploitation and a central point of reference for interconnected practices of slaving between the religious and political cultures shaping the region and linking the ancient to the medieval, the medieval to the modern, and the modern period to the world of today. This chapter focuses on the social realities of slaves in the late medieval Western Mediterranean by showcasing the interconnectedness of individual slave biographies with the slaving practices of

J. Schiel (✉)
University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria
e-mail: juliane.schiel@univie.ac.at

the neighboring empires, as well as the links between these practices and those in earlier and later periods.

From around 1300 onwards, the number of persons transported across the Mediterranean Sea to Southwestern Europe as slaves increased significantly. While slaves traded over long distances were a rare and high-priced merchandise only accessible to the political and economic elites of the Western Mediterranean prior to the thirteenth century, unfree servants from Central Asia—and to a lesser extent from sub-Saharan Africa—had already begun to populate the urban and aristocratic households of the Italian and Iberian peninsulas. By 1400, between 2000 and 5000 slaves were being sold in Genoa each year. Every moderately wealthy household included at least one or two slaves working and living side by side with local domestic servants and wet nurses, agricultural laborers and artisanal apprentices, carters and messengers. Members of the ruling classes of Renaissance Europe often employed up to ten or fifteen slaves under their roofs. Based on fundamental research performed by early experts in the field, the percentage of slaves in Western Mediterranean societies during this period is estimated to have been between 1 and 2 percent in rural areas, between 3 and 5 percent in the urban centers, and up to 10 percent on the Mediterranean islands such as Mallorca, Malta, and Crete.¹

The reasons for this sharp increase are still heavily debated among historians. One of the traditional explanations, the so-called Ehrenkreutz thesis, has recently been challenged by an interdisciplinary group of researchers. In his *Strategic Implications of the Slave Trade*, Andrew Ehrenkreutz depicted the revival of the European slave trade as a secondary byproduct of power relations in Central Asia and the Black Sea region.² According to Ehrenkreutz, when the rising European maritime powers expanded their trading routes toward the Eastern Mediterranean and the Black Sea, Genoese merchants came to function as intermediary shippers between the slave markets on the Black Sea coast and the imperial ports of the Mamluk state. As Italian merchants provided the rulers of the Sultanate in Egypt and Syria with thousands of boys and young men for their armies of slave soldiers, they gradually began to bring the sisters and mothers of these young recruits back home to the booming urban centers of the Latin Western Mediterranean. New research has now shown, however, that the so-called Mamluk system relied on the support of Italian shippers much less than previously assumed, while European participation in the slave trade followed its own logic from the very beginning.³ Another explanation provided in relevant literature refers to the Black Death as a major factor in the increase of slaves from Central Asia and sub-Saharan Africa. Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, for example, has argued that town dwellers in Catalonia and Italy had strong economic reasons to keep slaves after 1348, when wages had increased dramatically and profits had stagnated or declined for many urban elites. As the normative power of the Roman Catholic Church had made Europe a “no slaving zone” where the enslavement of fellow believers was forbidden, slave labor had to be imported over long distances from non-Catholic regions.⁴ Other voices have contested the assumption that the loss of life from the Black

Death played a decisive factor, instead pointing to the dynamics of the late medieval urbanization and colonization processes that gave rise to a new sex industry and settlement policy heavily reliant on human trafficking and slave trading.⁵

No matter what the reasons were for the increase in slaves, the late medieval period brought about a particular type of household slavery that was clearly distinct from earlier forms of slavery as a means of increasing agricultural production, as well as from later phenomena such as aristocratic court slavery and ransom slavery that began to play a role around 1500. Intimately intertwined with slaving practices and discourses found in the neighboring Greek Orthodox and Muslim spheres,⁶ the late medieval form of Latin household slavery can be characterized as very ambivalent and fluent, with slaves not representing a clear-cut social or legal category of its own. The labels used to designate them, the status applied to them in legal documents, and the daily tasks they fulfilled overlapped with the ones assigned to other dependent members of the Latin household. Contemporaries nevertheless knew very well who worked as a slave and who was an ordinary servant, nurse, serf, or apprentice—and in cases of conflict, the fine lines of distinction became apparent and were sometimes controversially debated in court. Unlike other domestics, slaves were bought and sold by oral agreement or written contract, and their services were more easily rented out to third parties than those of other dependent household members. Slaves were associated with non-Latin origins not adhering to the Roman rite. They usually arrived as individuals by sea and were baptized upon entering the Latin sphere regardless of their original religious background. Sexual intercourse, marriage, and the production of offspring with a person outside the master's household was forbidden. In practice, however, it could either be the reason for some of the severest forms of persecution and punishment by criminal courts or serve as an opportunity to escape the slave status and leave the master's household. In general, slaves in the Western Mediterranean rarely remained slaves for the entirety of their lives—though almost none of them managed to return home or live their lives as free citizens of European society.

This ambivalent and fluent position of the household slave in the Western Mediterranean was embedded in a multi-layered discourse on slavery. On the one hand, slavery as a legal institution was associated with Muslim practices that were clearly condemned and needed to be combatted: Any activity supporting the Muslim slave trade was officially forbidden and penalized. Christian crusaders often legitimated their actions by proclaiming to be fighting Muslim slavery and freeing or protecting “poor Christians” or “innocent pagans” in the eastern part of the Mediterranean from enslavement.⁷ On the other hand, buying slaves on the slave market, converting them to the Roman Catholic faith, and integrating them into a Christian household was perceived as a pious act—and sometimes even as a Christian duty. The Church and the Pope increasingly encouraged merchants and travelers to buy slaves on their journeys to the East in order to rescue them from Muslim slavery

and offer them protection under a Christian roof.⁸ Latin clerics and missionaries living in Central Asia and the Near East bought slave children specifically to raise them in the Christian faith.⁹ The language use reflects this ambivalence in the Latin discourse: The abstract noun *schiauitū* or *esclauitud* in the vernacular documents of the Western Mediterranean designated the Muslim institution of slavery and was never used for slaving practices in Latin households. The slaves living in Latin households, however, were naturally called *schiauo/schiaua* or *esclauo/esclaua*. A Muslim master was considered a slaveholder, while a Christian master acted as a *pater familias* taking care of all members of the household including slaves. The Latin discourse on slavery can thus only be understood in the broader context of late medieval crusades, maritime expansion, and early Mediterranean colonialism.

Given the ambivalence and fluidity of slave biographies and slavery discourses, this chapter will focus on following the fragmented traces of individual slaves in order to explore the range of scenarios people could experience (a) while becoming a slave and entering the Western Mediterranean, (b) while living in a Latin household as a slave, and (c) upon exiting (or attempting to exit) the condition of slavery.

Following the traces of individual slaves means depending on the fragmentary tradition of the time, however. Luckily for us, the number of administrative records increased dramatically in the late medieval period. Starting in Italy, more and more people began to confirm their businesses and last wills with contracts and testaments written and signed by (or in the presence of) official notaries. Even though the overall level of literacy remained low, people were able to write and read their names and referred to written documents as evidence for agreements they had made. Writing was no longer limited to clergymen and high officials of the lordship. Parishes and municipalities, craft guilds, and trading communities now produced their own records.¹⁰ For us as historians, this means that besides official chronicles, legal codes, and deeds from secular and ecclesiastical rulers, a huge number of administrative documents are available for research on household slavery. Sale contracts, letters of manumission, account books, tax lists, parish registers, court records, and of course private wills, letters, and travel accounts help to reconstruct the lives of the slaves of the time. Ego documents from slaves themselves still do not exist, however, and in most cases, only brief references or incidences per slave rather than any form of continued documentation of one and the same enslaved individual have been handed down to us. All existing references and representations of slaves were written from the perspective of those who were *not* enslaved, and they need to be read with this aspect in mind. Furthermore, the amount of available material varies greatly from place to place. To explore the variety of slave lives in Latin households thus requires us to make sense of scattered fragments by aligning and combining them with one another—like an enormous puzzle where most of the pieces have been lost over time, or were never even produced. In the following three sections, the reader will learn the names of individual slaves whose lives stand for the assumed experiences of many others.

ENTRANCE INTO SLAVERY

In terms of historical tradition, the act of enslavement took place outside the realm of Latin textual sources. Based on this inexistence of written evidence, historians have long been convinced that Western Europeans were not involved in the late medieval enslavement processes themselves. It is only recently that this assumption has been contested by interdisciplinary research. Bringing together archeological findings and implicit references in travel accounts of Latin and non-Latin tradition, it has been shown that Latin and Arab settlers could indeed be involved in inland manhunting. Scholarship has also determined that the moment in which a person's name appeared on a Latin or Arab sale contract and in the trade register of a merchant vessel disambiguated their status into that of a slave. While people sold on markets or in ports could be used under many labels and in a variety of roles in the local context, transshipment over the Mediterranean Sea explicitly transformed them into slaves.¹¹

Around two thirds of the slaves in the Western Mediterranean were women and one third were men. Male slaves were more often bought as minors, while women were on average five years older than their male counterparts at the time of purchase. What is more, female slaves were generally more expensive than men. Prices could vary significantly from case to case, ranging from 30 to 135 *yperperi* depending on the age, sex, origin, and health status of the slave as well as on the social relation between seller and buyer. Given the rising demand, the overall price level rose continuously during the late medieval period. By 1430, the average price was 70 *yperperi* (or around 23 Venetian gold ducats) for male slaves and 100 *yperperi* (or around 33 ducats) for female slaves. Most of the time, slaves were traded in smaller numbers alongside other goods transported on larger cargo vessels. The Italian merchant Giacomo Badoer, for example, who lived in Constantinople for three and a half years, trading textiles, cotton, linen, and furs for spices, wheat, wine, and copper, also accepted individual orders from family members and business partners for a total of 62 slaves.¹² Only few merchants specialized in the trading of larger numbers of several hundreds of slaves at once on ships specifically dedicated to their transport.

The biggest group of slaves serving in Latin households were purchased from the slave markets on the Black Sea coast. While Caffa and Tana, the main trading posts of the Genoese and the Venetians in the region, had the busiest slave markets at their disposal, Trebizont, Sinope, and other smaller ports also served as points of departure for the transport of enslaved people to the West. In the purchase contracts signed in the notary offices of the Latin administration, these people were identified as *tartari*, *circassi*, or *rossi*, often stating their original and/or baptismal names, their age and sex, and their physical and mental status. Most of them arrived there as a consequence of the unstable political situation in Central Asia following the decline of the Golden Horde. Riots, border wars, and pillages continuously produced captives of all ethnic

and linguistic affiliations from the Mongol, Circassian, and Russian principalities, who were then sold to Muslim and Christian merchants operating on the Mediterranean Sea. Others were sold by their parents or relatives (or sold themselves) to escape poverty and famine, hoping for a better fate away from home. But even prominent members of the political elites could end up as slaves in Latin households, with the example of Chebechzi serving as a case in point: Having served as a close advisor to Cazadahuch, the political representative of the Golden Horde in Tana in the 1440s, Chebechzi was captured and sold into slavery when his lord lost his position due to political unrest. He eventually arrived in Catalonia, where he served as a slave for several years. It was only thanks to a chance meeting with a Venetian nobleman and his high level of education that Chebechzi was ultimately able to make his voice heard and regain his freedom.¹³

The second group of slaves populating the Latin households of the Western Mediterranean were of Greek, Turkish, or Slavic origin, hailing from the Peloponnese, the Aegean islands, and most importantly from the Balkans, Bulgaria, and sometimes even Hungary. They were sold in the Peloponnese ports of Modon and Coron, in Famagusta on Cyprus, in Candia on Crete, and at the trading posts of the Adriatic coast such as Ragusa, Spalato (today: Split), and Zadar. In the case of the Adriatic Sea, most ports on its eastern coast were dominated and controlled by the city of Venice. Nevertheless, cargo vessels from Apulia, Sicily, Catalonia, and even Palestine and Egypt frequented the trading ports of Dalmatia and Istria as well, exporting Bosnian and Serbian slaves to their respective home regions or other parts of the Mediterranean. The Slavic hinterlands of the Dalmatian and Istrian coasts were contested between the Roman and Greek Orthodox Churches as well as between the competing dominions on the western side of the Balkans and the Ottoman territories in the east.¹⁴ The mountainous regions were poor areas difficult to access and control by ecclesiastical and political authorities. Besides organized and spontaneous raids, many poor Slavic families sought their fortunes on the Istrian and Dalmatian coast—sometimes by selling the services of their children to foreign merchants across the sea. The numerous *cartae servitutis* handed down to us note their respective geographic origin (*de Bosna, de Verbase, de Trebotich*) and specify whether the person in question was sold for life (*deffinite ad mortem*) or for a certain period of time. The young girl Stana, for example, was sold to the Italian settler Jacobo of Talava in Spalato for three years. Her mother Liuba received 24 *denarii* for her daughter's services—roughly the value of a cow.¹⁵ Some of the children serving in Latin households on the eastern Adriatic coast were lucky enough to return to their families with some savings and training in a handicraft. Others were less fortunate, becoming separated from their families for good when a merchant from Apulia or Sicily, from Aragon or Valencia shipped them to his hometown together with other precious goods and sold them into an Italian or Catalan household for life.

The third group of slaves to be found in Latin households of the Western Mediterranean were people from sub-Saharan Africa, mainly Ethiopia. These individuals usually arrived through the agency of Muslim middlemen on the northern coast of Africa and in Muslim Iberia. Captured in the small Islamized parts of Africa and traded to the Maghreb region over land, they were sold to Aragonese and Catalan merchants. Some of them entered Italy via Barcelona or Mallorca, others were brought from Tunis to Sardinia and Corsica via Sicily. While slaves from the Black Sea region and the eastern Adriatic coast were usually traded as individuals, African slaves often entered the Western Mediterranean in groups. Besides Rialto in Venice, proper slave markets primarily existed in the larger port cities of the Iberian Peninsula.¹⁶

It was only when the Ottomans controlled access to the Black Sea after having conquered Constantinople in 1453 and the Portuguese subsequently discovered the sea route to Western Africa and India that a shift occurred. From the 1490s onwards, most of the slaves living in Latin households were of African origin, while Russian and Mongol slaves only rarely reached the southern part of Europe.

EXPERIENCES OF SLAVERY

Being a slave in a late medieval Latin household could mean many different things and assume various forms. The most important common denominator of all slave experiences in the Western Mediterranean was that slaves could be employed as unskilled workers entirely arbitrarily by their masters, in whatever position the latter desired or required their help and presence. Slaves could be assigned to any form of domestic work, side by side and interchangeably with other domestic workers that were not enslaved. They cooked, cleaned, looked after children, and nursed infants. They performed courier services, ran errands, and acted as porters and carters. Outside the domestic sphere, they worked the land alongside serfs and other dependent agricultural workers. They helped in craftsmen's workshops together with apprentices and journeymen. They supported journeying merchants with various tasks, sometimes even acting as dragomen. And they were at their masters' disposal for physical pleasures and sexual services, as well as for the production of offspring.

The second important common denominator was that a slave was subject to the direct jurisdiction of his or her master. Other jurisdictions only came into play when the master seized the competent courts. The practical guides for household masters urged the *pater familias* to ensure the physical and mental integrity of their slaves.¹⁷ While the latter thus lived under the protection of the household's master, they were also completely and utterly at his or her mercy.¹⁸

These two components of slave existence in the late medieval Western Mediterranean are the primary reason why the actual experiences of slaves left very few traces. Once slaves had been bought, shipped, and baptized, their

various unskilled activities in and outside the household as well as their experiences of encounter and negotiation, of conflict and violence remained invisible in historical tradition unless the master or an external institution indicated a problem.

Only letter correspondences provide insight into the daily lives of slaves. The long-term exchange of letters between the merchant couple Margherita and Francesco Datini, who maintained two households in Tuscany, is a prominent example.¹⁹ Here we learn that the slave Bartolomea enjoyed a low level of trust and remained under the direct observation of her mistress, never allowed to leave the house. Other slaves bore babies to Francesco, whose own marriage with Margherita remained childless. The estimation of slave Lucia, for example, clearly improved when she gave birth to Francesco's daughter Ginevra, who survived infancy and grew up as the Datini's only child.

Where we have no such telling narrative sources, the range of activities and experiences can only be deduced from contested cases—from situations of conflict and debate. The most important sources for the reconstruction of slave experiences are therefore court records and council or guild orders mentioning slaves. Throughout the late medieval period, more and more regulations were concerned with the danger of criminal slaves being prepared to commit theft or use violence. In the case of Venice, the supposed poison murder of a prominent nobleman by a slave woman called Bona Tatara not only triggered an entire series of conspicuously similar cases in court, it also persuaded the political class to regulate access to toxic substances as well as the granting of licenses to run pharmacies and practice natural medicine. According to the court records, the slaves accused of poisoning their masters complained that they had been beaten or mistreated or that they could no longer endure the hard work requested of them. At the same time, the reader learns from the court documents that slave women moved freely within the town and were often well acquainted with other neighboring women of the *popolo*.²⁰

A further informative source is the guild prescripts of the time. Besides regulating access to and training in crafts, medieval guilds also protected their members and their families in the event of illness and death, as well as against competition from foreign craftsmen. Employing slaves as unskilled workers in a workshop constituted a cheap alternative for masters practicing a craft, but it also went against the idea of clearly regulated pathways of education and training and created a competitive situation for the apprentices and journeymen. In theory, the employment of slaves not officially registered in the guild register was forbidden. In practice, however, it was largely tolerated except when higher interests were at stake, as the various city council orders show. For example, the Venetian senate pronounced a general ban on slave labor in the production of luxury goods destined for export, arguing that the specialist know-how of a goldsmith or glassmaker could leave the Venetian dominion if an appropriately trained slave were manumitted or resold to a non-Venetian buyer.²¹

Finally, the gradual shift in inheritance law allowing children begotten by a household master with a female slave to inherit the free status of their father (rather than their mother's slave status, as in the Roman law tradition) and the simultaneous significant rise in foundlings in the foundling hospitals of Southern Europe demonstrates another important element of slave experiences of the time. The sexual power of household masters over their female slaves prevented the noble lines of European aristocracy from becoming extinct while at the same time establishing a new branch of human exploitation: the wet nursing industry. In Florence, like in other Italian cities, the priors of the *Ospedale degli Innocenti* complained that the number of slave babies had become unmanageable. Household masters were obligated to announce the birth of a slave baby in advance and asked to pay compensation to the hospitals upon delivery. On the flip side, employing and renting out slave women as wet nurses began to become such a lucrative business that the reproductive functions of female slaves were increasingly the subject of purchase negotiations and slave contracts. In Genoa, the *Officium Mercantie* regularly noted cases in which female slaves were returned or money was reclaimed when the purchased woman did not menstruate.²²

EXIT FROM SLAVERY

In the late medieval Western Mediterranean, almost all slaves exited the state of slavery at one point or the other. This rarely meant a substantial improvement of their social status, however: While opportunities for social advancement were plentiful for former slaves in Muslim societies at the time, ex-slaves in the western part of the Mediterranean region mostly remained dependent on someone else's mercy.

Generally speaking, there were four possible scenarios for escaping the state of enslavement. The first and most common of these was manumission. Household masters disposed of their belongings and decided about the future fate of their slaves in their wills or, on special occasions or for specific reasons, by way of notarial deeds. The exact wording of such testaments and deeds proves very telling with regard to the social relationship between the respective master or mistress and his or her slave. Slaves could become a bequest themselves when the master or mistress transmitted them to a close relative, or they could become the recipient of a bequest when their manumission was affirmed with the allocation of movable goods or a certain amount of money. The Venetian doge Antonio Venier, for example, decreed that his slave Lucia was to be set free upon his death with a financial endowment of 20 gold ducats, while slave Lena was to serve his wife for another five years before being manumitted with an endowment of 10 ducats. Another of Venier's slaves was to serve his daughter Valvina until the latter's death, at which point she was to be released if she had behaved well.²³ In many cases, manumitted slaves continued to serve in the same household—sometimes in a more favorable position, sometimes not. Francesco Datini's slave Argomento was rewarded for his excellent

services with manumission and became one of the most important carters—and thus a person of trust—in the Datini business.²⁴ Others continued to fulfill similar tasks as before, with the sole difference that they now worked under regularly renewed six- or twelve-month contracts and were remunerated with a small wage. The standard justification stated in wills and notarial deeds for granting a slave freedom was the salvation of the testator's soul. Manumission was deemed to be a pious act of Christian charity. The real motives of the testators were often much less honorable, however, and the social reality of the manumitted was sometimes quite sad. Many slaves were set free with very little financial or material endowment, or none at all—for in practice, manumission was also an easy means of getting rid of a disagreeable or aging slave no longer willing or able to work. Released from the state of enslavement, these people were forced to accept any type of work and working conditions. In the absence of alternatives, some of them resorted to begging, prostitution, or crime.²⁵

The second possible scenario for exiting the state of slavery was marriage, an option that mainly applied to female slaves. Generally speaking, marriage offered the greatest potential for upward social mobility for slaves in the late medieval Western Mediterranean world. Marrying a burgher with citizen rights could open up new social and economic possibilities and allow former slaves to live in an economically autonomous household. In some cases, marriage came as an add-on to standard manumission. Francesco Datini's slave Lucia, for example, who had given birth to his daughter Ginevra, was later compensated with marriage to Nanni da Prato, a laborer in the Datini business, along with a generous dowry that allowed them to live on the Datini estate in their own small house. In other cases, however, the marriage of a slave to a person outside the master's household was the result of a court settlement or an extrajudicial arrangement following an incident of sexual intercourse between the slave and their eventual spouse. As a matter of fact, slaves were not allowed to have sexual contact with persons outside their master's household at all—at least not without the master's consent. Voluntary or involuntary sexual contact with slaves was considered a property crime against the master's property. Not the potential sexual violence against the slave, but the misappropriation of their body as the master's property was considered a crime to be brought before a court.²⁶ Irrespective of a female slave's own will, her marriage to a man from the neighborhood was thus often the outcome of a conflict between her master and her lover or rapist.

The third exit scenario was absconding. Some striking differences between escape practices can be noted here. Generally speaking, enslaved men tried to escape more often than women, who were more vulnerable to violence and sexual exploitation than men. Furthermore, the rate of attempted escapes was considerably higher on the Iberian Peninsula than in Italy. While the majority of the slaves living in Italian households had been traded and sold as individuals at a relatively early age, slaves arriving on the Iberian Peninsula often came in groups or as families from the same place. The fact that they knew

each other from the time before their enslavement and/or transfer to Western Europe greatly increased their incentive to flee. Related to this aspect, slaves in Italian households mainly fled from a situation that had become unbearable for them to another household in a nearby town or region in hopes of finding better conditions there. On the Iberian Peninsula, however, at least some of the runaway slaves also hoped to return to their homeland and regain their former lives. In general, slaves' attempts to escape were more successful when they relied on a network of accomplices who often spoke the same language, no matter whether they had known each other before their enslavement or not.

The final possibility for slaves to attain freedom was court decisions: In rare cases, slaves could be manumitted by a court order because they had been illegally enslaved. Thus we read that the Mongolian slave Chebechzi and his compatriot were freed by the Venetian *Signori di Notte* and sent back to their homeland when it became known they had fled Catalonia in a small boat and been caught by a Venetian vintner who clandestinely kept them in chains in his wine cellar.²⁷ Other cases concerned the illegitimate enslavement of Catholic Christians from the Balkans. A Sicilian court decision of 1417 returned 25 Bosnians to their homeland who, according to the magistrates, were "true Christians" and had been wrongly "sold as slaves."²⁸ The other exit scenario by way of a court decision was, of course, the condemnation of a slave for a crime he or she was accused of. In these cases, the vulnerable position of the slave becomes most obvious: Slaves appear in criminal court records as witnesses and as accused persons, but never as plaintiffs. Their testimony before a court served to administer justice in a conflict involving their master, but never to enact justice for wrongs they had suffered themselves. A trial involving a slave could thus easily end with a sentence of death. The case of the previously mentioned Bona Tatara is a striking example here: According to Bona, her master had beaten her almost to death with a leather strap when he learned that she was pregnant. In revenge, she said, she had bought arsenic in a nearby pharmacy and poisoned her master. The criminal court sentenced her to death by being dragged first through water and then along the street, tied to a boat and a horse respectively, before being burned at the stake.²⁹

CONCLUSION

Placed in a broader context, slavery in the late medieval Western Mediterranean relied on long-distance trafficking networks that mainly traded people across religious and cultural borders. In the context of the crusading age, religious and cultural otherness had become the primary marker for "enslavability," and human trafficking as well as a theologically loaded discourse on slavery had become a means of religious conflict. At the same time, military struggles went hand in hand with economic and political expansion, paving the way for a new form of Mediterranean colonialism. Western European maritime powers experimented with different forms of colonial rule while exploring the

coasts of the Mediterranean, the Adriatic, and the Black Sea along with their hinterlands, as well as the Mediterranean islands. Their colonizing practices ranged from the imposition of fees and taxes or economic sanctions to the implementation of a Latin administration and the establishment of a centralized settlement policy with a transregional redistribution system. The trade in slaves was an integral part of this new European expansionism driven by the Western Mediterranean Sea powers, since it enabled a new form of labor recruitment. Even though most of the slaves sold into the Western Mediterranean served as individual unskilled workers in urban Latin households, the new labor requirements of the recently colonized islands also presented an opportunity to use coerced labor on a larger scale: The use of slaves for agricultural work on the plantations of Mallorca, Malta, or Crete formed the basis for the new plantation economy of the early modern age. The transatlantic slave trade and the implementation of a colonial economy based on slave labor would not have been possible without the experience gathered in the late medieval Western Mediterranean.³⁰

NOTES

1. Still relevant for a general overview: Charles Verlinden, *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*. 2 vols. (Bruges/Ghent: De Tempel, 1955/1977); Sergej P. Karpov, *L'Impero di Trepisonda Venezia, Genova e Roma. 1204–1461: Rapporti politici, diplomatici e commerciali* (Rome: Veltrio Ed., 1986).
2. Andrew Ehrenkreutz, “Strategic Implications of the Slave Trade between Genoa and Mamluk Egypt in the Second Half of the Thirteenth Century,” in *The Islamic Middle East, 700–1900*, ed. Abraham Udovitch (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1970), 335–45.
3. Reuven Amitai and Christoph Cluse, eds., *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1000–1500 CE)* (Turnout: Brepols, 2017), 401–69.
4. Jeffrey Fynn-Paul, “Empire, Monotheism and Slavery in the Greater Mediterranean Region from Antiquity to the Early Modern Era,” *Past & Present* 205, no. 1 (November 2009): 3–40.
5. Christopher Paoletta, *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe: Slavery, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020), 215–45; Peter Feldbauer, Gottfried Liedl, and John Morrissey, eds., *Mediterraner Kolonialismus: Expansion und Kulturaustausch im Mittelalter* (Essen: Magnus-Verlag, 2005).
6. Hannah Barker, *The Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).
7. As a representative example of Crusade sermons, see Guillelmus Adae, “De modo Saracenos extirpandi (1317),” in *Recueil des historiens des Croisades: Documents arméniens*, vol. 2 (Paris: Société des amis de la Roumanie, 1906), 521–55.
8. As a representative example of Church decrees, see S. Franco, H. Fory, and H. Dalmazzo, eds., *Bullarium Romanum*, 24 vols. (1857–1872), here vol. 4, no. 16–17 (3 June 1425), 718–21.

9. Representative for other accounts, see “Epistolae Fr. Iohannis de Monte Corvino,” in *Sinica Franiscana*, I: *Itinera et relationes fratrum minorum saeculi XIII et XIV*, ed. P. A. v.d. Wyngaert O. F. M. (Firenze: Apud Collegium S. Bonaventurae, 1929), 340–55, esp. 347–8.
10. Andreas Meyer, *Felix et inclitus notarius: Studien zum italienischen Notariat vom 7. bis zum 13. Jahrhundert* (Tübingen: Niemeyer, 2000); Irmgard Fees, “Ein venezianischer Kaufmann des 12. Jahrhunderts: Romano Mairano,” in *Il mito di Venezia: Una città tra realtà e rappresentazione*, ed. Peter Schreiner (Rome—Venice: Ed. Di Storia e Letteratura, 2006), 25–59; Linda Guzzetti, *Venezianische Vermächtnisse: Die soziale und wirtschaftliche Situation von Frauen im Spiegel spätmittelalterlicher Testamente* (Stuttgart: Metzler, 1998).
11. Marie Favereau, *La Horde d’Or et l’islamisation des steppes eurasiatiques* (Aix-en-Provence: Presses Universitaires de Provence, 2018); Barker, *The Most Precious Merchandise*; Juliane Schiel, “Tatort Tana: Die Rolle Lateineuropas in der Sklavenökonomie des Schwarzmeerraums (ca. 1300–1500),” *Historische Zeitschrift* 313, no. 1 (2021): 32–60; Juliane Schiel, “The Ragusan ‘Maids-of-all-Work’. Shifting Labor Relations in the Late Medieval Adriatic Sea Region,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 5 (2020): 139–69.
12. Umberto Dorini and Tommaso Bertelè, eds., *Il libro dei conti di Giacomo Badoer (Constantinopoli, 1436–1440)* (Rome: Ist. Poligr. dello Stato, 1956).
13. “Di messer Iosafa Barbaro, gentiluomo veneziano, il viaggio della Tana e nella Persia,” in *Navigazioni e viaggi: A cura di Marica Milanese*, ed. Giovanni Battista Ramusio, vol. 3 (Turin: Einaudi, 1980), 485–574, at 504–5.
14. Emir O. Filipović, “The Ottoman Conquest and the Depopulation of Bosnia in the Fifteenth Century,” in *State and Society in the Balkans Before and After Establishment of Ottoman Rule*, eds. Srdan Rudić and Selim Aslantas (Belgrade: The Institute of History Belgrade, 2017), 79–101.
15. Gregor Čremošnik, *Acta Cancellariae et Notariae Annorum 1278–1301* (Belgrade, 1932), no. 79, 46–7.
16. Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009); Aurelia Martín Casares, *La esclavitud en la Granada del siglo XVI: Género, raza y religion* (Granada: Univ., Centro Prov. de la Mujer, 2000).
17. Dennis Romano/Guido Ruggiero Leon Battista Alberti, eds., *I libri della famiglia* (Torino: Einaudi, 1989). Vera Ribauda, ed., *Benedetto Cotrugli Raguseo. Libro de l’arte de la mercatura* (Venice: Edizioni Ca’Foscari, 2016).
18. Stanley Chojnacki, “Crime, Punishment, and the Trecento Venetian State,” in *Violence and Civil Disorder in Italian Cities. 1200–1500*, ed. Lauro Martines (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1972), 184–228; Dennis Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft: Domestic Service in Renaissance Venice 1400–1600* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996).
19. Elena Cecchi, ed., *Le lettere di Francesco Datini alla moglie Margherita (1385–1410)* (Prato: Società Pratese di Storia Patria, 1990); Valeria Rosati, ed., *Le lettere di Margherita Datini a Francesco di Marco (1384–1410)* (Prato: Cassa di Risparmio e Depositi, 1977); Carolyn James/Antonio Pagliaro, eds., *Margherita Datini. Letters to Francesco Datini* (Toronto: Centre for Reformation and Renaissance Studies, 2012).
20. Archivio di Stato di Venezia, *Avogaria di Comun, Raspe*, reg. 3646, fol. 84v–85r (19 June 1410); for more detailed information on the case of Bona

- Tatara, see Juliane Schiel, “Mord von zarter Hand: Der Giftmordvorwurf im Venedig des 15. Jahrhunderts,” in *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500–1800)/Neue Perspektiven auf Mediterrane Sklaverei (500–1800)*, eds. Stefan Hanß and Juliane Schiel (Zurich: Chronos, 2014), 201–28.
21. Juliane Schiel, “Die Sklaven und die Pest: Überprüfung eines Forschungsnarrativs am Beispiel Venedigs,” in *Schiavitù e servaggio nell’economia europea, secc. XI–XVIII/Serfdom and Slavery in the European Economy, 11th–18th Centuries*, ed. Simonetta Cavaciocchi, vol. 1 (Florence: Firenze University Press, 2014), 365–75, at 371–74.
 22. Christoph Cluse, “Frauen in Sklaverei: Beobachtungen aus genuesischen Notariatsregistern des 14. und 15. Jahrhunderts,” in *Campagna pulsante convocati: Festschrift anlässlich der Emeritierung von Prof. Dr. Alfred Haverkamp*, ed. Frank G. Hirschmann and Gerd Mentgen (Trier: Kliomedica, 2005), 85–123; Sally McKee, “Inherited Status and Slavery in Late Medieval Italy and Venetian Crete,” *Past and Present* 182 (2004): 31–53.
 23. Sergio Perini, ed., “Testamento del doge Antonio Venier: 1400, 24 ottobre,” *Archivio Veneto* 138–139 (1992): 126–33; Juliane Schiel, Isabelle Schürch, and Aline Steinbrecher, “Von Sklaven, Pferden und Hunden: Dialog über den Nutzen aktueller Agency-Debatten für die Sozialgeschichte,” *Schweizerisches Jahrbuch für Wirtschafts- und Sozialgeschichte/Annuaire suisse d’histoire économique et sociale* 23 (2017): 17–48.
 24. See endnote 19.
 25. Romano, *Housecraft and Statecraft*; Guido Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros: Sex Crime and Sexuality in Renaissance Venice* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985).
 26. Ruggiero, *The Boundaries of Eros*.
 27. See endnote 13.
 28. Ferdinando Lioni, ed., *Codice diplomatico di Alfonso il Magnanimo*, vol. 1: 1416–1417. Palermo 1891, 159, n. 297.
 29. See endnote 20.
 30. Giulia Bonazza, “Connecting the Mediterranean and the Atlantic,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 3 (2018): 152–75.

FURTHER READINGS

- Amitai, Reuven, and Christoph Cluse, eds. *Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Eastern Mediterranean (c. 1000–1500 CE)*. Turnhout: Brepols, 2017.
- Barker, Hannah. *The Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019.
- Blumenthal, Debra. *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Guillén, Fabienne, and Salah Trabelsi, eds. *Les esclavages en Méditerranée: Espaces et dynamiques économiques*. Madrid: Casa de Velázquez, 2012.
- Hanß, Stefan, and Juliane Schiel, eds. *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500–1800): Neue Perspektiven auf Mediterrane Sklaverei (500–1800)*. Zurich: Chronos, 2014.
- Martín Casares, Aurelia. *La esclavitud en la Granada del siglo XVI: Género, raza y religión*. Granada: Univ., Centro Prov. De la Mujer, 2000.
- McKee, Sally. *Uncommon Dominion: Venetian Crete and the Myth of Ethnic Purity*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2000.

- Paoella, Christopher. *Human Trafficking in Medieval Europe: Slavery, Sexual Exploitation, and Prostitution*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2020.
- Rio, Alice. *Slavery after Rome, 500–1100*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Verlinden, Charles. *L'esclavage dans l'Europe médiévale*. 2 vols. Bruges/Ghent: De Tempel, 1955/1977.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





The Question of Slavery in the Inca State

Karoline Noack  and *Kerstin Nowack*

INTRODUCTION

The question of whether or not there were slaves and slavery in the Inca state (or Tawantinsuyu) has long been disputed in historiography, as has the general question of the dependence of people in the Inca state and the nature of their dependency. This debate is an expression of the continuous search for theoretical frameworks for Inca history, which have been based largely on various European models and terminologies. The various forms of dependency existing in the Inca state have been interpreted in the context of evolutionary models of economic and social evolution, where one category of dependents, the *yanacona*, were regarded as possible slaves. According to John Murra,¹ the dispute about the *yanacona* is as old as the anthropology of the Inca state.²

Yanacona can be defined as people detached from their family group, freed from tribute to the Inca, and serving the Inca and provincial elites. However, this is not the only social and labor-related category of dependency in the Inca state. Other main social and labor categories are *mitimaes*, *camayoc* and

K. Noack (✉) · K. Nowack
University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany
e-mail: knoack@uni-bonn.de

K. Nowack
e-mail: Kerstin_Nowack@gmx.de

K. Nowack
Independent Scholar, Bonn, Germany

mitayos. Paraphrased as relocated people (*mitimaes*), occupational specialists (*camayoc*), and commoners taking turns of service to fulfill their tribute obligations (*mitayos*), all of these are deeply rooted, but also historically evolving and intersecting social groups. These categories include men and women, while an additional category, *acllacuna/ mamacuna*, comprised exclusively women, the first category referring to young, the second to elder women. These are considered very close to the *yana* category. Given this situation, it is difficult to isolate just one of the social groups to describe, but we will focus our attention on the *yanacona* as the group that in previous works had been seen as experiencing an especially strong form of asymmetric dependency. However, we will also consider the overlapping of the *yana* category with other groups. A systematic study of the *yanacona*, but also of the other social and labor-related categories of the Inca state, i.e., on the dependent population, is still pending. After the seminal works of the so-called Andean Studies of the 1960s to 1980s, established principally by John Murra (1916–2006), no scholars have given much attention to these topics, generally, and also not to the *yanacona*, in particular.³ We focus here on a source-saturated approach that follows from Andean Studies and incorporates new anthropological, historical, and archaeological perspectives on the Inca state.

All written sources about the *yanacona* come from the Spanish colonial period. These were eyewitness reports, chronicles, administrative documents as visitation reports (“*visitas*”), and also early Quechua dictionaries. The meaning of the Quechua word *yana* in an early seventeenth-century dictionary is given as “*criado moço de seruicio*” (“servant, servant youth”), *yanacona* is the plural form.⁴ Generally, Spanish terms like “*criado*,” “*indios de seruicio*” or sometimes just “*seruicio*” (service), can be assumed to mean *yanacona* as well, but might also cover other individuals. Not everyone called a “*criado*” (“servant,” but also “raised”) was necessarily a *yana*. In addition, *yanacona* could also be occupational specialists (termed *camayoc*), and some of them occupied leadership positions and the term was applied to members of local elites. The degree of dependency is therefore not easy to determine, as the *yanacona* could cover a whole spectrum of different status positions. After a few general reflections on Inca society and economy, we will describe the *yanacona* as a dependent social group and labor category in three main sections. The first section will examine how people became *yana*; the second will explore personal service to the ruler, as well as working for the Inca and provincial elites; and the third section will consider how people exited the *yana* status.

THE INCA RULERS

| <i>Name</i> | <i>According to Miguel Cabello Valboa [1586]^a</i> | <i>According to Juan de Betanzos [1551–57]^b</i> |
|-------------------------|--|--|
| Manco Inca | | |
| Sinchi Roca | | |
| Lloque Yupanqui | | |
| Mayta Capac | | |
| Capac Yupanqui | | |
| Inca Roca | | |
| Yahuar Huacac | | |
| Viracocha | ?-1438 | ?-1420/30 |
| Pachacuti Inca Yupanqui | 1438–1471 | 1420/30–1470/75 |
| Topa Inca Yupanqui | 1471–1493 | 1470/75–1485/90 |
| Huayna Capac | 1493–1527 | 1485/90–1525 |
| Huascar | 1527–1532 | 1525–1532 |
| Atahualpa | 1532–1533 | |

Table (elaborated by Kerstin Nowack)

^aMiguel Cabello Valboa, *Miscelánea Antártica*, ed. Isaías Lerner (Sevilla: Fundación José Manuel Lara, 2011 [1586])

^bJuan de Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas: seguida del discurso sobre la descendencia y gobierno de los Incas*, ed. María del Carmen Martín Rubio (Madrid: Polifemo, 2004 [1551–57])

The Tawantinsuyu encompassed parts of present-day southern Columbia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia, and from northwest Argentina up to central Chile, making it the largest state in the Americas in terms of geographic extent. Its manifold landscapes ranged from a desert coast through hot and fertile valleys, to arid and cold highlands down to the eastern slopes of the Andes and the eastern rainforest. It was inhabited by between six and thirteen million people under the control of Inca rulers at its peak extent.⁵ The Inca state arose through expansion during the last hundred years or so before the Spanish conquest of Peru beginning in 1532.

How did Inca rulers manage to establish a state of such great dimensions in such a short time? The explanation for this phenomenon lies in the interlocking structures Andean communities, such as the *mincca*, reciprocal or mutual aid that was inseparably linked to the *ayllu*, the basic, household-based social organization of *hatun runa* or “commoners.” Social relations within the *ayllu* were structured on the basis of collective land ownership and the related principle of reciprocity. Members of local communities benefited from the *mincca* in agricultural work or, for example house construction. Gradually and in a manner almost imperceptible to Andean peoples, these structures were used to further the Inca state’s interests and transformed into the *mita*, a system of rotating labor obligations to the state based on the *mincca* model, for which new redistributive forms and ideological-religious justifications were created. The state needed this form of extended labor obligation of the community members, or *mitayos*, to expand its productive agricultural base and its infrastructure (e.g., roads, road stations, storehouses, administrative centers).

The Inca succeeded in achieving a subtle balance between diversity through the maintenance of local structures and unification on a higher level. In the diverse Andean ecosystem with its micro-landscapes and micro-climates, local agriculture was not only practiced at a single altitude level, for example growing maize at about 3000 meters or potatoes in the Puna highlands. Instead, local communities often controlled several vertical levels by establishing permanent colonies or “archipelagos” in order to obtain a wider range of agricultural products. These levels were often inhabited by *mitimaes*, relocated people or “colonists” of different origins.⁶ Inca rulers expanded this institution by systematically relocating and resettling families, or even entire communities to new, strategic locations, thereby developing unused or under-used land and other resources, but also contributing to the stability of their rule by dividing conquered polities. In a similar manner, they took the existing practice of having *yanacona* and expanded and adapted it for the support of their elite and of state-sponsored cults.

BECOMING A YANA

The *yanacona* have their origins in the time before the Inca. There were different ways of falling into this form of dependency. In pre-Inca times, the *yanacona* were apparently an integrated part of the local social organization. In Inca times, one can assume that the *yanacona* are to be seen in connection with the wars of conquest of the Inca and generally with the progressive constitution of the Tawantinsuyu. At the same time, the pre-Inca practices continued to exist in the local organizations. That is to say that often different forms of becoming *yana* were intertwined. During Inca rule, capture in war was probably a common way of becoming a *yana*. In the main Andean languages, Quechua and Aymara, the words for prisoner of war and their Spanish translations indicate that there was an overlap in meaning between “war captive,” “prisoner,” and “slave.”⁷ Juan de Betanzos, an important chronicler who could communicate in Quechua, mentions that some *yanacona* had been prisoners of war, mostly men or families abducted from their provinces during campaigns of conquest. He exemplifies this when he describes specific military campaigns and gives examples of people taken as booty and individuals settled as *yanacona*.⁸ After the initial transformation of war captives into *yanacona*, the majority of the *yanacona* was then provided by the local population as part of its tribute obligations after the wars of conquest. These are described as being taken or recruited from the provinces and allocated to the descent groups of the former rulers,⁹ who continued to be present in the life of their descendants as mummified ancestors, and whose land, servants, and buildings remained in their possession, serving to maintain their descent group.

Accordingly, *yanacona* could be provided for the *Inca ruler* himself and his family; including the former rulers; the *Inca elite*; or the *local elites* of the subjugated provinces—in this last case as a reward for subjugation, but also

as part of the existing practices. The Inca elite expected subjugated populations to provide it with *yana* laborers in a similar manner as provincial lords requested these permanent dependents from their subjects. The *yanacona* themselves could come from socially completely different status groups, namely both from the local elite of the subjugated region, but also from the group of the commoner population. As *yanacona* from the elite, they either remained at their status or were able to raise it which was sometimes also true for commoners who became *yanacona*. *Yanacona* thus at times were an important instrument of Inca rule and the maintenance of their power in the conquered territories. They could exercise positions of high responsibility as government officials, for example, but the case of the ten thousand Chachapoyas, the “Warriors of the Clouds” on the eastern slope of the northern Andes in Peru, stands out, who due to their military skills were turned into specialized soldiers by the Inca, some of them *yanacona*.¹⁰ After the Spanish conquest, these military skills could be turned against the Inca. Condorguacho, the female ruler of the Huaylas province, had been given *yanacona* by her husband, the Inca ruler Huayna Capac, respectively his military leaders. In 1536, she personally led troops to support the Spaniards during their fight against the Inca and “brought many Indians Chachapoyas [and other] with her that were hers.” They might have been the war captives awarded to her as *yanacona*.¹¹ Other Chachapoya *yanacona* and/or *mitimaes* were assigned to the Inca Huayna Capac personal guards and for his son Huascar together with other groups. Especially from *mitimaes* we know that they were able to maintain their high status during the turbulent times of Spanish conquest, when the Chachapoya became allies of the Spaniards. This guaranteed them a high social status with access to honor and privilege even during the colonial period.¹²

One specific example of becoming a *yana* is given by don Joan Puyquin during the General Visitation of viceroy Francisco de Toledo, the “reformer” of the viceroyalty of Peru (1570–1575). He described to the Spanish information gatherers that his father had been captured as a child during a campaign against the Chachapoya. While most members of his local group were killed, the father of don Joan Puyquin was allowed to live because he was so young, and was made a servant or *yana* of Topa Inca.¹³ Later in life, the father married, had children on his own, and even acquired a position of local leadership in the Cusco region. Remarkably, it is documented that the Chachapoya turned war captives into *yanacona* as well, since Inca Garcilaso de la Vega, famous author of the “Royal Commentaries of the Incas” (1609) mentions a supposed Chachapoya rebellion, where they took Inca soldiers as prisoners “with the intention of using them as slaves.”¹⁴

Although we know something about wars being the context in which people became *yanacona*, in the other cases we know nothing about the selection process by which *yanacona* were drafted. Because the sources on the *yanacona* are so scattered, they seem to give the impression of random decisions. The exception is the *yanacona* of elite origins who came “from the

best people and most [were] children of curacas [local rulers],” as the Spanish administrator Hernando de Santillán explains.¹⁵ They served the Inca ruler in special capacities and progressed to become part of a patronage network in the Inca state. Their fate differed completely from that of *yanacona* drafted from the commoner population.

The other accounts tell of the way *yanacona* were chosen in the provinces by the Inca nobles, but not who exactly was chosen. In the Chíncha valley in south coastal Peru, Inca officials are reported to have come inspecting the performance of the local rulers, collecting data on the province’s demographics as well as selecting individuals who would become *aclla* (“chosen women”) and *yana*. A local ruler in Huanuco in the northern-central Andes reported to the Spanish crown officials about the work his people had done for the Inca state. For example, he sent a number of *yanacona* to live in Cuzco in service of the Inca ruler. As he underlined, their children as adults continued to serve as *yanacona*. This is an indication that the status of the *yanacona* may have been hereditary. If there were no children, the home province had to send a replacement.¹⁶ Nothing is said about the fate of *yanacona* who had become too old for work.

This form of recruitment explains why even an Inca ruler who had not yet led a successful campaign of conquest could nevertheless distribute *yanacona* to the descendants of his predecessors, the “dead lords”. Similarly, high-ranking members of an Inca ruler’s family like his mother and principal wife were allowed to get *yanacona* from the provinces to work on the parcels of land they had been allocated.¹⁷ Possibly, *yanacona* of the Inca ruler and the Inca elite were selected mostly from small and non-influential kinship groups (*ayllus*), but it is also imaginable that, as in the case of general labor service (*mita*), a percentage of every given unit was chosen.¹⁸ The only other information on the origins of *yanacona* again comes from Betanzos. He provides a list of Inca laws, one of them stating that thieves either had to recompense the owner of stolen property by giving it back in double. If they did not have the means for making amends, they had to become the *yanacona* of the property owner. Not only would the thief stay the *yana* of property owner until his death, he would also bequeath his status on his children. A second law implies that unwanted children exposed as infants could be turned into *yanacona*.¹⁹ In these cases, it is evident that people already marginalized in their societies were in danger of becoming *yanacona*.

As stated above, the Inca built their institutions and practices on those existing in the Andes prior to their rule. Having *yanacona* was widely practiced by the local elite in the pre-Inca Andes. Local rulers from highland Ecuador, Peru and Bolivia as well as from coastal Peru describe that they enjoyed the service of *yanacona*.²⁰ They expected to be provided with *yanacona* from their subjects. That is to say that, unlike as in the above-mentioned cases, the dependents originated from the same group as the people for whom they worked.²¹ In a village near the Lake Titicaca, one of the Lupaca rulers still powerful in the colonial epoch, explained that he had both Aymaras and Uros in his service,

referring categories used to define people around the Lake Titicaca by occupation, lifestyle, and language.²² The ruler governed members of both groups, and both provided him with *yanacona*. *Yanacona* could also be “given” within the hierarchy of the provincial elite from one lord to a higher-level lord.²³

A very few examples indicate that *yana* status could be the result of a breakdown of social relations, as for example in the case of orphaned children who became members of a local elite household, and as adults found that they were ascribed to the *yana* category for their lifetime. In the aftermaths of the Spanish invasion, documents from the central highlands of Ecuador and Peru refer to individuals and families who apparently accepted *yana* status in exchange for a livelihood and the protection of local elites.²⁴

While coercion by economic and social circumstances might be a factor in becoming a *yana* in local social organizations, direct violence is hardly ever mentioned. Although the inhabitants of the central Andes experienced a period of regular conflict among neighboring polities before the Inca ruled, and although warfare was also before the Inca one of the most common ways to acquire dependents, there is little evidence that *yanacona* in those times were war captives. At the same moment, the testimonies of local elites reflect the situation after one to four generations of Inca rule, and the correlating suppression of conflicts among the Tawantinsuyu’s subjects.

The term *yana* encountered in the colonial sources thus covers a great variety of statuses and historical developments. What interests here most is the employment of dependents in the Inca empire, starting with the largest group, those working for the Inca elite.

PERSONAL SERVICE TO THE RULER: WORKING FOR THE INCA AND PROVINCIAL ELITES

In the Inca state, the obligation to work applies to all who depended on the Inca state or the local political elites, or a ruler, whether or not they are in servitude. Therefore, most of the population as a whole worked to provide basic subsistence, and this is true for the *yanacona* as well. Lamentably, the information about the circumstances of their life does not go far beyond these references to their labor obligations. Based on the sources, we can again distinguish between labor and personal services of the *yanacona* for the Inca ruler and his family as well as for the Inca elite and for the local elites.

Most of the Inca *yanacona* were workers on the Inca elite’s rural estates.²⁵ These estates, mainly located in the environs of the Inca capital of Cuzco, were settlements and resource systems, created by a ruler and then managed in the name of his descendants. Many of them included more than one palace as well as private lands and resources for their inhabitants and for the sun, the principal deity. They also encompassed storehouses, pastures, forests, gardens or *moyas*, irrigated fields, coca fields, salt resources, bridges, and villages.²⁶ Sometimes thousands of *yanacona* worked there, nearly all resettled from other provinces (as were *mitimaes*), producing resources to maintain the legacy of

the deceased nobles. Sometimes, subsequent rulers augmented the number of *yanacona* of their predecessors in exchange for the political support of the descent group. Machu Picchu, for instance, housed dwellings for 500 to 750 nobles and servants, apparently *yanacona*. Bioarcheological studies of the laborers at Machu Picchu show that most spent their childhood in remote coastal or high-altitude regions, meaning that they had been resettled from diverse locations of the Inca state.²⁷

On other estates, the *yana* settlers lived in small villages and were supervised by other *yanacona*, and sometimes by inhabitants of villages nearby.²⁸ Cheqoq, part of Yucay estate of Huayna Capac's lineage, for instance, was mostly inhabited by *yanacona* (who also were resettled, that is, *mitimaes*) rather than nobles. During Huayna Capac's rule, 150,000 *mita* workers were temporarily transferred to channel the river and create irrigable land for maize production in the Yucay valley, as well as 2,000 *yanacona*, one half coming from the northern and the other half coming from the southern part of the state, with very diverse geographical and cultural origins.²⁹ At the same time, his grandfather Topa Inca's descendants in Cuzco disposed of the services of another 1,000 *yanacona*.³⁰ Apart from fieldwork, some *yanacona* on the estates had specialized occupations and worked as weavers, salt makers, or builders.³¹ In this case, the *yana* category was overlapping with the *camayoc* category, occupational specialists. In addition to the dependents in service of the Inca elite, major supernatural beings both in Cuzco and the provinces were endowed with *yanacona*, although in lower numbers than those serving the Inca elite, together with fields and camelid herds.³²

Service for the Inca elite was not associated with great material benefits, as archaeological studies show.³³ Practically no information is found about the family life, social organization, work conditions, lifestyle, and religious practices of the *yanacona* on the estates. It was the pre-Inca institution of *yanacona* that resulted in their being able to marry and form households.³⁴ As we already know that the father of don Joan Puyquin from the Chachapoya region had been captured in war when he was a child, and became a *yana*, but we do not know anything about don Joan Puyquin's mother. Was she a captive of the same campaign, the child of a *yanacona* couple with similar or different regional origins, or did she descent from the local non-*yana* population? And who became don Joan Puyquin's wife? Offspring inherited the status of a *yana* and had to continue working for their elite lords. Were male and female able to find partners among the *yanacona* of the same master? If marriages between members of different *yanacona* groups occurred, where did the couple live, and for whom did they and their eventual children work?

As *yanacona* can be defined as people detached from their kinship group (*ayllu*), this nearly always meant that they had to leave their homeland and lost their familial and communal networks. They often became members of a larger and more anonymous workforce, and it can be supposed that their quality of life was lowered, and that individuals lost the ability to make choices about significant aspects of their life.³⁵ However, being a *yana* did not mean that

these individuals were publicly degraded. No specific rituals of humiliation are known to mark the transition to *yana* status and, although the Inca state valued such symbols to make a status visible, no outward signs on the body or a special attire denoted *yana* status.³⁶ In contrast to *mitimaes*, no special rules applied to the *yanacona*, except that legally *yanacona* fell under the jurisdiction of their Inca superiors, not of provincial rulers.³⁷ *Yanacona* apparently could not be killed randomly or as sacrificial victims, and no special corporal punishments were reserved for them.³⁸ Most importantly, they retained the right to have a family.³⁹

A very different group of *yanacona* were those taken from the provincial elites to serve the Inca ruler directly. Their office was to work in ruler's household, overseeing the preparation of food and caring for his clothes, insignia, and weapons, tasks associated with a great responsibility, since everything in contact with the Inca's body could endanger his ritual purity and be used for harming him by magical means.⁴⁰ Their relationship with the Inca ruler could become very intimate, best exemplified by one of the already mentioned Chachapoya *yanacona*, Chuquimis, who sucked blood from a wound of Inca Huayna Capac. As a reward for his service, as it is claimed, Chuquimis later became a local ruler in his home province.⁴¹ It is, however, more likely that the time spent in the Inca ruler's household prepared young men for future leadership positions in provinces. During their turn in the Inca ruler's household, they learned how the administration of the empire functioned and acquired valuable contacts among its elite—this is what we understand as patronage. Furthermore, having served the Inca ruler was prestigious and enhanced their status after returning home. For the Inca, the presence of offspring of local elites in the imperial center facilitated the flow of information between them and the provinces, gave the ruler and his advisors insights into the politics and personalities of the local elites, and continued to weave the network what was becoming and strengthening the “fragile” Inca state.⁴²

When local rulers from the central coast of Peru like Taulichusco of the Rimac valley and Francisco Yayvi of the Chillón valley described themselves as *yanacona* of Inca rulers, they refer to a patronage relationship resulting from their stay at the Inca court. They ended up governing members of their own local group. Most *yanacona* described as having acquired local rulership were not outsiders, but members of the group they came to rule. There is no clear evidence that the appointment of a former Inca *yana* as a local ruler can be interpreted as the start of an administration based on merit and abilities.⁴³ A possible exception is the case of don Alonso Condor, interviewed during the General Visitation of viceroy Toledo. His father (or perhaps grandfather?) came from the Soras province (today Ayacucho, Peru) and was brought to the Xaquixaguana valley close to Cusco by the Inca ruler Pachacuti, to become the *curaca* of Pomaguanca, where *mitimaes* had been relocated to.⁴⁴ As Pachacuti had subjugated the Soras, don Alonso's progenitor might have been a war captive. When Alonso Condor's father was dying, he had entrusted Alonso and his elder brother to the Inca ruler Huayna Capac. Alonso Condor became a

page (a term applied to a youth serving a member of the elite) of Huayna Capac, as probably his brother as well. Apparently, the brother was later installed as a *curaca* in Tomebamba (perhaps heading another group of *mitimaes* with unknown regional extraction) in Ecuador, while Alonso Condor came to rule Pomaguanca as the successor of his father.⁴⁵ So Huayna Capac took the fatherless sons of a loyal subject lord into his household to serve him and train them for future positions in the Inca hierarchy and administration. In this example, members of the provincial elites advanced from a position in the Inca ruler's household to local rulership of *mitimaes*.

The *yanacona* serving the local elite in the provinces were mostly active in either agricultural work or herding, some were craft specialists (*camayoc*), and a few supervised specific tasks or people.⁴⁶ Depending on the nature of their occupations, these men and women lived in or near the households of their elite overlords or at separate locations, which probably determined the degree of autonomy they enjoyed. In general, they remained in their homeland, in contrast to Inca *yanacona*, but like them lost their ayllu affiliation and, possibly, had to identify with the elite's descent group and very likely participate in its religious practices. The case of Alonso Poma Cochache (see below) shows that some *yana* superiors physically mistreated their dependents; other hints that (physical?) intimidation was sometimes used can be found as well.⁴⁷

The number of *yanacona* a local leader could claim depended on mostly unknown historical conditions and customs, and the proportion of *yanacona* in relation to the number of a leader's subjects varied. In the Bolivian highlands, the rulers of 10,000 households stated that they had the right to have 50 *yanacona*, that is half a percent of their subjects became their dependents. Additional *yanacona* in decreasing numbers were allocated to the lower-ranking leaders of units of 5000, 1000, 500, and 100 taxpaying households, so that the total of *yanacona* expected to be provided by these leaders' subjects might have amounted to five percent of all households. It cannot be said if these numbers reflect pre-Inca ratios or if the Inca put a limit on the number of *yanacona* local leaders could recruit (the decimal units refer to Inca division of the subject population).⁴⁸ In an example from highland Ecuador, dependents constituted up to ten percent of the population, which seems to be on the higher end of the range. Murra discusses the question of the *yanacona*'s share of the total population in the context of whether they can be considered slaves. According to his calculation using the example of the visitation report of the Lupaca, *yanacona* made up a share of two to three percent. He left open the question of whether such a society could be referred to as a slave society.⁴⁹

LEAVING THE YANA STATUS

As in the case of becoming a *yana*, which varied depending on whether they were on-going local or regional practices stemming from the pre-Inca period

or practices related to the Inca expansion and state-building process, the possibilities for leaving the status, if that was at all possible, varied as well. However, there are even fewer sources on this question than regarding the first two topics. Criteria that determined these differences were the social origins of the *yanacona*, i.e., whether they were commoners from the communities or belonged to the regional or local elites themselves, and whom they served, i.e., superiors at the level of the Inca state or at a subordinate level of the local political elite.

It is mentioned that *yanacona* of the Inca elite meant a lifelong service which to our knowledge ended only in the case of severe political upheaval. For the *yanacona* of Topa Inca's descendants, the outcome of the succession war between his grandsons Atahualpa and Huascar for the position of Inca ruler resulted in the dissolution of the descent group, and the death of many of their members. Perhaps it also gave some of the *yanacona* of that kinship group the opportunity to escape their status. In a similar manner, the *yanacona* on a newly founded estate of Huascar were sent home by the military leaders of the opposite party during that war, so that they could revert to be ordinary community tribute payers.⁵⁰ Other sources referring to *yanacona* of commoner background serving the Inca elite make clear that people designated to become *yanacona* remained so for the rest of their lives. This is true for those drafted from the local population as well for example for those punished to become *yanacona* for criminal offenses as theft, especially toward a property owner, generally a person of higher status.

In general, there was no need for "manumission" for those *yanacona* of the Inca elite as in the case of slaves in other parts of the world. *Yanacona* never completely lost their position in their provincial community or the Inca state, and therefore they were not viewed as outsiders. They did not need to be reintegrated into Inca society, as in the case of slaves who were often seen as standing outside of the society where they had brought to serve.

The experience of elite *yanacona* for the Inca ruler was the opposite. For them, service at the ruler's court was a transition in their life, a form of training for their future positions as provincial leaders. They continued to refer to themselves as *yanacona* of the ruler, but this meant a prestigious status denoting their close political ties to the Inca sovereign, not a continuance of personal service. It is not known if this special relationship could be transmitted to the successors of rulers who had been *yanacona*.

Colonial-era wills of local elite and documents from tribute inspections show that *yanacona* service to provincial elites—as part of local social organization—was permanent. Only the case of Alonso Julca Guaman, who had been physically mistreated, as mentioned above, indicates that a *yana* could leave his position. During a quite early Spanish inspection of the local population in central Peruvian Huaraz (1558), the inhabitants were asked if their rulers abused them in any way. Alonso Julca Guaman, one of the witnesses, explained that he had been given by his superior ("principal") to a higher-level ruler, don Alonso Poma Cochache, as a *yana*, and complained about his

treatment. He had been physically abused by Alonso Poma Cochache, while customary clothing and food were withheld from him.⁵¹ As a consequence, Alonso Julca Guaman left the service of his abusive lord, apparently without any punishment.

The previously mentioned criteria that mark the differences in the possibilities of leaving *yana* status also make it clear that there are differences in terms of the heritability of that status. These are determined by the same principles. The commoner *yana* status will have been hereditary. *Yanacona* lived in families. The children of those families continued to serve as *yanacona* as adults. As we have seen, if there were no children, the home province had even to send a replacement. It will have been different in cases that we call patronage. Since the *yanacona*, who came from the provincial elites, went through a kind of educational process at the ruler's home, it was completed at a certain point. These differences regarding the heritability of the *yanacona* probably also explain their different, even contradictory presentation in the literature.⁵² The problem is that the differentiations in the large group of the *yanacona* had not been perceived and therefore was not addressed.

CONCLUSION

Since the first research on *yanacona* was based on little and one-sided source material, it had come to the assumption that the *yanacona* were slaves. In the context of European historical concepts, an Inca state without slaves was inconceivable. More recent research since the 1960s, such as in the Andean Studies initiated by John Murra, based on the analysis of new source material like for example the visitation reports, brought new insights and made clear that the *yanacona* were subject to a strong form of asymmetrical dependency, but could not be considered slaves according to the terminology and the models of economic and societal evolution developed in European historiography.⁵³ After the 1980s, the topic of *yanacona* was addressed only sporadically. For example, in the *Oxford Handbook of the Incas* (2018) the social and labor-related categories of dependency in the Tawantinsuyu, including the *yanacona*, are hardly dealt with in detail.

Andeanist John H. Rowe clarified that the categories of *mitimaes*, *yanacona*, and *camayoc* were “not three contrasting categories of men,” but that they could overlap. As we have seen, Inca subjects could be everything together, a combination of two or only one category. “Which status or statuses are mentioned, may depend on the context of discourse.” Following Rowe, the difference between them should not be described as a degree of servility or dependency. Rather, the distinction between social and labor-related categories “was not more or less freedom but more or less access to honor and privilege,” the source of which was the Inca government.⁵⁴ Accordingly, it was the status of the dependents in Inca society, not the degree of dependency, that was directly related to the privileges to be transferred by the Inca ruler to his subjects. As we have seen, the line between those who were endowed

with privileges and those who were not passed right through the group of *yanacona*.

Instead of assuming greater or lesser dependency of groups or individuals, they are distinguished by the privileges they have received from the Inca ruler, who else they had to serve like local rulers or supernatural beings, by the respective work they had to perform and by the characteristics associated with the *yanacona* such as heritability, the possibilities to leave the status or not, i.e., the degree of their separation and uprooting from their original groups, and others.

This makes clear that the complexity and diversity of the dependent population, which was involved in multiple areas of the Inca labor system, implied a whole range of different types of dependency and of different mechanisms of direct and indirect coercion. During the colonial period, the Spanish Crown “saw great benefit in persisting with and resignification servitude practices that were later institutionalized as yanaconazgo,” as Paola Revilla Orías has argued. Thus, the “yanaconazgo institution was preserved and re-signified along colonial period,” colonial *yanacona* gradually lost their freedoms, like the liberty of movement, in that they found themselves more and more tied to the land for whose owners they worked, and became “almost slaves.”⁵⁵

NOTES

1. John Murra, *Formaciones económicas y políticas en el mundo andino* (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1975), 226.
2. Karoline Noack, “Mobilization as Dependency: the Case of *Mitimaes* of the Inka State as a Hotspot of Early Glocalization” in *Comparative and Global Framing of Enslavement*, eds. Youval Rotman, Ehud Toledano and Rachel Zelnick-Abramovitz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2023), forthcoming.
3. For a short summary, see Teresa Vergara, “Tahuantinsuyo: el mundo de los Incas,” in *Historia del Perú* (Barcelona: Lexus editores, 2000), 282.
4. Diego González Holguín, *Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo el Perú llamada lengua Qquichua, o del Inca* (Quito: Corporación Editora Nacional, 1993 [1608]), 363-64.
5. John Verano and Douglas H. Ubelaker, *Disease and Demography in the Americas* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1992), 16.
6. Murra, *Formaciones económicas y políticas en el mundo andino*, 59-115.
7. González Holguín, *Vocabulario de la lengua general de todo el Perú llamada lengua Qquichua, o del Inca*, vol. 3: bk. 1, 286; bk. 2, 450, 512; Ludovico Bertonio, *Vocabulario de la lengua Aymara. [Juli (Provincia de Chucuito)]* (Cochabamba: CERES/IFEA/MUSEF [1612] 1984), vol. 2, 242, 316, 328, and vol. 1, 122, 223.
8. Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, pt. 1, ch. 20, 140; pt. 1, ch. 21, 150, pt. 1, ch. 48, 234; pt. 2, ch. 1, 244; María Rostworowski, *History of the Inca Realm*, translated by Harry B. Iceland (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 176-77.
9. Hernando de Santillán, “Relación del origen, descendencia, política y gobierno de los Incas,” in *Crónicas peruanas de interés indígena*, ed. Francisco de Esteve Barba (Madrid: Ediciones Atlas, 1968 [1563]), núm. 36, 114.

10. Terence D'Altroy, "Inca Political Organization, Economic Institutions, and Infrastructure," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Incas*, ed. Sonia Alconini and R. Alan Covey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 218–19. See also Inge Schjellerup, "Inca Transformations of the Chachapoya Region," in *The Oxford Handbook of the Incas*, ed. Sonia Alconini and R. Alan Covey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 435–51.
11. Probanza de Martin and Francisco de Ampuero, in: Informacion hecha en cumplimiento de una cedula se su magestad en su rreal audiencia de la Ciudad de los Reyes a pedimiento de Francisco de Ampuero vezino della e de Martin de Anpuero y Francisco de Ampuero sus hijos (Archivo General de Indias: Lima, 1572), 38v.
12. D'Altroy, "Inca Political Organization, Economic Institutions, and Infrastructure," 218–19; Carolyn Dean, *Inka Bodies and the Body of Christ: Corpus Christi in Colonial Cusco, Peru* (Durham, NC; London: Duke University Press, 1999), 186–92.
13. Informaciones hechas por orden de don Francisco Toledo [1570–72], in *Don Francisco de Toledo. Supremo organizador del Perú. Su vida, sus obras (1515–1582)*, 2. *Sus informaciones sobre los Incas (1570–1572)*, ed. Roberto Levillier (Buenos Aires: Espasa-Calpe, 1940), 55–57.
14. Garcilaso de la Vega, *Comentarios Reales de los Incas* (México: Fondo de Cultura Económica, [1609] 1995), bk. 9, ch. 7, 574.
15. Santillán, "Relación del origen, descendencia, política y gobierno de los Incas," núm. 36, 114.
16. Cristóbal de Castro y Diego de Ortega Morejón, "Relaçion y declaraçion del modo que este valle de chincha," in *Quellen zur Kulturgeschichte des präkolumbischen Amerika*, ed. Hermann Trimborn (Stuttgart: Strecker und Schröder, [1558] 1936), 237–41; *Visita de Huánuco*, ed. John Murra (Huánuco: Universidad Nacional Hermilio Valdizán, [1562] 1967), 237–40.
17. Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, pt. 1, ch. 41, 217; ch. 43, 220; "Informaciones hechas por orden de don Francisco Toledo" [1570–72], 112–13, 142; Testimonio dado por Benito de la Peña [1552], in "Documentos sobre Yucay en el siglo XVI" ed. Horacio Villanueva Urteaga, *Revista del Archivo Histórico del Cuzco*, 13 (1970): 149–52.
18. Catherine Julien, "How Inca Decimal Administration Worked," in *Ethnohistory* 35 (Summer 1988): 257–79.
19. Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, pt. 1, ch. 21, 148–50; pt. 1, ch. 21, f. 54v.
20. Visita de Huánuco [1562], 108, 127, 146, 168. See also John Murra, "New Data on Retainer and Servile Populations in Tawantinsuyu," in *Actas y Memorias, XXXVI Congreso Internacional de Americanistas*, vol. 2 (Sevilla: Católica Española, 1966), 40–41; *Visita de los valles de Songo [1568–70]*, ed. John Murra (Madrid: ICI/Instituto de Estudios Fiscales, 1991); Testamento de Melchior Carorayco [1565], Estratificación social y el hatun curaca en el mundo andino, in *Ensayos de historia andina. Elites, etnias, recursos*, ed. María Rostworowski (Lima: Instituto de Estudios Peruanos, 1989), 239; Pleitos por los cacicazgos de Torata y Moquegua [1590–94], in *La visita de Juan Gutiérrez Flores a Colesuyo y Pleitos por los cacicazgos de Torata y Moquegua*, ed. Teresa Cañedo-Argüelles (Lima: PUCP, 2005), 25–47, 148.

21. “El Memorial de los Mallku y principales de la provincia de los Charcas,” in *Qaraqara-Charka — Mallku, Inca y Rey en la provincia de Charcas (siglos XV–XVII): Historia antropológica de una confederación aimara*, ed. Tristan Platt, Thérèse Bouysson-Cassagne and Olivia Harris (La Paz: IFEA, 2006), 834–36.
22. *Visita hecha a la provincia de Chucuito*, ed. Waldemar Espinoza Soriano (Lima: Casa de la Cultura del Perú, [1567] 1964), 111. See also Murra, “New Data on Retainer and Servile Populations in Tawantinsuyu,” 37–39.
23. “Visita de los repartimientos de Ichoc y de Allauca Guaraz...” [1558], in *Huaraz: Poder, sociedad y economía en los siglos XV y XVI. Reflexiones en torno a las visitas de 1558, 1594 y 1712*, ed. Waldemar Espinoza Soriano (Lima: UNMSM, 1987), 113.
24. “Pleitos por los cacicazgos de Torata y Moquegua” [1590–94], 25–47, 148; Testamento de Gonçalo Taulichusco, ed. Guillermo Lohmann Villena, *Revista del Archivo General de la Nación*, 7 (Lima, [1562] 1984), 270–71; Testamento de doña Francisca Sina Sigchi, in *Sancho Hacho. Un cacique mayor del siglo XVI*, ed. Udo Oberem (Quito: CEDECO / Abya-Yala, [1580] 1993), 137; Visita de Huánuco [1562], 196–201; see Murra, “New Data on Retainer and Servile Populations in Tawantinsuyu,” 41.
25. See for example Autos seguidos por el capitán don Martín García de Loyola y la coya doña Beatriz... [1574] 2008), in *Imperial Transformations in Sixteenth-Century Yucay, Peru*, ed. Alan Covey and Donato Amado González (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press), 78; and “Informaciones hechas por orden de don Francisco Toledo”.
26. Kylie Quave, “Royal Estates and Imperial Centers in the Cuzco Region,” in *The Oxford Handbook of the Incas*, ed. Sonia Alconini and Alan Covey (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 102–104.
27. Lucy Salazar, “Machu Picchu. Mysterious Royal Estate in the Cloud Forest,” in *Machu Picchu. Unveiling the Mystery of the Incas Burger*, ed. Richard Burger and Lucy Salazar (New Haven: Yale University, 2004); and Lucy Salazar and Richard Burger “Lifestyles of the Rich and the Famous: Luxury and Daily Life in the Households of Machu Picchu’s Elite,” in *Palaces of the Ancient New World*, ed. Susan T. Evans and Joanne Pillsbury (Washington: Dumbarton Oaks Research Library and Collection, 2009), quoted in Quave “Royal Estates and Imperial Centers in the Cuzco Region,” 108–109.
28. Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, pt. 1, ch. 43, 220; for *yana* as rulers of other *yanacona* see “Informaciones hechas por orden de don Francisco de Toledo,” 112–18; for adjacent groups overseeing the *yanacona* see Probanza de Sancho Usca Paucar y Alonso Auca Poma [1569], in “¿Incas de privilegio? La probanza de Sancho Usca Paucar y Alonso Auca Poma, caciques principales de Maras y Mullaca (4–12 de mayo de 1569),” ed. Laurent Segaline, *Revista Andina* 55 ([1569] 2017): 47.
29. Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, pt. 1, ch. 43, 220; Autos seguidos por el capitán don Martín García de Loyola y la coya doña Beatriz...,” 117, 206–96 y “Testimonio dado por Benito de la Peña” [1552].
30. Cabello Valboa, *Miscelánea Antártica*, bk. 3, ch. 31, 529. See also Sarmiento de Gamboa, “Segunda parte de la Historia general llamada Indica... [1572], in *Geschichte des Inkareiches*, ed. Richard Pietschmann (Berlin: n.p. 1906) ch. 66, 123; Martín de Murúa, *Historia general del Perú*, ed. Manuel Ballesteros (Madrid: Historia, [1613] 1987), bk. 1, ch. 57, 202.

31. “Autos seguidos por el capitán don Martín García de Loyola y la coya doña Beatriz...,” 78; *Informaciones hechas por orden de don Francisco de Toledo*, 108–18, 125–33.
32. Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, pt. 1, ch. 11, 89, 91; ch. 45, 226. See also Castro/Ortega Morejón, “Relación y declaración del modo que este valle de chincha...,” 240–41; John Rowe, “Inca Policies and Institutions Relating to the Cultural Unification of the Empire,” in *The Inca and Aztec states The Inca and Aztec states 1400–1800*, ed. George A. Collier, Renato I. Rosaldo and John D. Wirth (New York: Academic Press, 1982), 101; Pedro Cieza de León [1548–54], *El señorío de los Incas*, ed. Manuel Ballesteros (Madrid: Historia 16, 1985) ch. 28, 101–102; Titu Cusi Yupanqui, “Ynstrucción ... para el muy ilustre señor el licenciado Lope García de Castro,” in *Titu Cusi Yupanqui, History of how the Spaniards arrived in Peru*, ed. Catherine J. Julien (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, [1570] 2006), 128–31; Cristóbal de Albornoz, “Instrucción para descubrir todas las guacas del Piru y sus camayos y haciendas, in Pierre Duviols “Albornoz y el espacio ritual andino prehispánico,” *Revista Andina* 2, no. 1, [1583–84] 1984: 198; Marco Curatola Petrocchi, “La función de los oráculos en el Imperio Inca,” in *Adivinación y oráculos en el mundo andino antiguo*, ed. Marco Curatola Petrocchi and Mariusz S. Ziółkowski (Lima: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos/Pontificia Universidad Católica del Perú, 2008).
33. Di Hu and Kylie E. Quave, “Prosperity and Prestige: Archaeological Realities of Unfree Laborers under Inka Imperialism,” *Journal of Anthropological Archaeology* 59, no. 2 (September 2020): 10.1016/j.jaa.2020.101201; Ian Farrington, *Cusco: Urbanism and Archaeology in the Inka World* (University Press of Florida: 2013), 234–49.
34. Murra, *Formaciones económicas y políticas en el mundo andino*, 229.
35. Noel Lenski, “Framing the Question: What Is a Slave Society?,” in *What Is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, ed. Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 49–53.
36. Fernando Santos-Granero, “Slavery as Structure, Process, or Lived Experience, or Why Slave Societies Existed in Precontact Tropical America,” in *What Is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, ed. Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 201–02, 208–15; Christina Snyder “Native American Slavery in Global Context,” in *What Is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, ed. Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 180–82.
37. Castro/Ortega Morejón, “Relación y declaración del modo que este valle de chincha... [1558],” 240; José Toribio Medina, “Probanza sobre la forma y orden que los Ingas tenían en el juzgar [1582],” in *La imprenta en Lima (1584–1824)*, 1 (Santiago de Chile: n.p. 1904), 191.
38. Noel Lenski, “Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology,” in *What Is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, ed. Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018)2018), 139; Catherine M. Cameron, “The Nature of Slavery in Small-Scale Societies,” in *What Is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, ed. Noel

- Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 162–63.
39. “Autos seguidos por el capitan don Martin Garcia de Loyola y la coya doña Beatriz...”; Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas*, pt. 2, ch. 9, 267–68.
 40. Información sobre las chacras... que cultivaban los mitimaes ... en la provincia de Abancay, in “Colonias de mitmas múltiples en el valle de Abancay. Siglos XV y XVI. Una información inédita de 1575 para la etnohistoria andina,” ed. Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, *Revista del Museo Nacional*, 39 [1575] 1973), 278; “Informaciones hechas por orden de don Francisco de Toledo,” 78, 113, 115, 152; Pleito de don Pedro Ocxaguaman [1562–64], in *La crónica de Ocxaguaman*, ed. Jorge Zvallos Quiñones (Trujillo: Fundación Alfredo Pinillos Goicochea, 1994), 61; Primera información hecha por don Juan Colque Guarache, in “*El reino aymara de quillaca-asanague, siglos XV y XVI*,” ed. Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, *Revista del Museo Nacional* 45 ([1575] 1981), 241–42.
 41. Memoriales... de Leimebamba y Cochabamba, in “Los señoríos étnicos de Chachapoyas y la alianza hispano-chacha, siglos XV–XVI,” ed. Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, *Revista Histórica*, 30 ([1572–74] 1967): 294.
 42. Norman Yoffee, “Introducing the Conference: There Are No Innocent Terms,” in *The evolution of Fragility: Setting the Terms*, ed. Norman Yoffee (Cambridge, UK: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, 2019), 1–8; Noack, “Mobilization as Dependency,” forthcoming.
 43. Prouança de don Gonçalo [1555], in Dos probanzas de Don Gonzalo, Curaca de Lima (1555–1559), ed. María Rostworowski, *Revista Histórica*, 33, 1981–82, 115, 120; Tierras y chacaras de coca del valle de Quivi [1558–1570], in *Conflicts over Coca Fields in XVIth-Century Peru*, ed. María Rostworowski (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, 1988), 105; Rowe, “Inca Policies and Institutions Relating to the Cultural Unification of the Empire,” 100–02; Rostworowski, *History of the Inca Realm*, 148–150.
 44. Alan Covey and Kylie Quave, “The Economic Transformation of the Inca Heartland (Cuzco, Peru) in the Late Sixteenth Century,” in *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 59, no. 2 (2017): 277–309.
 45. “Informaciones hechas por orden de don Francisco de Toledo,” 108; Betanzos, *Suma y Narración de los Incas.*, pt. 1, ch. 18, 126–31; See also Rowe, “Inca Policies and Institutions Relating to the Cultural Unification of the Empire,” 98.
 46. Visita de Huánuco [1562], 108, 127, 146, 168. See also Murra, “New Data on Retainer and Servile Populations in Tawantinsuyu,” 40–41; Visita de los valles de Songo [1568–70]; “Testamento de Melchior Carorayco” [1565] 239; “Pleitos por los cacicazgos de Torata y Moquegua” [1590–94], 25–47, 148.
 47. “Testamento de doña Francisca Sina Sigchi” [1580], 137.
 48. El Memorial de Charcas [1582], 833–34 y “Probanza de don Fernando Ayavire Cuyasara” [1583–84], 885, in *Qaraqara-Charka. Mallku, Inca y Rey en la provincia de Charcas (siglos XV–XVII)*, ed. Tristan Platt, Thérèse Bouysson-Cassagne and Olivia Harris (La Paz: Instituto Francés de Estudios Andinos, 2006); Visita ... del valle de los Chilllos [1551–59], in *Visita y numeración de los pueblos del valle de los Chilllos 1551–1559*, ed. Cristóbal Landázuri (Quito: Abya-Yala /Marka 1990); and Visita de los valles de Songo [1568–70].

49. Visita ... del valle de los Chilllos [1551–59]. See also Frank Salomon, *Native Lords of Quito in the Age of the Incas* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1986), 127–29 and Murra, “New Data on Retainer and Servile Populations in Tawantinsuyu,” 39–40.
50. Información sobre las tierras del inca ... en ... Pinagua [1571], in *El habitat de la etnia Pinagua, siglos XV y XVI* ed. Waldemar Espinoza Soriano, *Revista del Museo Nacional* 40 (1974): 201–203, 206–207.
51. “Visita de los repartimientos de Ichoc y de Allauca Guaraz...” [1558], 113.
52. Rowe, “Inca Policies and Institutions Relating to the Cultural Unification of the Empire,” 100; Quave, “Royal Estates and Imperial Centers in the Cuzco Region,” 114; D’Altroy, “Inca Political Organization, Economic Institutions, and Infrastructure,” 218–19.
53. Paola Revilla Orías, *Entangled Coercion: African and Indigenous Labour in Charcas (16th–17th Century)* (München: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021), 119.
54. Rowe, “Inca Policies and Institutions Relating to the Cultural Unification of the Empire,” 96–97.
55. Revilla Orías, *Entangled Coercion*, 28 (fn. 86), 120.

FURTHER READINGS

- Alconini, Sonia and R. Alan Covey. *The Oxford Handbook of the Incas*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2018.
- D’Altroy, Terence N. *The Incas*. Malden, Massachusetts: Wiley/Blackwell, 2015.
- Dillehay, Tom D., and Steven A. Wernke. “Fragility of Vulnerable Social Institutions in Andean States,” in *The Evolution of Fragility: Setting the Terms*, edited by Norman Yoffee, 9–23. Cambridge, UK: McDonald Institute for Archaeological Research, University of Cambridge, 2019.
- Guaman Poma de Ayala, Felipe. *Nueva corónica y buen gobierno*, edited by John V. Murra, Rolena Adorno and Jorge L. Urioste. Madrid: n.p. [1615] 1987.
- The Guaman Poma Website <http://www5.kb.dk/permalink/2006/poma/info/en/frontpage.htm>
- Julien, Catherine. *Reading Inca History*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000.
- Murra, John V. *The Economic Organization of the Inka State*. Greenwich, Conn.: Jai Press, 1980.
- Niles, Susan A. *The shape of Inca History: Narrative and Architecture in an Andean Empire*. Iowa City: Univ. of Iowa Press, 1999.
- Pease G. Y., Franklin. *The Incas*, translated by Simeon Tegel. Lima: PUCP, 2011.
- Rostworowski de Diez Canseco, María. *History of the Inca Realm*, translated by Harry B. Iceland. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999.
- Rowe, John H. “Inca Policies and Institutions Relating to the Cultural Unification of the Empire,” in *The Inca and Aztec states, 1400–1800: Anthropology and History*, edited by George A. Collier, Renato I. Rosaldo, and John D. Wirth, 93–118. New York/London: Academic Press, 1982.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Injection: A Gender Perspective on Domestic Slavery

Ruth Mazo Karras 

This “injection” comes from the point of view of a historian of slavery turned historian of sexuality. The history of sexuality sits very uneasily with the history of enslavement, however, because of the problem of agency and its relationship to consent. Historians must not erase the personhood of the enslaved and their ability to make choices; but the realm within which they make those choices is so constrained that recognizing their agency can be akin to blaming the victim or implying consent when it cannot really be given. Can we really say that every sexual encounter between an enslaved person and their enslaver is an act of rape, if the enslaved person has been the one to initiate it in the hope that it could better their life in some way? Indeed, we can, by analogy with the laws about rape of minors or others who are incapable of consent. Even if a 16-year-old initiates a sexual encounter or agrees to one, sex with them is legally rape because their consent is not valid. Of course, sex with one’s own human property was not legally considered rape under Western and some other legal systems. The enslaved person had no ability to withhold consent from their enslaver, in the same way a wife until quite recently (1990 in Ireland; 1991 in England; and 1993 in some US states) could not be raped by her husband because her marital vows constituted permanent consent. But although sex between enslaved people and their enslavers would not be considered rape under the law of the time, it is entirely reasonable for us to call it

R. M. Karras (✉)
Trinity College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland
e-mail: ruth.karras@tcd.ie

that. Even if the encounter was not in proximate terms violent or coercive, even if the enslaved person participated enthusiastically, the coerciveness of the entire situation was such that they cannot be considered independent actors.

This essay focuses largely on the actions and choices of enslavers and treats enslaved people as victims. This does not deny their humanity, their choices, or their desires, but they were nevertheless victims of a violent system in which they had no redress. There are three factors in the sexual exploitation of the enslaved by their enslavers, although they overlap a good deal. One is, simply, desire. If enslavers wished to have a variety of sexual partners—or even one new sexual partner—systems of enslavement allowed them to choose from among their enslaved people, or to purchase additional enslaved people, with whom to have sex. Already the enslaver's property, they did not need to be courted, or paid, or endowed. They were practically and legally available, and if there were no social sanctions there was no reason for the enslaver not to engage in sex with them if he so desired (usually he, because sex between free women and enslaved men was a serious offense in most cultures).

But, of course, there is no such thing as simple desire without issues of power being involved, and there is a significant overlap between the factors of desire and domination. The assumption that whenever one feels the wish to have a sexual encounter, that encounter is immediately available is a result of a huge power differential and unquestioned privilege. For men of the enslaving class to assert that privilege is an act of domination over people of other groups, notably people of whatever ethnic or racial group or social class was being enslaved in that particular culture. It may not feel that way to the one who holds the power, but privilege is not any less the case for being unexamined.

Sex as domination is both the result of unexamined power and privilege that manifests in an individual, and the result as well as the cause of larger group processes. Sex with one's enslaved women or men could carry with it a message of dominance over other men: men who are raped; enslaved men who are less masculine because they are unable to protect the victims; men whose wives, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers have been captured and raped (even if the men in question are dead, their posthumous reputation may still be dominated); men within the enslaving society who are not wealthy or powerful enough to have slaves or perhaps even any sex partners, and are dominated by the assertion of a monopoly. These messages need not always be deliberate, but sometimes they are. And, of course, for a man to have multiple enslaved sex partners can also be an assertion of domination over other women as well, that is, his free sex partners, whether wives or concubines, whom he may be trying to make jealous or more eager to retain his favor.

There is a third factor in men's having sexual relations with their enslaved women, which may not be obvious to those of us living in a culture where the fathering of children out of wedlock is often secret or shameful and where birth control is commonly practiced: precisely the wish to beget children. Even when law or religious teaching restricted the inheritance rights or the social

standing of children born out of wedlock, the begetting of such children could still be a proof of masculinity. Children born of an enslaved woman and her enslaver could often be expected to be loyal and trusted supporters even if they could never take the full role of a child born in wedlock of a free woman. In many premodern societies such children were either automatically considered free or could be freed. Such a child, if recognized, might have full inheritance rights equivalent to those accruing to a child of formal marriage. Enslaved women were thus often valued for their reproductive labor.

For medieval Christian Europe the status of a child born of an enslaved woman impregnated by her enslaver was legally problematic. First, relationships between men and women other than within marriage were condemned by the church, regardless of whether there was a status differential between the parties. In practice, the definition of what relationships constituted marriage took a long time to work out. Historians have placed the triumph of church control over marriage, and the consequent definition of those born outside of it as illegitimate, anywhere from the ninth to the thirteenth century. Even when marriage came to be considered as within ecclesiastical jurisdiction, what constituted it was not necessarily a blessing by a priest (not required until the sixteenth century). Marriages were meant to be conducted publicly but were not invalid if they were not. By the twelfth century it was generally agreed that marriage was constituted by the consent of the parties, and that of their families was not required. Secular law might judge the validity of a marriage by the payment of a dowry or other marital assigns, which did require the consent of the family from which the money came. More importantly, however, whether a particular union was considered a marriage by the community, and sometimes by various legal systems, could depend on the relative status of the parties.

Pope Leo, I had written to Rusticus of Narbonne in 458–59 that “Marriage is a legitimate agreement between freeborn and equal persons,” and suggested that someone who wished to marry his daughter to a man who had an enslaved concubine need not worry that the man could be considered already married.¹ Leo’s opinion was based on Roman law, which did not consider any union involving an enslaved person as a marriage. The enslaved could have only *contubernium* and not *coniugium* which only existed between Roman citizens. By the twelfth century the church would come to reject Roman law on this point.² The jurist Gratian held that a marriage between an enslaved and a free person or between two enslaved people was valid as long as there was no fraud and the status of the enslaved party was known to the free party.³ But the older attitude that a marriage could not be valid one unless the parties were of approximately equal status still persisted, particularly in areas whose legal systems were based on Roman law. Bartolo of Sassoferrato (1314–1357), one of the great legal authorities of the fourteenth century, enunciated a general principle that any son of an unmarried man who is acknowledged by his father should be considered legitimate unless the father calls the child “natural.” Children born to servants, however, were exceptions to this rule: “if some honorable and noble citizen should have children by some servant who served

him or another, then by those words he cannot say he is legitimate because marriage cannot happen with that woman, at least honorably.”⁴

The Roman law principle for the children of the enslaved had been *partus sequitur ventrem*, or “the child follows the womb”: because there was no marriage of the enslaved, children born to them were by definition illegitimate, and illegitimate children did not take the status of their father. As an enslaved woman was legally property, her children were considered the property of her enslaver as well. This was the case whether or not her enslaver was the father; fatherhood brought with it no rights here, as indeed motherhood did not. The principle that the children of an enslaved woman and a free man were themselves enslaved did not hold throughout medieval Europe, however. In Scandinavia, for example, the laws held that children of the enslaved followed the status of the higher-status parent. And even in places where Roman law was generally followed, such as medieval Italy, by the later Middle Ages both legal commentators and judges were discussing whether a man could make legitimate the child he had with an enslaved woman, without referring to any preceding manumission. In other words, they were assuming that the acknowledged child of a free man was already free. Sally McKee has argued that this change originated in Venetian Crete, where enslavement was quite common, and was then imported to the Italian metropole where it was less so.⁵ Hannah Barker argues that by the later Middle Ages in many areas of Mediterranean Europe, enslaved women were valued precisely for their ability to produce offspring. Children, especially sons, born of an enslaved woman and her owner before his marriage could be his heirs if he did not eventually have children from a marriage.⁶

Late medieval Italy gives us examples of elite men’s children with enslaved women being treated as part of their marital family. Gregorio Dati (1362–1435), a Florentine merchant who left a famous *ricordanza* (journal/account book), had a son with his enslaved woman Margherita (a “Tartar”, possibly a Russian) in between his first and second marriages.⁷ The child, Tomasso (Maso), was born in Valencia where Dati spent 1391–92 on business. He sent Maso back to Florence at the age of two or three months. Dati subsequently had eight children with his second wife, eleven with his third, and six with his fourth. He records that Maso was still alive in 1422, calling him his eldest child, clearly acknowledged and considered part of the family.⁸ What he does not tell us, however, is anything further about Margherita. He had purchased her while in Valencia, but does not say whether he brought her back to Italy. Although we may guess that Maso was to be wet-nursed in Florence and that his mother may never have seen him again, it is possible that she went with him, and that she was simply not significant enough to be mentioned. This would not be out of character for this particular text, which is largely an account of Dati’s business; he mentions his wives’ dowries, the children they bear, and their deaths, but is not otherwise concerned with household matters.

What can we guess, then, about Margherita? Dati was single when he went to Valencia and may well have purchased Margherita as a domestic servant, but

sexual service was often a part of this. Sexual involvement with her would be seen as only a minor offense, if an offense at all: she was his property, and he was not married at the time. Bringing her back to Florence with him could be seen as a risk, however, in that he was seeking to marry well to secure a large dowry to invest in his business. If Margherita did come to Italy with her son, she likely was no longer enslaved in Dati's household.⁹ The fact that he had a subsequent 25 legitimate children (not counting stillbirths and miscarriages) but does not mention any further illegitimate ones makes it likely that he remained either faithful to his wives, or careful.

We do not know how Dati's wives felt about Margherita, if she did come to Florence. Mark Meyerson gives the example of a baptized former Muslim named Maria who was enslaved in a household in Alicante but sent to Valencia in 1503 to be sold because the wife of her enslaver was jealous.¹⁰ But a child born prior to the marriage was less likely to threaten a wife. Francesco Datini, a merchant in Prato, had a daughter Ginevra with an enslaved woman; his wife Margherita, who had no children, raised the girl and wrote that she considered her own daughter.¹¹ In order to be raised in her father's household she had to be taken from her mother Lucia, who was freed and married to another servant of the family. It is possible that some enslaved women who had their children taken from them were subsequently sold as wet nurses, a task in high demand which was often performed by enslaved women.¹²

On the individual level, men in the European Christian Mediterranean who purchased enslaved women particularly (as opposed to purchasing both men and women for large-scale agricultural enterprises) did so to fulfill their own needs, whether for sex, domestic help, reproduction, or some combination. But on a societal level it was also about having a class of people who could be dominated, and the conspicuous "consumption" of a luxury "good." Sally McKee has estimated that 80% of enslaved people sold in the Christian Mediterranean between 1360 and 1499 were women; a sharp rise in prices cannot have been justified by the economic cost of domestic service and must, she argues, be due to men's purchasing of enslaved women for sexual services.¹³ A man might feel the responsibility to care for his children with enslaved women, might even welcome and love these children, but the availability of the enslaved facilitated the access of the elite men to these women without creating a responsibility to care for them.

We turn now to a different medieval culture. For the Jewish merchants whose business and family letters have come down to us from the Cairo Geniza, particularly from the tenth through thirteenth centuries, the possibility of jealousy between enslaved women and wives was made much more explicit. This Jewish community, like the Muslim majority community within which it was embedded, permitted men to have more than one wife, but the *ketubah* or marriage contract could be drawn up in such a way as to severely limit this possibility (it could not absolutely prevent the man from doing so but it could provide serious financial penalties if he did). Marriage contracts could also provide that the man could not force his wife to move abroad, or

commit him to living with her family. The inclusion of provisions like this in marriage contracts, of course, varied and reflected the relative strength of the two sides in the marriage negotiation. But one of the most common clauses included in marriage contracts was that the husband would not purchase any enslaved woman of whom his wife disapproved. Sex by an enslaver with his enslaved woman was forbidden in Jewish law (unlike in Muslim law) but evidently was enough of a concern in practice that this type of stipulation was commonly found in marriage contracts along with the undertaking not to marry a second wife or a concubine. Typically, too, contracts stipulated that any enslaved woman had to be sold if the wife demanded it.¹⁴ This type of clause begins to appear in large numbers in the twelfth century; S.D. Goitein suggests that it reflects local custom that prohibited men from forming such secondary unions.

The Cairo Jewish community seems to have been stricter than Christian communities about unmarried men enslaving women for sexual purposes, and several cases ruled against men who placed their enslaved women under the control of their sisters to preserve appearances.¹⁵ The stipulations in marriage contracts that provided wives with a veto over enslaved women in the household were not restricted to sexual jealousy alone. Enslaved women generally did domestic work (as opposed to enslaved men who generally worked in the family enterprise), and would have been under the supervision of the woman of the household; thus, she had a major stake in making sure that they were capable workers. What men did while they were on long trips, however (and like Gregorio Dati, many of the men in the Cairo Jewish community did travel for business) would not be under their wives' eyes. Jewish merchants of Cairo were involved in the Indian Ocean slave trade along with Muslim traders, and had ample opportunity for sexual exploitation of those they sold.¹⁶

Islamic law provided that an enslaver's child with his own enslaved woman, assuming that he recognized the child as his, was free and legitimate; the mother could not be sold and was freed upon the father's death. As Hannah Barker puts it, "[i]n an Islamic context, therefore, sex with slave women produced heirs, while in a Christian context, it produced property." Barker suggests that the fact that by the late Middle Ages in some Christian jurisdictions these unions did not produce property but rather free children who could be legitimated and brought into the inheritance at the father's discretion, may have been due to the influence of Islamic law.¹⁷ Within the Cairo Jewish community, even though it was located in a Muslim realm, these unions produced people who were treated as property. Girls born to enslaved women could be raised in the household and trained in domestic duties, and boys trained to work in the family business or sold for use as military slaves. The fact that enslaved women could not produce children who would be the heirs of their enslavers did not mean that they were not valued for their reproductive abilities, both in producing children and in serving as wet nurses.

For Muslims, there was nothing legally wrong with a man having sex with his enslaved woman, and indeed if an enslaved woman were raped by someone

else, any compensation would be owed to her “owner.”¹⁸ Michael Gomez has suggested that an entire political system—that of the Songhay Empire of West Africa—was based on slavery and in particular the enslavement of women who bore children to the ruler; these women were an integral part of the court and actively supported their sons in the struggle over the throne.¹⁹

Because sexual contact with enslaved women was licit in Muslim law, opportunities thus arose for these women within the household or court. The same thing might be true of eunuchs. But, like the eunuch, the enslaved woman who bore her enslaver’s children had to give up something in order to gain power and influence. The material conditions of enslavement could differ from place to place, and material conditions might not have been any worse than for many free people, and in some instances better if an enslaved woman became a favorite of a monarch. But good treatment in material terms, and especially the acquisition of political influence, were only possible because slavery was normalized and accepted. Margherita may have been separated from her son by Gregorio Dati, whereas in a Muslim society she might not have been; but the society that would not separate her from her child did not do so because such exploitation of enslaved women was routine. And whereas, in societies where married men’s children with slaves were considered heirs, this could improve the status of enslaved women while at the same time harming that of free women in relation to their husbands.

It is the Christian set of practices that should be treated as the historical anomaly, not the Muslim. Some overlapping of different categories within a polygynous system is very common in global history: even when a man is limited to only one official wife, or several, who are married with a particular ritual, it is common for him to have sexual access to enslaved women in his household, and for the line between an enslaved and a non-enslaved concubine to be blurred. For example, in the Tang Code dating from seventh-century China, the law acknowledged both a man’s right to sexual access to the servile women in his household, and the importance of the production of descendants in the Chinese family system, by adding this critical qualification to the statement that slaves and bondmaids were of “base” status and could not be wives or concubines: “If the bondmaid has a child and has already been manumitted, it is permitted for her to be a concubine.”²⁰ She could even become a concubine if she had a child but was not manumitted (or vice versa). In all these cases, it was entirely up to the man. Her status was in no way guaranteed. This is, of course analogous to the Islamic law in which a woman who bore a child to her enslaver became free upon his death, but only if he had acknowledged that child.

The distinction between household women of low status and concubines eroded further in the Song period as more of the former were indentured servants rather than enslaved. In practical terms, whether someone was sold on a contract for a period of years or as a permanent possession may not have mattered very much to her treatment.²¹ The senior (non-concubine) wife was legally considered the mother of all her husband’s children, regardless of

who their birth mother was. Whether they were considered heirs depended on the situation of the family and how many children the senior wife had, but courts supported their entitlement to a share.²² Under the Yuan dynasty the government attempted to freeze the fluidity that had previously existed between enslaved women, indentured servants, and women of higher status, to treat slavery as a permanent and degraded category, and to forbid the indenture of other people. In practice, however, the fluidity continued as it was not uncommon for people of high status to become enslaved.²³

Christian Europe, as mentioned, developed by the later Middle Ages a somewhat analogous system in which the children of enslaved women with their enslavers could be considered free and where it was not uncommon to free the mothers as well. The issue of whether the child could inherit from the father is more complicated. This distinction between free and unfree in this context is a legal question and not one of religious outlook. The fact that Christian Europe for the most part did not legally recognize the relationships between enslavers and enslaved women does not mean that they did not force enslaved women into sexual relationships. These statuses existed, but without legal protection. Rather, the lack of legal recognition meant that everything depended even more on the enslaver; as in other systems he could grant or withhold status, but in the legal systems of Christian western Europe that status was more likely to go unrecognized by his heirs or the community, unless he took both legal and extra-legal steps to remedy it.

The fact that it was the enslaver had the upper hand legally and socially, in Christian Europe and elsewhere, did not mean that sex could not be an avenue of upward mobility for an enslaved woman, or that such women did not fight for their rights and those of their children through the legal system (and undoubtedly in other ways as well, but it is the records of the legal system that have survived). But even if these women did make choices—if what Steven Epstein refers to as “the motives behind the behavior of becoming pregnant” is something we can really consider²⁴—the system constrained their choices within a context of rape and exploitation. These were not simply status-imbalanced unions but coerced ones, coerced on a systemic if not an individual level.

NOTES

1. “Ad Rusticem Narbonensum episcopum,” *Sancti Leonis magni Romani pontificis epistolae*, 167: 4, *PL* 54:1204a, quoted at greater length and discussed in Ruth Mazo Karras, *Unmarriages: Women, Men, and Sexual Unions in the Middle Ages* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 31–32.
2. See Rachel Stone, “Overlooked Husbands: The Paradox of Unfree Marriage in the Carolingian World,” *Gender and History* 33, no. 2 (2021): 408–26 for how this developed.
3. Anders Winroth, “Neither Slave nor Free: Theology and Law in Gratian’s Thoughts on the Definition of Marriage and Unfree Persons,” in *Medieval Law and the Origins of the Western Legal Tradition: A Tribute to Kenneth*

- Pennington*, ed. Wolfgang P. Müller and Mary E. Sommar (Washington: Catholic University of America Press, 2006), 187–218.
4. Transl. in Thomas Kuehn, *Illegitimacy in Renaissance Florence* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2002), 254. Further examples and discussion in *Unmarriages*, 97.
 5. Sally McKee, “Inherited Status and Slavery in Late Medieval Italy and Venetian Crete,” *Past & Present* 182 (2004): 31–53.
 6. Hannah Barker, “The Risk of Birth: Life Insurance for Enslaved Pregnant Women in Fifteenth-Century Genoa,” *Journal of Global Slavery* (2021): 1–31, esp. 11–15.
 7. Dati’s *ricordanza* has been translated: *Two Memoirs of Renaissance Florence: The Diaries of Buonaccorso Pitti and Gregorio Dati*, trans. Julia Martines, ed. Gene Brucker (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1967), 107–41.
 8. *Ibid.*, 134.
 9. Cf a 1461 case cited in Debra Blumenthal, *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 175.
 10. Mark D. Meyerson, “Slavery and Solidarity: Mudejars and Foreign Muslim Captives in the Kingdom of Valencia,” *Medieval Encounters* 2 (1996): 286–343, here 302.
 11. Origo, “Domestic Enemy,” 344, 345.
 12. Rebecca Lynn Winer, “Conscripting the Breast: Lactation, Slavery and Salvation in the Realms of Aragon and Kingdom of Majorca, c. 1250–300,” *Journal of Medieval History* 34 (2008): 164–84.
 13. Sally McKee, “The Implications of Slave Women’s Sexual Service in Late Medieval Italy,” in *Unfreie Arbeit: Ökonomische und Kulturgeschichtliche Perspektiven*, ed. M. Erdem Kabadayi and Tobias Reichardt (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2007), 101–14, here 103.
 14. S.D. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, Vol. 3: The Family* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978), 147–48.
 15. Goitein, *A Mediterranean Society*, 24.
 16. Craig Perry, “Slavery and the Slave Trade in the Western Indian Ocean World,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 2: AD 500-AD 1420*, ed. Craig Perry, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 123–52.
 17. Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019), 62 and 82.
 18. Hina Azam, *Sexual Violation in Islamic Law: Substance, Evidence, and Procedure* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 131.
 19. Michael A. Gomez, *African Dominion: A New History of Empire in Early and Medieval West Africa* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018), 299–303.
 20. Beverly Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013), 60.
 21. Patricia Buckley Ebrey, *The Inner Quarters: Marriage and the Lives of Chinese Women in the Sung Period* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 217–34.
 22. Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult*, 246.
 23. Bossler, *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult*, 333.

24. Steven A. Epstein, *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001), 129.

FURTHER READINGS

- Bossier, Beverly. *Courtesans, Concubines, and the Cult of Female Fidelity*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013.
- Blumenthal, Debra. *Enemies and Familiars: Slavery and Mastery in Fifteenth-Century Valencia*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009.
- Epstein, Steven A. *Speaking of Slavery: Color, Ethnicity, and Human Bondage in Italy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.
- Goitein, S. D. *A Mediterranean Society: The Jewish Communities of the World as Portrayed in the Documents of the Cairo Geniza, Vol. 3: The Family*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1978.
- McKee, Sally. "Slavery," in *The Oxford Handbook of Women and Gender in Medieval Europe*, edited by Judith M. Bennett and Ruth Mazo Karras, 281–94. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Origo, Iris. "The Domestic Enemy: The Eastern Slaves in Tuscany in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries," *Speculum* 30, no. 3 (July 1955): 321–66.
- Stuard, Susan Mosher. "Ancillary Evidence for the Decline of Medieval Slavery," *Past & Present* 149 (November 1995): 3–28.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Early Modern Societies (1500–1800 C.E.)

PREFACE

The third part of this handbook examines slavery and slaving practices in the modern world, roughly from the sixteenth through the eighteenth centuries. In many world societies, this period constituted an era of continuation of local slaving practices and cultures from earlier periods. In many others, however, the early modern world was characterized by a substantial expansion of slavery and other forms of extreme dependency—both in scope and intensity—in no small part due to territorial expansion, increased regional and global interconnectedness, and the adoption of slavery and various systems of coerced labor in the production of valuable commodities.

The expansion and intensification of slavery and slave-trading networks are visible in a wide variety of settings, including relatively self-sustaining slave societies—such as in Chosŏn Korea, where internal enslavement intensified due to the expansion of elite landholdings and the application of new agricultural techniques, until roughly 30 percent of the population was enslaved. Large-scale expansion, however, is most clearly visible in the wider Mediterranean, Atlantic, and Indian Ocean worlds that connected Europe, Africa, the Americas, and Asia. The rise of the Ottoman Empire and the intensification of Mediterranean wars and trade routes, for example, led to increased slaving activities throughout the region, with corsair raids and captive-takers ensnaring millions of “infidels,” some of whom were ransomed, others put to work in galleys, others ending up in elite households, and still others—in the Ottoman Empire—utilized as “settlers” in newly acquired frontiers. Similarly, the territorial expansion of the Muscovy and Russian Empire into the south and east in this period led to increased enslavement and servitude in frontier regions, including for the production of agricultural market commodities.

European expansion in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds, however, constituted the most radical changes to the history of world slavery. The development of a racialized system of African slavery for the capitalist production of plantation commodities in the Americas was unique in its scope, intensity, and far-reaching consequences for communities across the Atlantic world. European—particularly Iberian, Dutch, British, and French—conquest of the Americas initially included the co-option and expansion of indigenous slaveries and the enslavement of Native Americans captured through warfare. As plantation agriculture—especially sugar and tobacco—took hold in the regions that stretched from the Chesapeake region of mainland North America through the Caribbean and into the northern zones of South America, however, Europeans shifted the massive importation and employment of African slave labor, tapping into a pre-existing African slave trade and expanding it dramatically (ultimately an estimated 12 to 14 million African slaves would be transported to the Americas). In so doing, they established economic models heavily dependent on slave labor for the production of global commodities; political and legal systems that regulated slavery and justified it in racial terms (expanding upon racial justifications made in the medieval period); and modern trade networks that intensely integrated Europe, Africa, and the Americas. The rise of Atlantic slavery also intensified slaving practices and warfare within Africa (especially West Africa), with far-reaching consequences for social and political relations in communities all along the coast and into the hinterlands.

Similar patterns occurred in the Indian Ocean world, where European expansion built upon trade networks previously controlled by Arab traders that connected East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, and South Asia. Here, too, Europeans tapped into and expanded pre-existing slave trades and a wide variety of systems of dependence and servility that had long connected East Africa and South Asia. In so doing, they also created new sources of slave labor, introduced new systems of slavery, and created new nodal hubs of slave trading throughout the entire region. Whereas Madagascar and the Horn of Africa had long been sources of slaves in the Western Indian Ocean, for example, and the Indonesian archipelago had long constituted a completely separate slave-trading network in the east, the arrival of European merchants in the sixteenth century led to the development of vast trading networks that integrated the entire Indian Ocean world. Enslaved people from the Cape Colony or from East Africa were now traded directly into the Eastern Indian Ocean, for example. Like their counterparts in the Atlantic, European empire builders in the Indian Ocean world utilized slave trading and slavery to consolidate power and establish plantation agriculture for global markets, with far-reaching consequences for local societies throughout the region, from East Africa through Asia. Also like their Atlantic counterparts, European empire builders in the Indian Ocean world increasingly institutionalized slavery, developing legal codes that justified slavery in racial terms, and economic models that linked slavery with capitalist profit-seeking enterprises.



Slavery in the Mediterranean

Giulia Bonazza

INTRODUCTION¹

Slavery in the early modern Mediterranean world from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century was characterized by a high number of slaves in circulation; the cultural and economic impact of the reciprocity of slave trade practices in coastal regions; and the centrality of the Mediterranean to other slave trading routes. The region witnessed enslavement due to war, privateering, piracy, and other slavery networks. Slaves from sub-Saharan Africa and the colonies passed through the Mediterranean en route to other parts of Europe. The practices of enslavement in Southern Europe and the Ottoman Empire with regard to war and privateering were similar, and the “slavery of reciprocity” was an important factor there as well. Slaves were brought to the Mediterranean world from other parts of Southern Europe and the Ottoman Empire along various routes. The majority of the Ottoman Empire’s slaves were from sub-Saharan Africa, Western Africa, and the Red Sea area. Slaves in Europe predominantly came from Northern Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and the colonial world.

From a quantitative perspective, Mediterranean slavery involved an estimated 7–9 million people, with the number of slaves in Europe during the period from 1500 to 1800 estimated at just over 2.5 million. Data on the slave trade from Africa to the Ottoman Empire suggest that approximately 16,000–18,000 men and women were transported annually during the nineteenth

G. Bonazza (✉)
Ca’ Foscari University, Venice, Italy
e-mail: giulia.bonazza@unive.it

century. However, historians still lack the sources to calculate the number of slaves in each country or empire within the Mediterranean sphere with appreciable precision.² Available figures for the slave trade across the Atlantic and with the colonial world are more exact: 12 million people were involved in the Atlantic trade, and around 10.7 million arrived in the Americas.³ While these numbers are much higher than those for the Mediterranean, recent studies of urban settings such as Lisbon in Portugal and Bursa in the Ottoman Empire indicate that the proportion of slaves to inhabitants was similar in the Mediterranean and some colonial cities. Individual countries in Europe and in the colonial world are likewise comparable: Estimates suggest that around 400,000 slaves arrived in Portugal between the end of the sixteenth century and 1761, the majority of them in Lisbon.⁴ A further estimation assumes 700,000–800,000 slaves in the entire Iberian Peninsula in the period from 1450 to 1750—with again around 400,000 of them in Portugal—as well as 360,000 slaves sent to Spanish colonies during the sixteenth and the first half of the seventeenth century.⁵ In Bursa, 7699 of 12,832 surveyed households had slaves between 1595 and 1603.⁶

The number of slaves in the Iberian Peninsula was greater than the number taken to the British colonies in North America at the time. Didier Lahon has shown how this significant cohort contributed to making slavery an omnipresent social phenomenon in early modern Portugal—one that touched all social classes directly or indirectly and influenced most economic, social, and cultural activities. For this reason, *ancien régime* Portugal is defined as a “slave society” as opposed to a “society with slaves,” as was the case elsewhere in Europe.⁷ In more general terms, the early modern Mediterranean world was long classified as being composed of “societies with slaves” rather than “slave societies,” but over the past twenty years the historiography has pinpointed several exceptions to this rule in both Southern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. Different systems of slavery can coexist in the same geographical area, and both “slave societies” and “societies with slaves” were present in the Mediterranean, just as they were in the colonial world. “Societies with slaves” are societies in which the institution of slavery is relatively peripheral to local economies and social status, like in New England and Canada. By contrast, the plantation system in the more southerly English plantation colonies such as Virginia and the Carolinas gave rise to “slave societies.” In the European context, Portugal can be defined as a “slave society,” while the same does not apply to the German states.⁸

The theory that slavery assumed a relatively mild form and was not practiced on a large scale in the Christian, Muslim, and Jewish societies surrounding the Mediterranean Sea has been disproved by new comparative research on other geographical spaces and other slave trading economies around the globe. This involves more detailed analysis of the living and working conditions of slaves in comparison to other coerced workers. In both the Mediterranean and the rest of Europe, the origin or point of departure of slaves was varied: There were “African-descended” slaves from North Africa, sub-Saharan Africa, and

the Atlantic colonies as well as other slaves from the Indian Ocean region. This is exemplified by the story of Emanuel Fernandez: in 1641, the dark-skinned man from the city of Goa in the East Indies worked as an enslaved porter in Venice before eventually regaining his freedom after being baptized and integrated into the Venetian community. The inquisition in Venice later investigated him for committing blasphemy against the Christian God while intoxicated.⁹

In general, there is a theoretical distinction between captives and slaves in the Mediterranean and European contexts. The term “captive” does not feature regularly in the taxonomy of early modern sources in every country, whereas the word “slave” is invariably among the standard repertoire. In theory, captivity was a temporary condition of slavery from which a person could be freed by intermediaries, redemption institutions, or relatives. The captive became a forced worker upon being enslaved, but only for a certain period. The usual duration of the captivity of Christian slaves in North Africa was around 5 years, with only 2 percent held for more than 20 years. There is no comparable data on the duration of captivity in Europe, however. Most of the historiography suggests that the majority of captives eventually integrated into European society.¹⁰ The ransom of captives was also a vital factor in the Mediterranean economy,¹¹ a “lucrative business” involving many economic stakeholders: redemption institutions, religious orders, private merchants, municipalities and states, consuls, and bankers.¹²

Unlike the captive, the slave was unfree for an indefinite period from a legal point of view. In reality, slaves could also sometimes be manumitted by their owner or the state. Furthermore, a captive could be sold as a slave rather than being released for ransom; the conditions of captivity and slavery were thus at least partly commutable. Black captives in the Mediterranean were less likely to be ransomed than Levantine slaves because they often did not have family, an institution, or a state interested in their release.¹³

Captivity in the Mediterranean existed in a form of reciprocity between Southern European countries and the Ottoman Empire and its satellite states, including the regencies of Tunis, Algiers, Tripolitania, and Egypt. There were Muslim captives in the European countries and Christian captives in North Africa and the Ottoman Empire—as well as captives of other confessions, some of them Jewish. The ransom of captives remained an important business in the Mediterranean region until the mid-nineteenth century. There were also slaves from the colonial world, who were mostly owned privately rather than by a state. Following the juridical abolition of slavery throughout Europe, North African slave markets traded slaves from sub-Saharan Africa to Europeans, for example missionaries or nobles, who continued to ransom or buy them. The analysis of Mediterranean slavery in this chapter will focus on Southern European practices, especially those in the Italian states, France, Portugal, Spain, and Austria. Comparisons with the Ottoman world regarding forms of enslavement, slave labor and coercion, and routes to freedom will also be made.

FORMS OF ENSLAVEMENT IN THE MEDITERRANEAN

One of the principal reasons for enslavement in the Mediterranean was war. During armed conflicts, taking captives was legal and opportunities to do so were plentiful. Even during times of peace between the European powers and the Ottoman Empire, the capture of women and men by way of privateering and piracy was a common phenomenon. Privateering went on until 1856, and slavery continued illegally around the Mediterranean until the end of the nineteenth century. While it was an everyday practice, selling slaves was actually unlawful in most of Europe well before the nineteenth century. The presence of slaves was nevertheless widely accepted even where it was controlled or prohibited by law. Slaves from all parts of the colonial world were illegally brought to Europe via the Mediterranean by merchants and captains, and their slave status persisted in Europe. Introducing slaves from the colonial world was outlawed in France and Portugal when their numbers became too high; for example, colonial slaves were admitted to France only until 1738. Before that time, owners could bring their slaves from the Antilles to the motherland for religious education or to teach them a profession. If a slave married in France, he or she would become free on French soil. In 1738, however, the growing black population in France prompted the abolishment of marriage for slaves, and in 1777 the monarch declared that slaves could not be manumitted or sold by their owners. Furthermore, slaves could now only remain in France for a maximum of 3 years. Their arrival had to be declared immediately and was subject to taxation. Abandoned slaves or maroons were arrested. The legislation passed in 1777 prohibited all blacks and “mulattoes” from entering France.¹⁴

Taxation upon entry of a slave into a territory also occurred in Istanbul, where the Sultan tried to control the activities of slave traders through the *pencik*.¹⁵ The introduction of new slaves to Portugal was prohibited in 1761 even though slave labor was vital to the country’s economy. While slavery persisted, the new law limited the permissible numbers of slaves and reoriented the trade around northern Brazil. In 1801, the chief of police of Lisbon, Pina Manique, warned of labor shortages in the city. In 1773, the “Law of Free Birth” had targeted the hereditary element of slavery by automatically liberating fourth-generation slaves (*mulatos* and *pardos*).¹⁶

In the Italian states, there were no specific anti-slavery laws until the first half of the nineteenth century—although selling slaves was forbidden in the Republic of Venice in the early modern period, with only their presence being allowed. In general, the fluidity of the law was motivated by the fact that slavery was more or less explicitly permitted in Europe—in certain instances even in countries promoting the principle of free soil. During the eighteenth century, notions of the danger of “black” contamination and “racial” discourses became more widespread as well.

In terms of war captives, only non-Muslims were enslaved in war in the Ottoman Empire, and only non-Christians in Europe. Converted captives were

not automatically legally free after conversion—only after a certain period and under specific conditions. During the campaign to conquer Vienna in 1683, the Ottoman army took 6000 adult males, 25,000 females, and 50,000 children as captives, and the Republic of Venice apprehended numerous Ottomans during the Morea war (1684–1718) for use as rowers. In Venice—but not in Genoa or in Rome—the term “prisoner of war” was used instead of “slave.”¹⁷ Besides war, piracy was another common setting of enslavement; it accounted for a significant share of the total number of captured men, and Fernand Braudel referred to the ongoing phenomenon as a “minor war.” Unlike corsairs, pirates were not licensed by governments, so their captures were illegal. In the Adriatic Sea, the *Dulcignotti* from Ulcinj attacked many Adriatic and Ionian cities and villages. As Salvatore Bono argued, the greatest threat to Cirò, a small Calabrian village, were pirates from Ulcinj rather than those from North Africa. Furthermore, in a history of the village entitled *Sciagure di Cirò per le incursioni di Barbareschi*, the inhabitants declared that Cirò was swarming with French privateers in 1711, and later with *Dulcignotti* and Turks. Likewise in 1711, forty-four people were captured from the church in a small village close to Lecce.¹⁸

Moving on to other types of enslavement resulting from forced slave mobility around the globe, the Mediterranean trade also involved slaves brought to Italian cities from the Atlantic colonial world. The complexity of the global circulation of slaves between the ports of the Atlantic Ocean and the Italian territories is evidenced by documents produced by the Roman Holy Office in the eighteenth century. Slaves from ports in the Antilles and Brazil reached Italy, in one case via the Cape of Good Hope. Ship captains, merchants, missionaries, and nobles were all mediators in this process. The case of Martino, a black boy born on Saint Thomas Island in the Danish Antilles to a family originating from Guinea, is illustrative: Martino arrived in Genoa following several changes in his ownership and after traversing various Atlantic ports and the Mediterranean. On 8 November 1786, the Archbishop of Genoa wrote of doubts surrounding Martino’s baptism application received by the Holy Office in Rome; he made reference to information that the boy had communicated to the Genoese priest Nicola Maria Ferri, *penitenziere* of the Metropolitan Church of Genoa.

A young Moor named Martino, who was born on St. Thomas Island in the Antilles, and whose appearance suggests he is now around fifteen-sixteen years old, was nine years old when kidnapped by a French ship captain while bathing. He was then transported to the Cape of Good Hope and sold to a Genoese merchant, Pietro Paciugo, who lived there. After around three-four years serving him and obeying all his orders, he was sold to a Milanese man named Mr. Puglia. He was a ship captain and shopkeeper in Genoa who was passing through the Cape of Good Hope. The Moor served his second master both on sea and land, during the first journey to Genoa after his purchase, and then on another journey from Genoa to Spain and back. The second seller decided immediately to educate him when they reached Genoa for the first time, but then he departed

again and took the Moor with him, and therefore he lost all his learning. When he came back, he had to restart his lessons. His first master had never offered him an education and never talked to him about religion. After two years, his second owner sold him last March to the Knight of Malta Andrea di Negro, a Genoese patrician, with whom he still lives and who has paid close attention to his education.¹⁹

According to Martino, his father was a free man working on Saint Thomas Island and not a slave, given that he was paid. His mother had never spoken to him about baptism or the Holy Trinity, but she had often mentioned God. It seems that Martino spoke Genoese well; we can assume his owners had taught him the language. The Archbishop of Genoa asked the Holy Office whether the boy could be baptized after being educated in the Catholic faith. Martino's last owner, Andrea di Negro, who educated him in Catholicism, was born in Genoa in 1720 to Agostino Di Negro and Dorotea Lomellini. He was a patrician and a Knight of Malta.

Martino's case demonstrates circulation directly from the Cape of Good Hope to Genoa, but the main European recruitment channel for overseas slaves was through Portugal or Spain—as in the case of the *Hofmohren* (“court Moors”), the black servants at the court of the Habsburg Empire who worked as musicians, messengers, and horse grooms, or in that of the “Atlantic slaves” on Italian territory who worked for captains, merchants, or nobles. Countries that did not control a formal colonial empire in the early modern period were thus supplied with slaves by way of imperial trading routes and the intermediation of local shipowners who worked for imperial powers. In 1451, a man named Perablanco became the first slave gifted to an Austrian noble by a Portuguese owner, and Cassanth, a young African who reached Brazil and then Lisbon aboard a Portuguese frigate commanded by Captain de Bosa, arrived in Naples in 1826 on a frigate from Sorrento commanded by Captain D. Carlo Cilenti.²⁰ In sum, there were multiple forms of enslavement in the Mediterranean area, and the slaves present there originated not only in the countries of the Mediterranean itself but in various parts of the world.

SLAVES' EXPERIENCES

Captives and slaves were employed in various types of labor in Southern Europe. Public slaves primarily worked on galleys and construction sites, in manufacturing, or as soldiers. Private slaves were usually domestic for nobles and middle-class families, although they could also be employed in agricultural and production activities or rented out. Captives worked as rowers and builders in ports or *bagnini*, and they became soldiers or assumed more responsible roles after conversion. They could also open small shops in port cities or engage in smuggling. Slaves, on the other hand, were mainly domestic servants or agricultural laborers, although in the service of nobles or princes they could also become musicians, nurses, valets, or butlers. This latter minority

group enjoyed better working conditions than agricultural slaves. The same was true in other Mediterranean regions as well: In the Ottoman Empire, the demand for unfree labor was largely focused on domestic and menial workers, but agricultural slavery was also important. Furthermore, there were elite (military-administrative slaves and *kull* harem slaves) and non-elite slaves (domestic, agricultural, and menial workers). At least in theory, the “sultan’s servants” and “state servitors” were privileged compared to other slaves.²¹

In the Kingdom of Naples, numerous slaves were employed alongside convicts and free wage laborers in the construction of the Caserta royal palace (1753–1800). In 1765, Jérôme de La Lande reported that 600 men were working on the building, with 75 of them convicts, 165 Turkish slaves, and 160 baptized slaves. The others were free workers. Baptized slaves earned four *grane* more per day than non-baptized slaves, were well-dressed, and lived in separate districts. In Portugal, slaves were subjected to the most degrading conditions and functions, but the long-term mechanisms of exclusion were based less on physical violence than on discrimination. Enslaved men and women mostly worked in cities as domestic or menial laborers: water carriers, excrement drainers, sweepers, fish sellers, and hawkers. Performing skilled work allowed a certain social fluidity without disturbing the established hierarchies of Iberian society, but free white servants competed with the huge black community in Portugal. At the beginning of the sixteenth century, King Manuel prohibited black women, slaves, and freedmen from selling fruit, fish, and vegetables in the ports and streets of Lisbon, but the practice nevertheless persisted until the 1800s. In the city of Évora, it was common to find slaves working as cooks or sweepers. Some of them even earned money, such as the 50 *reais* paid each day for selling bread to Eva, who belonged to a goldsmith from Évora. Thanks to these earnings, Eva was able to pay for her own freedom and that of one of her sons in 1583.²²

Slaves experienced different forms of coercion related to the types of work they were employed in, as well as in relation to their skills, age, gender, and health condition. This coercion had an impact on their prospects for liberation and return to their native home. For instance, many captives who were unable to work due to age or disability were sent back home to the Regency of Tunis and Algiers. In 1762, 18 slaves were considered incapacitated, most of them because of their advanced age (they were at least 63 years old) and several due to blindness or asthma. Many younger slaves were also blind or had missing limbs. Under orders from Stefano Lomellini, the deputy of the Republic of Genoa, Dr Pietro Francesco Pizzorni categorized old slaves as unfit to work in galleys or attack minor Christian vessels. Since it cost around 2000 lire per year to keep a slave and incapacitated slaves were unproductive, Pizzorni recommended they be manumitted without compensation to their sellers. It was hoped that their return to Tunis and Algiers might help to redeem some Christian slaves in return. On 9 March 1764, for instance, the captive Gero-lamo Balbi, whose name before baptism had been Assona da Tunis, declared himself unfit to serve on galleys due to paralysis and sought to be ransomed.²³

Captives often experienced the most degrading conditions. The working and living environment on galleys was harsh, and captives' feet were often cuffed. In 1795, slaves in Civitavecchia submitted a petition to "not wear cuffs on their feet," as was the case with Christian slaves in Barbary regencies. Sexual crimes, theft, and terrible sanitary conditions were commonplace on ships.²⁴ While the atmosphere on Mediterranean galleys was generally one of violence and suspicion, galley slaves were generally not treated differently on the basis of ethnic origin or skin color. Captives who were considered effective skilled workers and behaved appropriately were more likely to receive better treatment and have their supplications heard; retaining good workers was a matter of exigence. For example, Mohamet and Hucherim were two slaves who arrived in Livorno in 1776 and 1777 and were considered very good workers. 30-year-old Mohamet was employed as a mason in the new *Lazzaretto*. He was a talented sailor and woodworker and an expert terracotta chiseler. Hucherim was 47 years old and had a strong physical constitution. Like Mohamet, he was versatile and skilled in masonry and sailing, and he likewise worked on the construction of the *Lazzaretto*. Both men were seen as responsible and productive, and their supervisor accordingly objected to their use in a ransom exchange to liberate two Christian slaves named Palma and Palmieri.²⁵

Slaves who lived or worked for noble families or royals were more likely to experience better living and working conditions than captives, and they also had the best chances of being set free. In these cases, being a slave not only meant work; these men and women could be used for representative or ornamental purposes as well. In 1786, for instance, a young girl named Ourika was purchased by the governor of Senegal, the Chevalier du Boufflers, on behalf of the Duchesse d'Orleans. Ourika was baptized in Paris and became Charlotte-Catherine-Benezet-Ourika. She was educated in the prominent noble Parisian De Beauvau family as though she were their own child, although she was treated as an exotic ornament in Parisian social circles. Her skin color is described as "black as ebony." Madame de Staël met Ourika at a salon and used her name for a character in *Mirza ou Lettre d'un voyageur* (1795). Ourika was manumitted and became free in 1794; she died in 1799 at the age of eighteen, presumably of pneumonia or tuberculosis, and was buried at Saint-Germain-en-Laye.²⁶

The relatively good treatment of slaves by nobles probably changed for the worse following the abolition of the slave trade and slavery around the Mediterranean. When keeping slaves became illegal in Italy in the second half of the nineteenth century, for example, noble families continued to treat domestic servants bought in sub-Saharan African territories—in which slavery was still legal—as slaves in the Italian context. Bakhita, for example, was purchased as a slave by the consul Callisto Legnani in Khartoum. Her status was still uncertain when she arrived in Genoa in 1885. Under Italian law, Bakhita was free, but the Michieli family for whom she worked as a nurse regarded her as a slave under "African laws." It was only in the Venetian House

of Catechumens that Bakhita eventually discovered that she could not be kept as a slave according to Italian law and should have been free.

The types of work performed by slaves in Northern Mediterranean countries and the Ottoman Empire had certain commonalities, but also differed in some respects. In both territories, soldiering for the state and domestic slavery were prevalent, and domestic workers in elite urban households were generally treated better than enslaved individuals in other settings—especially captives on galleys and agricultural workers. In both regions, women were also more likely to suffer sexual exploitation, while men were more likely to be subjected to harsh physical treatment. Differences are evident in the contexts of ethnicity and gender. In the Ottoman Empire, Africans were less socially mobile than Circassians and Georgians. In Southern Europe, on the other hand, there were few Circassian slaves, and Africans were in no worse position than other slaves. In fact, “Moors” from Africa or blacks from the colonial world who were placed in noble courts were more likely to experience better working conditions and eventually attain freedom.

In the early modern Mediterranean, for example in Lisbon and Caserta, the remuneration of slaves was essential for their self-redemption when their owners or the state had no intention of liberating them. In other situations, there is no evidence that slaves were paid. Enslaved men and women salaried by private owners experienced better material conditions than state-owned slaves, though some publicly owned slaves in Italy—such as those in Livorno—were also paid. Furthermore, conversion was an essential aspect affecting the living and working conditions of slaves in Southern Europe, especially with regard to the likelihood of manumission. Slaves were pushed and pulled toward conversion as an exit strategy from their unfree status.

EXITS FROM SLAVERY

The condition of slavery could be escaped in different ways: under certain circumstances, by way of conversion; by running away; by ransom or self-ransom; as a result of being unable to work; and thanks to active petitioning where the laws were fluid.

While most European territories had their own specific legal systems and institutional practices, there were a number of shared features: Religious conversion uniformly involved the imposition of a new Christian name on a slave and initiated a process of cultural assimilation in the host society. Although slaves did not necessarily obtain legal freedom after conversion, they generally did benefit from better working and social conditions: In particular, they were allowed to live separately from other slaves and enjoy some degree of material support. This could lead to redemption by the state or liberation by a private owner, or to a slave earning sufficient money to buy his or her own freedom. Slaves were also occasionally freed immediately after baptism, as documented by a number of cases in Rome between 1516 and 1716, but this was exceptional in the Italian context.²⁷

In the majority of cases, slaves did not become legally free after baptism, as numerous petitions clearly show. In Rome, Giuseppe Bastoncelli, a renegade slave working in the fortress of *Castel Sant'Angelo*, petitioned for freedom five years after his baptism. In Livorno, slaves preparing to join the Catholic Church received a small daily payment from the state because they could not work. Immediately after conversion, they were still not allowed to perform real work—although they could be put in the service of officials and other workers at the *bagno*. Slaves' living conditions generally improved immediately after baptism since their feet were unchained. In Livorno, like in other cities in the Italian region, slaves were not automatically manumitted after baptism, and the chaplain of the *bagno* declared that religion could not be used as an instrument by slaves to obtain freedom.²⁸ Conversion was thus generally only a first step in an exit strategy from the condition of slavery.

Another frequently attempted manner of exiting slavery was escape. Many convicts and slaves absconded from galleys in Civitavecchia, for example: In July 1782, three slaves—Messana (known as the Tiger), Machmet from Tunis (known as Busolotto), and Machmet from Tripoli (known as Belbello)—ran away from the galley Capitana. Messana was found and returned to Civitavecchia, while the others made good their escape. Messana's defense was based on his claim that he was drunk when convinced to join the other men in escaping. He was already in a condition of perpetual slavery, the punishment for slaves attempting escape in the Papal States. Under the circumstances, the government of Civitavecchia accepted his statements as true.²⁹ Some slaves on Italian galleys tried to flee to other states in search of more promising ransom opportunities. In 1782, fugitive slaves from Livorno traveled to France because the latter had different agreements in place with the Barbary Regencies, which meant the escapees were more likely to be ransomed in France than in Tuscany.³⁰

Slaves could be ransomed by others or buy their own freedom. Southern European countries had various institutions (state institutions such as the *Magistrato per il riscatto* of Genoa or religious institutions such as the Mercedarians and Trinitarians) that worked to redeem Christian slaves in the Ottoman Empire and its satellite states. Slave ransom with its significant financial dimension was practiced more intensively in Southern Europe than in the Ottoman Empire—even though exchanges in the Mediterranean often favored Muslims because their economic value was lower than that of Christians (on average, 3 Muslims could be exchanged for 2 Christians, or 5 Muslims for 3 Christians). In October 1808 in Palermo, Father Paolo and Monsignor Castelli, who were in charge of ransom operations, exchanged 56 Turkish slaves for 28 Christian slaves. In this particular instance, we can calculate that the exchange rate was two Turkish slaves for one Christian slave. The exchange value of black slaves was even lower than that of Turkish Levantines: Two Christians “equaled” five blacks.³¹ Another document informs us that the Bey of Tunis did not accept the exchange of 18 “Moor” Tunisian slaves because they were black and therefore not regarded as Levantine:

n. 18 proposed Tunisians are Moors, and not Levantines. Such a distinction between Tunisian Moors and Tunisian Levantines is new since it has never been made in four different exchanges of Sicilians for Tunisians as warned by said Consul Oglander. In light of this recommendation, and in an effort to finalize the situation, I implore from His Majesty S.M. the grace to condemn them to the arsenal of the pier.³²

The fact that the value of a “Moor” slave (not necessarily black, but likely so in this context) was inferior to that of a non-black Levantine Tunisian proves that color and ethnic origin were commercial factors. One reason for this was that black slaves were highly unlikely to have family in the Barbary Regencies or any other nearby state that might have an interest in ransoming them. We may therefore conclude that it was not necessarily skin color itself that had an economic impact; rather, it was geographical origin that most affected the possibility of exchange.

Other exit routes from the condition of slavery involved age and health status, as we have seen in the Genoese context. In Livorno, ill and elderly slaves were likewise eventually allowed to return to North Africa. One group of Turkish slaves, for example, petitioned for liberation on the basis that they were too ill to work.³³

Slaves could also escape their condition through marriage, as well as by way of juridical scenarios where legal loopholes afforded room for maneuver. In France, slavery was theoretically not permitted in accordance with the legal principle of “free soil” that dated back to the fifteenth century: At least notionally, any slave landing in France was automatically free. But circumstances changed in the eighteenth century with the arrival of increasing numbers of slaves from the colonies. Royal legislation issued in 1716 established a right for colonial owners to bring slaves to France indefinitely for instruction in religion or trade, provided that they obtained permission and registered their slaves upon arrival. Under the more stringent act issued in 1738, slaves could be brought to France for only three years before having to return to their respective colonies. There were initially two ways in which they could attain freedom: Their owner could grant it to them in his or her will, or they could marry a free person. The law passed in 1738 abolished manumission altogether, however. Despite these restrictions, the black population in France continued to grow. Hundreds of slaves wrote petitions assisted by lawyers, requesting their freedom from the Admiralty Court of France in Paris because the king’s declarations had not been registered in the Parliament of Paris.³⁴ Interracial marriage was forbidden in 1778. This prohibition was also in force in other places at other times, such as in Venice during the Napoleonic period (where it was permitted during the period of Austrian rule, however). When and where it was legal, interracial marriage represented an important element of integration into Mediterranean communities and a means of securing the future of the children of slaves. It likely afforded more women than men an opportunity to exit slavery.

CONCLUSION

Over the past decade, the historiography of Mediterranean slavery has been revitalized thanks to important studies such as *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited* (2014) and *Les esclavages en Méditerranée* (2012). The study of Mediterranean captivity was transformed by Wolfgang Kaiser's *Le commerce des captifs* (2008). Another promising trend in research on slavery in Europe—and one in which the Mediterranean features prominently—concerns black slaves in Europe. Olivette Otele's recent work on *Black Mediterranean: Slavery and the Renaissance* (2020) is an example. The first task of this new historiography is to reduce the distance between the Atlantic and the Mediterranean worlds in terms of the importance of slavery practices. In the words of Ehud Toledano, Mediterranean slavery was long considered “milder” than its Atlantic counterpart, but this interpretation has been refined. Furthermore, slavery in the early modern Mediterranean has frequently been viewed as a declining phenomenon gradually overtaken by Atlantic slavery. Even within the Mediterranean world, the findings of new studies on slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its satellite states sometimes clash with older interpretations based on the situation in Southern Europe. Fresh debates may improve our understanding of both histories.

One new approach is to reduce the distance between the Mediterranean and the Atlantic by means of quantitative comparisons of slave numbers, particularly in urban settings, as well as through qualitative comparisons. It has become increasingly apparent that slavery was far more than a residual phenomenon in Mediterranean cities, sometimes as important as in the cities of the colonial world. Not all Mediterranean societies were “societies with slaves,” as has been traditionally held: There were “slave societies” in the Iberian Peninsula, particularly in Portugal. And although statistics on European and Mediterranean slavery are less precise than those available for Atlantic and colonial slavery, it seems that the number of slaves in Europe has generally been underestimated in research to date. Further work is required in this regard.

Slave labor and coercion were central to the functioning of the Mediterranean world. Captives and slaves were employed on galleys, on construction sites, in manufacturing, and as soldiers. Private slaves were usually domestic for nobles and middle-class families, although they could also be employed in agricultural and production activities or rented out. Captives could also open small shops in port cities or engage in smuggling. Slaves of nobles or princes, on the other hand, sometimes became musicians, nurses, valets, and butlers, or did not work at all; this minority group enjoyed better working and living conditions than agricultural or galley slaves. The situation was much the same in Southern Europe and the Ottoman Empire. In the latter, demand for unfree labor also focused on domestic and menial workers, and the slaves of elites likewise worked in better conditions than other types of slaves. The age, strength, health, and gender of slaves all influenced their working conditions

and the tasks they had to perform, as well as their prices. In Europe, ethnic origin and skin color did not impact living and working conditions as much as they shaped exit routes from slavery. Black captives were rarely able to return to their places of origin, while black slaves who worked for noble families were much more likely to be freed than other types of slaves.

Slaves could attain freedom through a number of different processes including religious conversion, escape, ransom, the inability to work, and successful legal petition. While they did not necessarily obtain legal freedom after conversion, they did benefit from better working and social conditions. As we have seen, they began to live separately from non-baptized slaves and enjoy greater material support. Under these circumstances, slaves could sometimes liberate themselves using their own earnings. They could also submit legal appeals for their liberation, which were sometimes successful in France as well as Italy. Marriage to a free person was another means of escape from the condition of slavery. Besides these institutional channels, slaves also tried to escape their bonds by absconding, just as they did in the colonial world. All these strategies for seeking freedom depended on multiple factors including individual slave initiative, geographic origin, work skills and contacts with other workers and slaves, the rank and status of private owners, and state laws.

Mediterranean slavery shows how strong the cultural and economic relations between the European countries and the Ottoman Empire were, as well as how these relations were linked to and influenced by other slave trading routes thanks to the global circulation of slaves and intermediaries of slavery. Slave practices in Europe and the Ottoman Empire need to be compared to and analyzed together with those in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean worlds in order to better understand the common features and differences between these varied spaces and avoid crystallizing practices inside a specific geographical area.

NOTES

1. I am currently receiving funding from the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme under grant agreement No. 887152.
2. Salvatore Bono, *Schiavi. Una storia mediterranea (XVI-XIX secolo)* (Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016), 73–75; Ehud R. Toledano, “Enslavement in the Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern Period,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, eds. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 26, <https://doi.org/10.1017/CHOL9780521840682.004>.
3. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/assessment/estimates>; Philip D. Curtin, *The Atlantic Slave Trade: A Census* (Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1969), 13; Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), xviii.
4. Didier Lahon, “Être affranchi au Portugal (XVIe-XIXe siècle),” in *Sortir de l'esclavage. Europe du Sud et Amériques (XIVe-XIXe siècle)*, eds. Dominique Rogers and Boris Lesueur (Paris: Karthala-CIRESC, 2018), 132.

5. Alessandro Stella, *Histoire d'esclaves dans la péninsule ibérique* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2000), 64–65; Roger Botte, "Migrations forcées des africains subsahariens: Maghreb, Al-Andalus, péninsule ibérique. Une synthèse," *Journal des africanistes*, 90, no. 2 (2020): 41.
6. Y. Hakan Erdem, *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and Its Demise, 1800–1900* (London: Macmillan, 1996), 17.
7. Lahon, "Être affranchi au Portugal," 130–32.
8. https://ldhi.library.cofc.edu/exhibits/show/africanpassageslowcountryadapt/sectionii_introduction/english_north_america_slave_so.
9. ASV, *Savi all'Eresia (Santo Ufficio)*, b. 97, unpaginated folios.
10. Cecilia Tarruell, "La captivité chrétienne de longue durée en Méditerranée (fin XVIe- début XVIIe siècle)," *Cahiers de la Méditerranée* 87 (2013), <https://doi.org/10.4000/cdlm.7175>; Bono, *Schiavi*, 222.
11. Wolfgang Kaiser, "Introduction," in *Les commerce des captifs. Les intermédiaires dans l'échange et le rachat des prisonniers en Méditerranée, XVe-XVIIIe siècle*, ed. Wolfgang Kaiser (Rome: Ecole française de Rome, 2008), 1–14.
12. Wolfgang Kaiser and Guillaume Calafat, "The Economy of Ransoming in the Early Modern Mediterranean: A Form of Cross-Cultural Trade Between Southern Europe and the Maghreb (Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries)," in *Religion and Trade: Cross-Cultural Exchanges in World History, 1000–1900*, eds. Francesca Trivellato, Leor Halevi, and Cátia Antunes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 111.
13. Levantine slaves came from Anatolia or the Aegean Isles in the Ottoman Empire.
14. Pierre H. Boule, *Race et esclavage dans la France d'Ancien Régime* (Paris: Perrin, 2007), 93; Sue Peabody, "There Are No Slaves in France": *The Political Culture of Race and Slavery in the Ancien Régime* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).
15. Suraiya Faroqhi, "Quis Custodiet Custodes? Controlling Slave Identities and Slave Traders in Seventeenth- and Eighteenth-Century Istanbul," in *Frontiers of Faith: Religious Exchange and the Constitution of Religious Identities 1400–1750*, eds. Eszter Andor and Istvan G. Tóth (Budapest: Central European University, 2019), 125.
16. Lahon, "Être affranchi au Portugal," 50–51; Cristina Nogueira Da Silva and Keila Grinberg, "Soil Free from Slaves: Slave Law in Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Portugal," *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (2011): 431.
17. Luca Lo Basso, *Uomini da remo. Galee e galeotti nel Mediterraneo di età moderna* (Milano: Selene Edizioni, 2004), 29.
18. Bono, *Schiavi*, 97–99.
19. ACDF, Archivum sancti officii romani, (D.B D.B 9) 2, 1785–93, unpaginated folios. English translation by the author.
20. Walter Sauer, "From Slave Purchases to Child Redemption: A Comparison of Aristocratic and Middle-Class Recruiting Practices for 'Exotic' Staff in Habsburg Austria," in *Beyond Exceptionalism—Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850*, eds. Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2021); Giulia Bonazza, *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850* (Cham: Palgrave, 2019).
21. Toledano, "Enslavement in the Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern Period," 27–28.

22. Antonio De Almeida Mendes, "Africaines esclaves au Portugal: Dynamiques d'exclusion, d'intégration et d'assimilation à l'époque moderne (XVe-XVIe siècles)," *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 31, no. 2 (2008): 51–52; Jorge Fonseca, "Black Africans in Portugal during Cleynaerts's visit (1533–1538)," in *Black Africans in Renaissance Europe*, eds. Tom F. Earle and Kate J. Lowe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 116–17.
23. ASG, *Archivio Segreto*, n. 292, n. 296.
24. Bonazza, *Abolitionism*, 119.
25. ASL, *Governo civile e militare di Livorno*, n. 940, c. 150.
26. Robin Mitchell, *Vénus Noire: Black Women and Colonial Fantasies in Nineteenth-Century France* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2020), 30–31.
27. Serena Di Nepi, "Saving Souls, Forgiving Bodies: A New Source and a Working Hypothesis on Slavery, Conversion and Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome (16th–19th Centuries)," in *A Companion to Religious Minorities in Early Modern Rome*, eds. Matthew Coneys Wainwright and Emily Michelson (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 272–97.
28. ASL, *Governatore civile e militare di Livorno*, n. 940, f. 487.
29. ASR, *Tribunale di Civitavecchia*, n. 666, f. 15.
30. ASL, *Governatore civile e militare di Livorno*, n. 896.
31. ASP, *Redenzione dei Cattivi*, vol. 298, f. 520.
32. ASP, *Redenzione dei Cattivi*, vol. 311. English translation by the author.
33. ASL, *Governo civile e militare di Livorno*, n. 940, c. 778.
34. Peabody, "There Are No Slaves in France," 54–55.

FURTHER READINGS

- Bonazza, Giulia. *Abolitionism and the Persistence of Slavery in Italian States, 1750–1850*. Cham: Palgrave, 2019.
- Bono, Salvatore. *Schiavi. Una storia mediterranea (XVI-XIX secolo)*. Bologna: Il Mulino, 2016.
- Botte, Roger. "Migrations forcées des africains subsahariens: Maghreb, Al-Andalus, péninsule ibérique. Une synthèse." *Journal des africanistes* 90, no. 2 (2020): 6–86. <https://doi.org/10.4000/africanistes.9820>.
- De Almeida Mendes, Antonio. "Africaines esclaves au Portugal: Dynamiques d'exclusion, d'intégration et d'assimilation à l'époque moderne (XVe-XVIe siècles)." *Renaissance and Reformation / Renaissance et Réforme* 31, no. 2 (2008): 43–63.
- Guillén, Fabienne P., and Salah Trabelsi, eds. *Les esclavages en Méditerranée: Espaces et dynamiques économiques*. Madrid: Casa de Velazquez, 2012.
- Hanß, Stefan, and Juliane Schiel, eds. *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited*. Zurich: Chronos Verlag, 2014.
- Kaiser, Wolfgang, ed. *Le Commerce des captifs. Les intermédiaires dans l'échange et le rachat des prisonniers en Méditerranée, XV^e -XVIII^e siècle*. Rome: École française de Rome, 2008.
- Otele, Olivette. *African Europeans: An Untold History*. London: Hurst & Company, 2020.
- Rogers, Dominique, and Boris Lesueur, eds. *Sortir de l'esclavage. Europe du Sud et Amériques (XIVe-XIXe siècle)*. Paris: Karthala-CIRESC, 2018.

Toledano, Ehud R. “Enslavement in the Ottoman Empire in the Early Modern Period.” In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, edited by David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman, 3: 25–46. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the Ottoman Empire

Hayri Gökşin Özkoray 

INTRODUCTION

The Ottoman Empire was initially a small state formed as a warrior polity in Northwestern Anatolia in the late thirteenth century. During its expansion phase, slavery and slave raiding greatly contributed to the enrichment of the military, state officials, mercenaries, and some merchants and private owners. Beginning in the mid-fourteenth century, however, slave raiding gradually became a rather marginal practice with the establishment of a sophisticated bureaucracy that extracted fiscal revenues and taxes from a vast array of territories, activities, institutions, and actors.

This chapter explores the phenomenon of slavery in the early modern Ottoman Empire through the phases of entry, labor extraction, and exit with a view to the slave–master relationship, drawing on Marcel van der Linden’s tripartite analytical scope.¹ Albeit useful as a framework, van der Linden’s take on this particular form of coercive labor relations does not suffice to fully explain the historical dynamics and rationale at stake in the Ottoman society. The Ottomans of the early modern era had a “populationist” motivation for maintaining a yearly influx of thousands of slaves into their territories despite not maintaining production systems that relied exclusively on servile labor. The empire therefore never constituted what Moses Finley has called a “slave society”—one in which production and the social order depended in large parts

H. G. Özkoray (✉)

Aix-Marseille Université, TELEMMe, Aix-en-Provence, France

e-mail: hayri-goksin.ozkoray@univ-amu.fr

on slavery, and where enslaved people made up a substantial portion of society. The demographic proportion of the slave population in the Ottoman Empire was roughly between one and ten percent in major cities and towns, with the more or less constant trafficking in slaves somewhat offset by the regular practice of manumission. This particularity is best epitomized by a fifteenth-century chronicler: “Every year more or less fifty thousand male and female infidels are taken from the abode of war as captives; those become Muslim, and their progeny join the rank of the faithful until the day of resurrection.”² The forced migration of scores of “infidels” each year (by way of conquest, abduction, slave raiding, and human trafficking, but also often through sale by their own families) therefore cannot be explained solely with the exigencies of economic growth, but more so with the ruling elite’s desire to forcibly recruit future Ottoman subjects, loyal taxpayers, and new Muslim believers—thus essentially employing slaving as a strategy of bolstering the ranks of the empire and its dominant religion.

ENTRIES INTO SLAVERY

Who could become a slave in the Ottoman Empire, and how? Firstly, it is important to note that non-Muslim foreigners were most commonly (and legally) considered enslaveable. Simply being a non-Muslim and non-Ottoman subject was not a uniform category, however; citizens or subjects of a state that had signed a peace treaty with the Porte (such as the Republic of Venice outside the main periods of war against the Ottomans, or the Kingdom of France from the 1530s onwards), for example, were considered off limits and under protection, at least in legal and diplomatic terms. By contrast, people hailing from a polity at war with the Ottoman Empire were deemed fit for enslavement. Non-Muslims could therefore become enslaved through direct capture in warfare—but they could also be born into slavery, acquired via trade networks (implicating merchants and actors outside the Ottoman realms), or enslaved illegally.

Capture in the course of war best illustrates the ways in which Islamic law shaped the institution of slavery over many centuries. Legal slavery was entirely exogenous by principle.³ Compared to putting prisoners of war to death, slavery was presented as a “lesser evil” that nevertheless constituted a way of imposing the victor’s law upon the vanquished (to paraphrase Carl von Clausewitz). The age, gender, beauty, talent, and social status of captives helped their captors decide whether to enslave, ransom, or kill them. As a structuring element of most societies in the Mediterranean, the implementation of slavery was based on juridical, political, and religious criteria along with military circumstances and simple misfortune.⁴

A discrepancy existed between the legal tenets of the “abode of Islam” (*dâr al-islâm*) and the “abode of war” (*dâr al-harb*), however. In theory, the populations of countries having concluded truce or peace treaties could not be enslaved—in other words, enslavement could not be applied to people

who had already recognized the political supremacy of an Islamic state or a Muslim sovereign. This often amounted to little more than a legal fiction, however—and one that did not correspond to the *Realpolitik* of Ottoman imperial expansion. In practice, military strategy and material gain were the determining factors for slave raids on warring parties, even after a peace treaty had been concluded.⁵

The empire's expansion brought diverse peoples into slavery directly at the hands of Ottoman military forces (officials, conscripted subjects, mercenaries, and the like)—especially from many of the territories conquered between the fourteenth and seventeenth centuries: Greeks, Bulgarians, Moldavians, Serbs, Albanians, Georgians, Hungarians, Germans, Spanish, and Italians, among others. Independently of this imperial expansion, however, corsairs also raided for slaves along the maritime borders of the Ottoman Empire and beyond. Marauders from the autonomous Maghreb provinces (Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli), for example, ravaged northwestern Mediterranean shores, sometimes venturing well beyond the Ottoman sphere of influence and raiding as far north as Iceland during the seventeenth century.⁶ Engaging Christian military orders like the Knights Hospitaller of St. John in Malta or the Order of San Stefano in Tuscany—who in turn took scores of Muslims from the Maghreb as well as Ottoman subjects of all religions from the eastern Mediterranean between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries—corsairs participated in a trans-Mediterranean network of captive ransoming and slave trading that impacted coastal communities throughout the region.⁷

The ubiquity of the phenomenon dissipates any illusion that enslavement and slave raiding were purely motivated by ideological and religious convictions. The pirates, corsairs, mercenaries, and their associates conducting these regular but relatively sudden and quick operations were often Muslim converts turned marauders, so-called “renegades” who subsequently set out to raid their former fellow Christians. Oranian corsairs originally hailing from Corsica or Calabria, for example, were newly converted Muslims who returned to Christian communities as their aggressors. Explanations for this behavior should be sought not in the sincerity of religious conversion but rather in the potential material gains to be achieved in such a frontier society, where the Catalan, Ligurian, Sardinian, and Provençal coasts were easily looted.⁸

Since slave raiding was a common maritime activity in the Mediterranean, and considering the fact that it was virtually impossible to control and patrol the official borders of the empire, commoners in coastal villages constituted easy targets for pirates and corsairs—even when the capturer and the captured were both Ottoman subjects. From the sixteenth century onwards, many sultans and their imperial governments tried to intervene to prevent the illegal enslavement of their own subjects, for example in the Aegean Sea. A practical problem arose here, however: By the time a collective petition reached the Porte, it had already travelled for at least a couple of weeks. In the meantime, even though officials could ascertain the circumstances and detect the profiles and activities of the enslavers, the victims of illegal enslavement were dozens

or even hundreds of kilometers away.⁹ Even worse, the act of sale—officially recognized by way of a fiscal stamp—sealed the legal slave status, notwithstanding the originally illegal enslavement. People hailing from distant towns and provinces were able to prove their origins and thus the illegality of their enslavement in numerous “freedom suits” throughout the early modern era thanks to their knowledge of the workings of Ottoman justice, the furnishing of witnesses who testified in their favor, and their own perseverance.¹⁰

An interesting case in point that corresponds to both entry and exit phases at once is the Ottoman conquest of Venetian Cyprus in 1570–1571 during the war between the two realms in 1570–1573. Establishing their own rule on the island in 1487, Venetian settlers and administrators had played an important role in maintaining and tightening the servitude of Greek Orthodox peasants at the hands of Latin masters in a form combining aspects of both chattel slavery and feudal serfdom. The military success of the Ottoman troops and navy in 1570–1571 led to several vicious massacres of Venetians as well as to the enslavement of the men and women who were spared. The Greek Orthodox peasants who had formerly been subdued by their Catholic masters not only became free tax-paying Ottoman subjects (*re ‘âyâ*), but some of them even went on to own Venetian slaves in a spectacular reversal of this specific form of asymmetrical domination, within the Ottoman imperial order.

A tributary state and key military ally of the Ottomans, the Tatar Khanate of Crimea, played a major role in the constant supply of slaves to the Ottoman Empire from its annexation into the “well-protected domains” around 1475 until 1699, when the Treaty of Karlowitz was signed with the anti-Ottoman European coalition following the severest Ottoman defeat in Europe until then. This regular source and network of supply developed incrementally and at times exponentially, especially with the slowing of the Ottoman military conquest machine from the mid-sixteenth century onwards. Besides the formal conquests (in which Crimean troops also participated in), regular raiding operations into Hungary, Poland-Lithuania, Muscovy, the Caucasus kingdoms, and sometimes even into friendly realms (such as other tributary states, especially the Romanian principalities of Transylvania, Moldavia, and Wallachia) were organized annually. The latter represented a problem for the Porte since its demand for yearly tribute from these territories was in exchange for autonomy in internal affairs and the protection of the physical and juridical integrity of the respective principalities’ subjects.¹¹ The Black Sea slave trade supplying entire Mediterranean networks from the macrocephalic Istanbul and various ports on the southern shores of the Black Sea had ancient roots, of course. Essentially, the power and volume of the lucrative slave trade in the Ottoman Empire were owed to the fact that the same polity—having expelled medieval Italian colonies from Caffa—reunited all these old routes, markets, and demanding urban centers of the intercontinental slave trade in the same way the Roman, Abbasid, or Byzantine Empires (to which the Ottoman sultans considered themselves the legitimate successors) once had.

Some comments regarding the juridical tenets of entry into an Ottoman's possession and service as a slave are in order at this point. The religion of the potential buyer/owner as well as that of the captured/enslaved were important in this context. Simply put, Muslims had the right to own slaves of both Muslim and non-Muslim obedience, whereas protected, free, non-Muslim taxpayers of the empire, the *zimmis*, officially only had the right to possess other non-Muslims as slaves—they could not own Muslim slaves, not even as percentage holders. To be clear, although a Muslim as such could not be legally enslaved by other Muslims, a legally enslaved person serving in the Ottoman realms could convert to Islam while remaining in their owner's possession (and in fact many did). Studies on executive orders from sixteenth- and seventeenth-century Istanbul and its Jewish communities show that not only did many non-Muslim Ottomans possess Muslim slaves, but some masters even made their slaves convert to their own religion, with frustrated local and imperial authorities unable to prevent this phenomenon despite the sovereign's displeasure. Community leaders were however called upon to compile lists of slaveholders with the names and religious denominations of their slaves. When an Ottoman official was able to efficiently intervene in such a case, he was to effect the sale of the newly Islamized slave to a Muslim master.¹²

When female slaves owned by Ottomans gave birth to a child that was not recognized by the male owner, the offspring would automatically have servile status. In addition, men were not legally allowed to have sexual relations with female slaves owned by their wives; *fatwa* compilations contain a plethora of rulings stating that even the wife's explicit authorization would not render such intercourse legal. This meant that a husband had to buy his wife's female slave in such a case so as to be formally irreproachable from a legal standpoint. If a child born to an enslaved woman was recognized by the male slave owner as his own, however, the newborn was considered free and its mother transitioned from enslavement to being an *ümm-i veled* ("mother of the child," a status discussed in more detail in the section on exits from slavery below). From a broader perspective, while slave children were certainly born in different places and situations within the sultan's realms, slavery by birth was far from being a common form of obtaining new slaves. It was not an internal reproduction system that sustained the Ottoman Empire's servile population but rather a combination of war plunder, slave raiding at the frontiers, and of course the massive imports via the Crimean peninsula—augmented to a modest degree from the Caucasus as well as Sahelian and sub-Saharan Africa, and to a much lesser extent via the Indian Ocean and Central Asia.

Entry into private slaveholding was not possible through penal condemnation or debt bondage. This does not mean, however, that penal condemnation and unpaid debts could not lead to forced labor or coercive methods of extracting work and other benefits from affected individuals. Simply put, different legal statuses existed within the same professions and workplaces. All slavery was not forced labor, and all forced labor was not slavery. What

is legally certain in this context is that insolvent persons could not be commodified.

Before delving into phenomena of extraction, the exception of the *devşirme* should be mentioned. Under the *Pax Ottomana*, *zimmîs* were normally exempt from all attempts at enslavement within the Ottoman society. And yet, a peculiar sultanic custom that presumably began toward the end of the fourteenth century consisted of organizing “levies” within the Christian communities of the Balkans (which would later be implemented in Anatolia as well), coercing teenaged boys into compulsory service to the sovereign. They were enslaved, forcefully converted to Islam, and circumcised before undergoing various intellectual, military, physical, artisanal, and agricultural formation phases to eventually become a member of the prestigious and elite Janissary corps. As personal slaves (*kuls*) of the sultan, the most brilliant and beautiful of them could also be employed at the imperial palace and eventually become imperial officials or advisors, with the highest attainable position being that of the grand vizier, second only to the sultan himself. The particularity of being the sultan’s slave also suspended existing shariatic norms:

- A *kul* of the sultan could possess slaves of their own, whereas this was not possible for ordinary *kuls* of private slave owners.
- While the sultan had the arbitrary power of life and death over his *kuls*, he was not allowed to have his free subjects executed without a judicial decision. Nor were ordinary slave owners legally permitted to kill their own slaves.

EXTRACTION POSSIBILITIES (LABOR AND OTHER)

There were possibilities of extraction and exploitation in many areas: lucrative, labor, services, prestige and domination, sexual favors, and the production of heirs. The use of slaves in the Ottoman Empire thus served many other purposes beyond pure labor extraction calculated according to a rationale of optimized and profitable work through intensified production methods. This was especially true for the richest slave owners, since they did not depend on rationalized and profitable labor extraction producing financial revenue through the exploitation of slaves over a calculated period of time before having to let them go either by sale or manumission. In other words, they had the means to lose some money by pursuing different objectives or gains with their slave ownership. We also find that slaves were present in virtually every sector, profession, activity, and function. This implies several things:

- No profession or form of production was reserved exclusively for slaves. Even sexual labor that could be imposed on female slaves in probably the direst circumstances was not an exclusive domain of servitude, with the quasi-merchandising of brides through dowry and ordinary prostitution

being the main counterexamples, which could simply be other forms of human trafficking. They were not always necessarily a trade in humans—as opposed to slavery, which always was.

- Workers of different legal status with similar or identical tasks coexisted in the same workshops, fields, bazars, shops, households, and so on.
- A clear dichotomy between free and unfree labor is too abstract and thus meaningless in the context of the Ottoman Empire.
- While present in many if not all work sites, slaves usually did not represent the majority.

The rationale for slave ownership that did not primarily follow economic goals consisted of integrating enslaved persons into a family, political faction, or group of trustees in a private and/or semi-public sphere. Beyond this motivation, broader considerations of growing the political, fiscal, and religious communities along with the logic of depriving the enemy of “human resources” played a role as well, in line with the “populationist” argument cited above.

Enumerating the key sectors of activity in which slaves could be found alongside workers with other statuses (wage earners, apprentices, Janissary trainees, convicts, ransomable captives, volunteers, requisitioned *re ‘âyâ*, conscripts, corporation members, and so on), we can cite pre-industrial textile workshops, agriculture, sexual, domestic, and menial labor, bureaucracy, intellectual activities, commerce, arsenals, mining, public works and the construction sector, and galleys.

In the mining sector, similar tendencies can be discerned in the rationale for workforce deployment as in the well-documented eastern Mediterranean sugar production from the fourteenth century onwards, with high mortality rates due to plague epidemics on a regular basis.¹³ The driving factor in this and other extraction and manufacturing sectors was certainly the need of the state and its business partners to maintain a constant flow of key raw materials and lucrative goods. The Ottoman state based its approach to mining on the economic value and strategic importance of ores, implementing fiscal stimulus policies to attract voluntary and free tax-paying subjects of the sultan in particular. Despite being less noble than silver, copper was a crucial metal for the Ottoman state, which established a monopoly on its extraction—most notably for the fabrication of artillery and other military equipment. Furthermore, exportation of and trade in copper was prohibited throughout the empire, a proscription enforced in particular on the ores from Küre in the Kastamonu province in northern Anatolia (on the southern Black Sea shore), which had been active since at least Byzantine and Seljukid times.

Although the state managed to attract free and salaried miners to Küre from the fifteenth century onwards by offering fiscal exemption, corrupt local officials frequently prevented the systematic application of these benefits to the miners. In addition, the state’s demand for the constant output was regularly interrupted by numerous instances of earthquakes, floods, and epidemics

(notably the Black Death). The natural catastrophes and poor hygiene that decimated the Küre miners caused the Ottoman state to rely on slave labor as a last recourse. Archival sources show that the imperial bureaucracy treated the issue as a purely budgetary one, but also that the state was not the sole owner of slaves extracting ore in Küre: Private investors and contractors were likewise involved. State archives (internal correspondence, account books, fiscal records) and contemporary chronicles (such as those of Evliyâ Çelebi and Kâtib Çelebi in the seventeenth century) provide us with specific and valuable data on the population of Küre that was involved in mining, as well as on the bureaucratic and commercial world revolving around the mining town.

A document from the year 1682 indicates a devastating plague outbreak in the mines of Kastamonu that left almost no survivors among the slaves. Local officials urgently called for the recruitment of new laborers in order to resume mining (BOA, İbnülemin, Me ‘adin 2/105, dated 18 July 1682). As compensation, 400,000 *akçes*—roughly equivalent to 1333 Venetian ducats at the time—were paid out to the mines by the central government. To provide a sense of the scale of this sum, we can consider that a luxury slave cost approximately 5000 *akçes* in the sixteenth to seventeenth centuries, while cheaper menial slaves were valued at around 200 *akçes*. The government handout thus allowed the purchase of roughly 2000 slaves at the lowest price. Simultaneously, the document also evidences the direct involvement of the central government in the assignment of the workforce. Another record from the same mines in 1690 confirms this *modus operandi* in terms of recruitment, with the allocation of 9000 Dutch lion dollars for the purchase of new slaves who were presumed to be worked to their deaths in the non-stop extraction business (BOA, İbnülemin, Maliye 30/2947, dated 9 June 1690). This sum would have allowed 180–240 slaves to be bought at average period prices.

Mining work was arguably the most difficult task with the highest mortality rate to be performed by slaves in the Ottoman Empire. Other instances of slave use as a business model were radically different: Boutique owners and merchants dealing in goods of international commerce could own slaves to whom they taught the tricks of the trade, using them as reliable and mobile agents “authorized” (*mezûn*) to complete various high-stakes transactions on their behalf. Some *mezûn* slaves even traveled abroad for financial operations respectively for import–export trading using the capital they were entrusted with, returning loyally to their patrons despite having the opportunity to escape with considerable amounts of money and/or merchandise. Some did in fact abscond, which in turn could cause Ottoman authorities to solicit their Venetian, Polish, or Muscovite counterparts for assistance, sometimes to no avail.¹⁴ This “authorization” can be viewed as a pure delegation of authority, with the possibility of the *mezûn* overseeing other slaves of the same owner. As agents of their masters, *mezûn* slaves determined the outcome of their status by constantly reassuring their owner with their competence and trustworthiness. By doing so, they could eventually succeed in exiting the slave status altogether by being enfranchised—though the nature of the labor relationship

between an issuer of orders and proprietor of means on the one hand and the competent but subordinate secretary or valet on the other meant they could never truly become equal business partners despite their achievements. We might say there was a continuum in the labor relation, and that enslavement was an important element of this relation—but nevertheless only an element, not a defining factor for the overall dynamics of such business setups.

Appellations like “domestic” slaves, or slaves *tout court*, by way of different synonyms in Ottoman Turkish (*kul*, *köle*, *câriye*, etc.) do not precisely indicate their role and function in a private setting. This has led many scholars of the Ottoman world to speak about them as performing “various tasks, menial tasks” as unspecialized workers subject to their masters’ and mistresses’ will, doing anything that was demanded of them. It is true that most documents do not clearly state the nature of the daily work of domestic slaves. In court records, however, we sometimes find indications of individuals working as washers, cooks, gardeners, blacksmiths, wetnurses, or the like, rather than generic and vague phrasings like “Ahmed’s Bosnian slave” or “my tall female slave with golden hair.” I would argue that these men and women performing everyday household work were anything but “unskilled”: On the contrary, they were constantly under pressure of having to multitask, to remain flexible and focused, and most of all to specialize in essential activities whose value was underappreciated. The same mentality is still demanded of cleaning staff, caretakers, merchandise handlers, warehouse workers, and other professions in our modern Western societies today. In other words, domestic slaves in the Ottoman Empire were skilled in ways that were not recognized institutionally or socially by guilds or employers—but this naturally does not mean they lacked skills altogether. On a slightly provocative note, one might even suggest that when historians emphasize the lack of skill of these slaves, this may translate as an *inconscient bourgeois* disdaining menial work while feeling contempt or pity for those who have nothing but their manual labor to make a living.

Although slavery as practiced by the Ottomans was not an institution exclusively related to labor, some form of benefit or gain was always a consideration—be it in terms of prestige, social standing, sexual gratification, or the satisfaction of ruling over someone (albeit with limitations). Access to slaves depended on the flows of the human trafficking networks and the geographic location of potential buyers as well as on market availability, the budget of the buyer, and the profit margin of the seller. An idealized form of ethnic labor division can be found in physiognomy and ethics treatises, which certainly had an effect on representations and clichés without necessarily having a day-to-day implementation. For instance, whereas sixteenth-century chronicler, bureaucrat, and gentleman Mustafa Ali of Gallipoli suggested Latin Western Europeans or Hungarians as the best and most intelligent personal servitors, Ottomans in need of personal servants generally had to purchase whatever ethnicity was available and affordable at their local market at the time.

Sociological and economic criteria were paramount in the context of slave ownership in the Ottoman Empire. The wealth of a master or mistress determined the use of their slaves and the duration of this use, which in turn defined the possibilities and ways of exiting and continuing the work relation under different circumstances. Was a prospective buyer looking for a new family member, a business partner, or a permanent servant? It all depended on their social standing, along with their available means and the purposes they envisioned for their future human property.

EXITS

Exit from slavery cannot be likened to the termination of any other labor relation, since the very ways in which an exit was (im)possible were determined by enslavement itself, whereas the slaveholding per se did not necessarily entirely define the extraction phase, which merely translated the means and objectives of employers in general.

Combining canonical Sunni jurisprudence with various customary elements, Ottoman law, and social practice offered several ways of exiting slavery. Unconditional, direct, and absolute manumission was always a possibility, although not widely practiced. For religious, moral, or any other reasons, owners could set a slave free by way of a simple formula declaring the liberation of the individual, who in turn could claim his or her new status. A written attestation or credible witnesses represented further guarantees for the enfranchised.

Another possible form was conditional manumission (*tedbîr*): In such cases, the owner defined a more or less predictable—and at times quite random—condition for their slave to attain freedom. This condition could be a specific occurrence: “if I survive this illness,” “if I do not return for more than 60 days after my departure,” “if I come back alive from my *hajj* to Mecca” or similar. However, stipulations were also often unsystematic and aleatory. Technically, testamentary manumission falls into this category as well, since the main condition for enfranchisement was the master’s death. The heirs had the possibility of formally annulling a testamentary manumission if the slave’s value was superior to a third of the whole inheritance.

Manumission contracts are well documented in the court registers of virtually any given Ottoman judicial district (*kazâ*). They correspond to the third and arguably primary legal manner of exit from slavery, which once again reveals the key logic of slaveholding. In general, such contracts were conditioned on duration of service, on the payment of a lump sum, or at times on the requirement that the slave produce a certain quantity of goods before being set free. In some cases, a manumission contract (*mükâtebe*) represented a combination of two or all three of these aspects. These written contracts allow us to determine the average duration of a slave’s service in a private household as 8–12 years, with extremes in the range of 4–20 years. Lifetime service was never excluded, of course, and could result from a slave’s failure to respect

the terms of their contract. Beyond the average service duration, manumission contracts also enable us to estimate the profit that slave owners expected to make. In this context, we must consider the estimated purchase price of the individual slave, the nature and duration of extraction, and of course, the sum of money the potentially manumitted was required to pay for their freedom. Incidentally, we can conclude from the *mükâtebe* that while indebtedness did not lead to slavery in the Ottoman Empire, enslavement could in turn easily lead to debt for those wishing to exit the status via contractual manumission. It was considered morally and conventionally inappropriate to manumit individuals deemed too old to provide for themselves. Ethical ideals suggested that owners assume the responsibility for material upkeep until their aged slaves' death.

The exit phase could also be a form of extraction in itself. *Walâ'*, the Arabic term indicating the patron-client relationship, was a secular institution originating in pre-Islamic times, specifically in Roman law and in part in customs of the Arabian Peninsula. Once the former slave master became a patron and the former slave a free person (and client) by way of manumission, heirs on both sides could potentially perpetuate this relation. If there were no heirs on the client's side, the patron's family would inherit everything the client or their childless descendants had possessed. Patronage also entailed various obligations and duties, along with a sense of fidelity which often made it so that the work relation did not change significantly beyond its juridical nature. The agnatization of clients and the patrons' right of preemption regarding their inheritance means that the value and meaning of the widespread and canonical formula used in manumission declarations before the kadi's court can be seriously questioned. The legal formula translating as "s/he shall be free from now on like every other person of free birth (*hurr al-asl*)" was apparently an optimistic portrayal and more of a legal fiction than a truthful rendering of the reality of the situation.

The power of a patron over their slave-turned-client naturally depended on the social standing along with the means and objectives in the new phase of the relationship. This means that not all theoretically established *walâ'* frameworks necessarily led to the perpetuation of patronage over many generations—and thus that not all manumissions can be considered transitions to a new form of extraction of privileges or as a further step in a never-ending power relation.

The primary counterexamples of this type of all-dominating power of the patron over the client were instances where clients or their descendants made use of their agnatic affiliation to the patron's family, above all in the client's own interest as an underdog. In a groundbreaking study on Damascene society in Ottoman times, Karl K. Barbir examined biographical dictionaries of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Darwîsh Muhammad (d. 1605/06) was the son of a holder of *timâr* (fiscal revenue for a caste of privileged military staff) in the Great Syria region and a manumitted female slave who had been owned by the notable Damascene family of the Ibn Tâlû prior to her enfranchisement and marriage. Darwîsh grew up in poverty owing to his father's fall

from grace and flight from Damascus. Despite this adversity, he managed to become a renowned member of the ulema class of legal-religious scholars. His fame extended from Damascus to Istanbul, and he was known under the patronym Tâlûzâde—derived not from his father’s name but instead from that of his mother’s former owner. In the Damascene society of the time, an Ottoman bureaucrat or soldier and thereby member of the fiscally exempted class of state officials (*‘askerî*) could thus obtain a new patronym by marrying a free, enslaved, or manumitted woman. This could also provide an official hailing from another province with a local affiliation. Darwîsh’s mother had never been his father’s slave; the patron–client relations clearly indicate that she had been owned by the Ibn Tâlû family, who manumitted her and allowed her to marry Darwîsh’s *timariot* father. This matrimonial contract allowed the Ibn Tâlû family to establish a new network within the Ottoman public service via a public servant who had recently arrived in the Damascus district. As the disgrace of his military father meant the end of his salary and his fiscal and real estate benefits, however, Darwîsh—now left in poverty—had to define a new “fictitious kinship” made possible by the slave past of his mother. He associated quickly with his mother’s proprietors-turned-patrons. Instead of being a burden, his mother’s past enslavement thus became a source of prestige for a man who had lost all social and symbolic capital he could have had, thanks to his father. He undertook considerable efforts to study in madrasas and become a member of the ulema in his own right, but it was above all the juridical, social, and perhaps also the economic heritage of his enfranchised mother that contributed to his success. These circumstances caused Darwîsh to choose a matrilinear filiation which, while fictitious, was juridically and socially solid. The new kinship between Darwîsh and the Ibn Tâlû created obligations for the latter in favor of the former. In this case, too, the economic and political power of slave owners influenced the possibilities open to the manumitted and their descendants over several generations.¹⁵

As an exit strategy, conversion to Islam or whichever was the owner’s religion could work in some cases, but such intentions were mostly recognized as insufficiently sincere—and besides, the agendas and calendars of the respective parties usually did not match. As mentioned above with regard to the criteria for becoming a slaveholder, a non-Muslim slave belonging to a non-Muslim owner could only *hope* to be manumitted upon converting to Islam. This outcome was anything but certain, however; in short, the possibilities were:

- Being sold to a Muslim and continuing to be a slave for some time.
- Being illegally detained by the same owner.
- Being enfranchised (in the knowledge that this was legally problematic since it established a patron–client relationship between a non-Muslim and a Muslim with the former being the superior party in the relation, which was deemed undesirable by the norms of the ruling class of the Ottoman Empire).

A brief mention should also be made of the *umm al-walad*, Arabic for “mother of the child.” When a female slave belonging to a male owner became pregnant and the owner recognized his paternity, the offspring would automatically be considered free at birth. While remaining a slave, the mother would obtain the special *ümm-i veled* (Turkish pronunciation) status, which rendered her inalienable. An *ümm-i veled* could no longer be sold or transmitted through legacy. If the owner did not choose to manumit her while he was still alive, she automatically became free upon her owner’s death. Many slaveholders nevertheless attempted to sell or bequeath an *ümm-i veled*, and there are numerous court records of litigations where such women claimed their rights, sometimes successfully.

Although the master’s social standing, power, economic means, and intentions for his or her slave(s) were key factors, this did not mean everything was inevitably determined by the slaveholder’s will—as stipulated in the legal norms demanding total obedience of slaves to their owners. The simple reason—and the final point of this contribution—is that there were also illegal exits from slavery. Such illegal exits by way of abscondence occurred by the thousands in the Ottoman Empire. Mentions of fugitive slaves are abundant in the court registers—more precisely, it is captured fugitives who were most frequently registered, compared to the far less numerous cases where owners unilaterally seized the kadi’s court to declare their human property missing. Some fugitives committed theft (material resources) and/or murder (as revenge and/or in order to make good their escape) before their flight. The chances of success of such getaways were scarce but not nonexistent. *Yavacıs*, a corps of semi-professional and prize-winning fugitive hunters (who also searched for lost livestock¹⁶) working closely with judicial authorities in many districts captured men and women suspected of being escaped slaves in the peripheries of towns, on major travel routes, and the like. Many of those captured in this way claimed to be free individuals or manumitted former slaves. Some managed to prove their assertion through documents and witnesses, while those who could not were detained by the kadi’s court for a customary period of three months or a hundred days. During this period, which was considered sufficient to allow owners to claim their absconded slaves, the court would provide food, shelter, and clothing for the captives. A retrieving owner could take their human merchandise back upon verification and after reimbursing the court for the expenses incurred for the fugitive’s material upkeep. If the owner did not show up by the end of the customary period, the court sold the respective detainee at auction, thereby recouping its expenses and perhaps realizing a small margin of profit (knowing that the price would be below market, since a fugitive was a “faulty” and thus less desirable slave). Although successful escapes did occur, the explicitly recorded cases are almost exclusively those in which absconders were recaptured and returned to slavery.¹⁷ To this day, we know of no tangible networks of solidarity between fugitives or autonomous escapee communities in remote areas comparable to the spectacular and inspiring examples in the Caribbean, for

example in Jamaica. This takes us back to the very beginning: Illegal exits by abscondence were still exits, though not always as efficient as the legal ones like manumission. Since the method was perilous for the escapees (and their recapture lucrative for fugitive hunters), these attempts could take slaves hoping to find their freedom back to square one—and “illegitimate” victims of the hunters could be illegally enslaved despite having been free Ottoman subjects by birth or through manumission. Therefore, an illegal exit could become a re-entry, and a presumed illicit exit an entirely new entry into slavery—and an unlawful one at that.

NOTES

1. Marcel van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labor,” in *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodriguez Garcia (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 293–322.
2. Muhammed b. Mahmūd-ı Şirvânî, *Tuhfe-i Murâdî* [1429], ed. M. Argunşah (Ankara: Türk Dil Kurumu, 1999), 73. Excerpt cited and translated into English by Cemal Kafadar, “A Rome of One’s Own: Reflections on Cultural Geography and Identity in the Lands of Rum,” *Muqarnas* XXIV (2007): 13–14.
3. Madeline C. Zilfi, *Women and Slavery in the Late Ottoman Empire: The Design of Difference* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 211.
4. Colin Imber, “Fiqh for Beginners: An Anatolian Text on Jihād [2000],” in *Warfare, Law and Pseudo-History* (Istanbul: The Isis Press, 2011), 65–66; Christine E. Sears, “In Algiers, the City of Bondage’: Urban Slavery in Comparative Context,” in *New Directions in Slavery Studies: Commodification, Community, and Comparison*, ed. Christine E. Sears and Jeff Forret (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2015), 201. See also Rainer Oßwald, *Das islamische Sklavenrecht* (Würzburg: Ergon Verlag, 2017).
5. Majid Khadduri, *War and Peace in the Law of Islam* (Clark, NJ: The Lawbook Exchange, 2006 [1955]), 130–32; Claude Cahen, “Note sur l’esclavage musulman et le *devshirme* ottoman: à propos de travaux récents,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* XIII, no. 2 (1970): 211–18.
6. Olafur Egilsson, *The Travels of Reverend Olafur Egilsson: The Story of the Barbary Corsair Raid on Iceland in 1627*, trans. K. S. Hreinsson and A. Nichols (Reykjavik: Fjölvi, 2008).
7. Salvatore Bono, *Schiavi musulmani nell’Italia moderna: Galeotti, vu’ cumprà, domestici* (Naples: Edizione Scientifiche Italiane, 1999); Godfrey Wettinger, *Slavery in the Islands of Malta and Gozo ca. 1000–1812* (San Gwann, Malta: Publishers Enterprises Group, 2002).
8. See among others the works by Bartolomé and Lucile Bennassar, Guillaume Calafat, Francesca Trivellato, and Nathalie Rothman on trans-imperial subjects and intermediaries of servile condition (at some point in their life) between Islam and Christendom.
9. Nicolas Vatin, “Une affaire interne: Le sort et la libération des personnes de condition libre illégalement retenues en esclavage sur le territoire ottoman (XVI^e siècle),” *Turcica* XXXIII (2001): 149–90.
10. Joshua M. White, *Piracy and Law in the Ottoman Mediterranean* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2017).

11. Christoph Witzernath, ed., *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History, 1200–1860* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2015).
12. See most notably the monographs by Yaron Ben Naei (2008) and Minna Rozen (2002) on Ottoman Jewish communities.
13. J. H. Galloway, “Mediterranean Sugar Industry,” *Geographical Review* LXVII, no. 2 (1977): 190–92 and passim. On plague epidemics and their impact on the Ottoman Empire, see the monographs by Nükhet Varlık (2015), Birsen Bulmuş (2012), and Yaron Ayalon (2015).
14. Halil İnalçık, “Capital Formation in the Ottoman Empire,” *The Journal of Economic History* XXIX, no. 1 (1969): 109.
15. Karl K. Barbir, “From Pasha to Efendi: The Assimilation of Ottomans into Damascene Society, 1516–1783,” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* I, no. 1 (1979–1980): 68–81.
16. The primary term used in Ottoman Turkish (*yava*) for fugitives applies both to slaves and livestock, similar to the word “maroon” derived from the Spanish *cimarrón*.
17. Yvonne Seng, “Fugitives and Factotums: Slaves in Early Sixteenth-Century Istanbul,” *Journal of the Economic and Social History of the Orient* XXXIX, no. 2 (1996): 136–69.

FURTHER READINGS

- Erdem, Y. Hakan. *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800–1909*. London: Macmillan Press, 1996.
- Faroqhi, Suraiya. *Slavery in the Ottoman World: A Literature Survey*. Berlin: EB Verlag, 2017.
- Hathaway, Jane. *The Chief Eunuch of the Ottoman Harem: From African Slave to Power-Broker*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Isnard, Paulin, Benedetta Rossi, and Cécile Vidal, eds. *Les Mondes de l’Esclavage: une histoire comparée*. Paris: Le Seuil, 2021.
- Karamürsel, Ceyda. “Transplanted Slavery, Contested Freedom and Vernacularization of Rights in the Reform Era Ottoman Empire.” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 59, no. 3 (2017): 690–714.
- Özkoray, Hayri Gökşin. “From Persecution to (Potential) Emancipation: Female Slaves and Legal Violations in Ottoman Istanbul According to Court Registers (16th–17th Centuries).” *Hawwa. Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World* 17, nos. 2–3 (2019): 257–80.
- Peirce, Leslie P. *The Imperial Harem: Women and Sovereignty in the Ottoman Empire*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- Schiel, Juliane, and Stefan Hanß, eds. *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500–1800)*. Zurich: Chronos, 2014.
- Toledano, Ehud R. *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.
- Veinstein, Gilles. *Les esclaves du sultan chez les Ottomans: des Mamelouks aux Janissaires (XIV^e–XVII^e siècles)*, edited by Elisabetta Borromeo. Paris: Les Belles Lettres, 2020.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the Holy Roman Empire

Josef Köstlbauer 

INTRODUCTION

The Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation was never a central nexus of enslavement and slave trading. Nevertheless, a large number of enslaved people were brought into the empire from different parts of the world between the sixteenth and the eighteenth century. There were essentially three slavery complexes extending into the German lands: One was the Mediterranean and Black Sea slaving networks, through which enslaved Africans, Eastern Europeans, Caucasians, Tatars or subjects of the Ottoman empire arrived in German principalities. The others were Atlantic and Indian Ocean slaving, which accompanied and fueled European colonial expansion and globalizing mercantile networks. Recent research in particular has brought to the fore the integration of German territories into transatlantic economic networks that provided the Atlantic slave trade with textiles, tools, weapons, copper, bullion, credit, and of course numerous sailors and soldiers. In the eighteenth century, the Atlantic slave trade as a source of enslaved persons eclipsed the Mediterranean slavery networks, albeit without ever completely replacing them.

The numbers of enslaved persons in the early modern Holy Roman Empire are difficult to ascertain, and a meaningful quantitative study is still lacking.

J. Köstlbauer (✉)

Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany

e-mail: josef.koestlbauer@uni-bonn.de

Certainly, their demographics were very different from those of the slave populations on the Iberian Peninsula, where hundreds of thousands of enslaved Africans formed an omnipresent part of urban society from the fifteenth until well into the nineteenth century (see the chapter by Giulia Bonazza in this volume). There were very likely also significantly fewer slaves in the Holy Roman Empire than in Britain or France. An exhibition in Stuttgart in 2001 documented the presence of fifty so-called “Moors” in Württemberg from the fifteenth to the nineteenth century. Similarly, a maximum of two hundred people of African descent may have lived in Vienna during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries—many of them enslaved. In an extensive but by no means all-embracing study of “Court Moors” in 2013, Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov identified three hundred and eighty individuals brought to Germany, a majority of them of African or African American origin. More recent research has led to the identification of many more individuals, both in early modern courts and beyond. In addition, large numbers of enslaved captives entered the empire as a result of wars and raiding unfolding along the imperial and religious fault lines crisscrossing the Mediterranean, the Balkans, the Black Sea region, and Western Asia. Campaigns against the Ottoman Empire in particular produced large numbers of captives. During the siege of Buda in 1686 alone, the participating German forces took a staggering 2325 prisoners, both soldiers and civilians, many of whom ended up in German lands. Although only fragmentary sources are available, it is clear that the total numbers of captives were formidable. Between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries, parish registers recorded 651 baptisms of Muslims in Vienna alone, and another five hundred in other parts of the Holy Roman Empire. Since only a minority of Muslim captives converted, their actual numbers were likely considerably higher.¹

Being readily available as property to be bought or sold facilitated the entrance of enslaved men, women, and children into German territories. There, however, slavery was not an institution that necessarily defined their social positions, spheres of action, occupations, and prospects the same way it did in colonial slave societies. The scarce and scattered sources often reveal next to no information on the status of such individuals and how they were perceived. The most accessible sources come from court archives in which payrolls, correspondences, and petitions have survived. So-called “Moors” were also depicted in visual media, figuring as servants, pages, or subordinate familiars in portraits of monarchs and nobles. In addition, there is a smattering of printed sources like baptismal sermons or court calendars. Enslaved individuals not employed at court usually left barely any traces in the archives. Parish registers sometimes provide information on non-European individuals—but only for those who were baptized, married, or died in a German principality. As a result, there has been an enduring debate among German historians regarding the existence of slavery within the Holy Roman Empire. Some have argued that slaves bought by Germans were automatically redeemed or became free upon baptism, while others consider the status of the affected individuals

to be fundamentally ambivalent. Recent studies have been able to prove the existence of slavery quite unequivocally while at the same time emphasizing the variety and complexity of the history of enslavement within the early modern Holy Roman Empire.²

When thinking about slavery, early modern Germans themselves most likely envisioned enslaved Christians. Popular captivity narratives, church sermons, the activities of ransoming orders like the Trinitarians, and the government-managed ransoming funds (*Sklavenkassen*) in Hanseatic port cities all helped to establish the trope of the unlucky Christian enslaved by North African corsairs or Ottoman armies. It must be kept in mind that for centuries, the Mediterranean and Atlantic coasts of Europe and the southeastern marchlands of the Habsburg Empire were slaving frontiers for North African and Ottoman raiders, making the threat of captivity very real for soldiers, mariners, or sea travelers. And while the supposed “Turkish danger” never reached beyond the gates of Vienna, its menacing shadow haunted the imagination of German readers for a long time.³

By contrast, the Atlantic slave trade and the enslavement of African and Asian people in the Indian Ocean seemed a distant matter. Germans were involved in colonial ventures that made use of the slave trade and the plantation economy, but this activity represented what has been characterized as “colonialism by proxy.” Since there was no German colonial empire before the second half of the nineteenth century, knowledge of the colonies held significantly less importance and was not as widely disseminated in the Holy Roman Empire as it was in places like Britain, France, Spain, or Portugal. Combined with the specters of Christian captivity and Muslim slaving, this reinforced the comforting (though false) notion that Germans had no part in slave trading and slavery: While early modern Germans readily expected to find slavery outside of (Christian) Europe, they hardly reckoned to encounter it amongst themselves. This bias may consequently have informed their perceptions of enslaved individuals in Germany.

The entry on slavery in the German-language encyclopedia *Zedler's Universal-Lexicon* (published from 1731 to 1754) focuses almost exclusively on enslaved Christians in North Africa. West Indian plantation slavery is mentioned only in passing, asserting that the fate of enslaved Africans in the West Indies was considerably less unpleasant than that endured by Christians in North Africa. Only the entry on “Nigritien” (“the country of the Blacks”) discussed the trafficking of Africans to America. The anonymous author vehemently defended the slave trade, claiming that the enslavement of Africans was solely a result of internecine warfare and the desire for financial gain. Employing a cynical but common argumentative *volte*, he reasoned that Christian slave traders were actually saving the enslaved from a much worse fate—namely, being slaves of Satan—than the one they were to experience in the West Indies. In general, the entries in *Zedler's* encyclopedia reveal a limited familiarity with contemporary colonization and slavery practices.⁴

After 1760, following the trend toward abolitionist criticism elsewhere in Europe, the Atlantic slave trade began to assume a more central position in the mind of German-speaking publicists and the reading public. But even during the final decade of the eighteenth century, many still believed that Germans “had never sullied themselves by participating in this trade.”⁵ The notion that enslavement and the slave trade were confined to the history of former maritime powers and colonial states like Britain, the Netherlands, Spain, or Portugal along with American nations like the United States or Brazil has proven to be quite persistent in Germany as well as in other successor states of the Holy Roman Empire.

ENTRY OF ENSLAVED PERSONS INTO THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

The moment of the transfer of power over enslaved persons is significant. In the situation where a person enters into the possession of another, enslavement as a practice and its acceptance become irrefutably apparent. Slaves arriving in the Holy Roman Empire had typically become enslaved outside of it—in locations in Africa, Asia, somewhere at sea, along the coasts of the Mediterranean—or had been born into slavery. They would often have been traded or exchanged between different proprietors several times before ending up in German territories. This was different for the captives taken in the wars against the Ottoman Empire insofar as their captivity was often limited. Depending on their rank and financial means, they were ransomed or exchanged for Christians. The processing of captives taken by German forces during their campaigns against the Ottomans in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries was increasingly handled by military officials. Unlucky individuals who were not exchanged or had no means to raise a ransom are often labeled as slaves in the sources. Many of them were put up for sale on slave markets—not only in frontier regions, but in German territories as well. In addition, significant numbers of captives were carried away by individual officers or soldiers as spoils of war.⁶

In the Holy Roman Empire, the procurement of slaves was not motivated by a need for enslaved labor. The tasks performed by slaves elsewhere—field-work, hard labor, or household service—were easily filled through existing practices of labor organization. Rather, it was primarily persons regarded as dark-skinned and usually labeled “Moors” who were sought as representative servants. In the sixteenth century, enslaved persons were exchanged through interconnected networks of long-distance merchants and the nobility from Italy and the Iberian kingdoms to courts and towns north of the Alps. For example, between 1569 and 1575, Duke Wilhelm V of Bavaria purchased “Moors” and “Turks” (and “Dwarfs”) for his court in Landshut. He employed the services of the Fuggers in Lisbon and Hamburg as well as business partners and agents in Milan and Genoa for this purpose. After the Thirty Years’ War, the demand for “Moors” rapidly increased when minor courts and individual

nobles began to add such servants to their staff as well. With transatlantic networks gaining importance in the seventeenth century, enslaved persons arrived in the Empire via Dutch, Danish, and British trading routes. Still, the process of acquiring slaves rarely followed direct lines; instead, it was often a haphazard, episodic affair. This made enslaved individuals an expensive commodity of infrequent availability. They were brought singly, by twos or threes, or in small groups by ship captains, merchants, soldiers, missionaries, and others traveling from the colonies. An example is Christian Real, a trumpeter in the service of the Duke of Württemberg. He was originally brought to Germany by Joß Kramer, a German officer in the Swedish Africa Company in 1657. Kramer had Real baptized in Lindau at Lake Constance in a spectacular ceremony. The baptismal sermon by Jacob Fussenegger was published in 1658 and is a valuable source providing information on contemporary perceptions along with glimpses into Real's life before he arrived in Germany. Upon leaving for the Netherlands, Kramer presented Christian Real to a friend, who in turn gifted him to Duke Eberhard of Württemberg.⁷

Another avenue was provided by Portuguese merchants, many of them Jews or so-called New Christians, settling in Stade, Hamburg, Glücksstadt, or Bremen accompanied by enslaved servants. In 1680, the Glücksstadt merchant Moyses Josua Henriques, who employed four enslaved Africans in his own household, recalled how his parents "like other citizens, either of the Portuguese or other nations, had had Moors in their service or used them as needed." Illustrating the scarcity and demand for "Moors," one of Henriques' slaves was abducted—with the perpetrator being a Lieutenant Colonel von Richelieu, no less.⁸

A case evidencing the random availability of "Moors" or slaves from other parts of the world is that of two enslaved Native Americans, Ocktscha Rinscha and Tuski Stannaki, who were dragged through half of Europe between 1719 and 1723. They—or rather their tattooed bodies—were presented in taverns as well as to kings and queens. In Dresden, they were eventually sold to Augustus II, King of Poland and Elector of Saxony, and added to his court. Because of the infrequent availability of so-called "Moors" even in the eighteenth century, princes or nobles keen to acquire prestigious servants often had agents scouring places like London, Amsterdam, or Copenhagen, or placed orders with merchant houses there. The latter in turn often contracted with slaving ship captains, and some merchants apparently specialized in the slave-trading business. In 1703, Jonathan Belcher, who visited the Hanoverian court at Herrenhausen, was told of a man in Kassel who allegedly supplied the court with slaves. Frederick II, the landgrave of Hesse-Kassel, used the services of the Amsterdam banker and slaver Jean de Barry Daniels to acquire at least five "Moors" for his court. Official slaving companies transported only a relatively small number of enslaved persons to Germany: No more than twenty-four "Moors" delivered by the short-lived Brandenburg African American Company to the Prussian court between 1699 and 1717 have been identified.⁹

Mariners, especially sea captains of slaving ships, occupied a special position in the procurement of enslaved people for service at Central European courts.¹⁰ They received commissions, which were sometimes paid in slaves, or engaged in the slave trade themselves. Small numbers of enslaved individuals thus arrived on slaving ships in London, Amsterdam, Middelstadt, Glücksstadt, Stade, Copenhagen, or other port cities linked to the slave trade, from where they were taken to destinations in the Holy Roman Empire. In 1757, captain Jan Michelsen brought a young “Moor” he had purchased “during a public auction in Suriname” to the German North Sea island of Sylt. Likewise returning from Suriname in 1764, the farrier Johann Jacob Drezler gave an enslaved boy as a present to Duke Karl Eugen of Baden-Württemberg. The child was lodged with the “Chamber Moor” Joseppi Pietro delli Santo Belli. These cases are also typical in that the Dutch colony of Suriname became especially important as a source region by the second half of the eighteenth century since many Germans were active there as plantation owners and overseers.¹¹

In exchanges between courts, noble families, or wealthy merchants, “Moors,” “Turks,” “Tatars,” or Native Americans were certainly gifts intended to showcase status and increase the prestige of both the giver and recipient. But it was not always an exchange between equals: Sometimes, slaves were used by those of lesser status to elevate their standing by way of an extraordinary gift. For example, when Jonathan Belcher, heir of a rich New England merchant, presented Sophia of Hanover with an enslaved Native American he had named Io and brought from Boston, it was a gesture intended to demonstrate Belcher’s access to the highest circles of Europe’s aristocracy and his personal friendship with the electress.¹² In some cases, these enslaved servants and wards had become a burden to their masters, who looked for ways to get rid of them while at the same time trying to make sure they were provided for. Carl von Imhoff, an officer and painter with the British East India Company, brought along two enslaved children when he came back to Germany in 1774. Short of funds, he soon became desperate to sell or give away the “little Moors” and was eventually able to place them at the Weimar court. A mixture of both motivations may have been at work in the case of the “black Malabar” Samuel Johannes Felix: In 1743, the ship’s surgeon Christian Dober returned to Germany after serving with the Dutch East India Company (VOC). Accompanying him was a thirteen-year-old slave named Felix. Dober intended to join the Moravian Church and “gifted” Felix to Countess Erdmuthé Dorothea von Zinzendorf, wife of Moravian leader Nikolaus Ludwig von Zinzendorf, before settling in Herrnhut in Upper Lusatia. Felix was subsequently put in a Moravian school in the Wetterau region near Frankfurt, was baptized Samuel Johannes, and received training as a tailor.¹³

There are significant imbalances in the age and gender distributions of enslaved people entering the Holy Roman Empire. Those trafficked from the African Coast, the West Indies, or North and South America were usually children below the age of twelve. The recipients often seem to have been regarded

as wardens of these children, responsible for their education as well as their religious instruction. Furthermore, children may have been considered more easily able to adapt to the foreign social surroundings they encountered in Germany and learn to fill the roles and functions assigned to them—as wards as well as pious converts, prestigious servants, and loyal subordinates. There was also a significantly greater proportion of men. In a quantitative analysis of a sample of 380 so-called “Moors” in Germany—most of them employed at courts or in military positions—males accounted for more than eighty percent. The gender distribution among Ottoman captives brought to the Holy Roman Empire seems to have been slightly less unbalanced, with around half of them being women and children.¹⁴

FORMS AND EXPERIENCES OF ENSLAVEMENT IN THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

In the Holy Roman Empire, slavery was not an unambiguous and immutable category. In the Dutch and Danish West Indies, on the other hand—from where many enslaved persons were brought to the empire—being assigned to the category “Black” translated into being a slave. Qualifiers like “free people of color,” respectively “vrij Neger” in Dutch or “frineger” in Danish, were used to describe manumitted individuals and their descendants. In the colonial environment, the social position of enslaved persons was narrowly defined, as were the types of labor they performed and the manner in which they were expected to conduct themselves. Obviously, the connection between a normative system and social realities is complex—but what is important here is that such a “place” of slavery did not exist in Germany, and neither did forms of labor linked solely to slavery and therefore bearing its stigma. Also, the perceived color of a person’s skin was not an essential marker of enslavement like it was in the West Indies. After all, enslaved Tatars as well as enslaved captives from the Balkans could be encountered in German territories. Whether a person was enslaved or not was therefore difficult to infer from visual markers alone.

Generally, individuals enslaved in the Atlantic slaving networks and arriving in early modern Germany experienced a transition from the colonial “slave society” into a “society with (a few) slaves.” Sources tell us little about how this was perceived by the individuals concerned—but their experience clearly differed from that of enslaved people coming out of Mediterranean “societies with slaves,” for whom the change entailed by moving into early modern German society may have been less profound.

The laws and ordinances of German principalities made no explicit provisions for slavery until the late eighteenth century. Since proprietorial claims were very rarely questioned, let alone brought before courts, there was little impetus to regulate the status of slaves in the empire until the late 1700s. And there was certainly no free-soil principle like in France or the Netherlands, which supposedly conveyed freedom to any enslaved entering the respective

territory. This by no means translated into a refutation of slavery, however—let alone a nullification of slave status. Rather, the notion of slavery and slave owning was well established in early modern Germany, and there was a considerable amount of legal literature and ample traditions that fully accepted enslavement. To arrive at legal definitions of slavery, German law practitioners and scholars turned to practical applications of Roman law known as *usus modernus pandectarum*. There was a consensus that Germans could not become another's property in the sense of the Roman *servus*, but this did not extend to slaves brought into the empire or to non-Christian captives. The latter could be enslaved in reciprocity (*iure retorsionis*). Sometimes the rightful enslavement of "Turks" was employed to argue the legitimacy of enslaving so-called "heathen" Africans as well. The important law scholar Ludwig Julius Friedrich Höpfner, in his widely read commentary on Roman law (*Theoretisch-praktischer Commentar*) of 1783, unequivocally explained that there was a contemporaneous slavery consisting of "true slaves." These were "Negro slaves" and "captured Turks." The former, Höpfner went on, "are brought to us from Holland and other empires" and should be "treated according to Roman law." Another influential jurist, Gustav Hugo, in 1791 rejected the application of Roman law in such cases, instead arguing for full acknowledgment of the possession of slaves based on colonial law. The influential philosopher Christian von Wolff, reflecting on dominion in a rationally ordered society in 1723, legitimized slavery with an awkward rationalist argument, claiming that those who would do harm when free could be enslaved "until they could find happiness in freedom."¹⁵

The vast majority of enslaved persons in early modern Germany found themselves labeled "Moors" or "Blacks." The German term "Mohr" ("Moor") was an umbrella term applied to anyone considered dark-skinned by German contemporaries. Until well into the eighteenth century, the term also carried associations with the Muslim world: North Africans of various ethnic backgrounds as well as inhabitants of the Ottoman Empire were sometimes referred to as "Moors" regardless of the hue of their skin. Sometimes the word's meaning was extended to include unlikely candidates: In 1742 in the Moravian Church settlement of Marienborn in the Wetterau region, a "Moors' love feast" was attended among others by a Tatar and a German Sinto. In 1675, the presence of "a Moor from China [sic] in Asia" is recorded in Speyer. Thus, even though Germans routinely participated in the Atlantic and Indian Ocean slave trades as well as the West Atlantic plantation economies by the eighteenth century, the term "Moor" was not limited to Africans but could also be used to designate Muslims, East Indians, or anyone considered to be vaguely "oriental." It was not associated with a concept of ethnic veracity, but rather with a cosmography structured by religious differences. The term "Neger" ("Negro"), on the other hand, became common in the German language only during the second half of the eighteenth century, bearing testament to the ever closer connection to the Atlantic world and the attendant colonial discourse. Although it never entirely supplanted the

older term “Moor,” the two words became increasingly synonymous as time went by. While it may thus be tempting to dismiss “Moor” as a quaint, traditional term of sorts, colonial discourse eventually loaded it with the same racist connotations as “Neger.” What distinguished the former was an enduring association with a function of representative service. The term “Sklave” (“slave”) itself was not particularly common in early modern Germany. Instead, when referring to slaves, the terms “Leibeigene” (serfs) or “Knechte” (servants) were often employed. It is important to emphasize that this did not mean actual serfdom was equated with slavery, as the differences were quite clear—both to scholars and lay people. However, such conflation was sometimes articulated with polemical intent in debates about the abolition of serfdom.¹⁶

Slave status also often remained masked by other forms of servitude and dependency. Most enslaved were employed as servants, and the work they did—whether it entailed hauling water or waiting on their masters in embroidered liveries—did not differ from that of other servants. What set them apart was their visibility: Those considered dark-skinned or “Black” by early modern Germans possessed unique representational value, with their bodies communicating a message regarding their masters’ cosmopolitan elegance, wealth, and status. Their alterity was emphasized visually by clothing them in generic “oriental” accoutrements.

In the registers, calendars, and payrolls of early modern courts, these prestigious servants are listed as “Court Moors” or “Chamber Moors.” They usually seem to have received wages, and their positions could bring a measure of respectability, influence, or even power within the court hierarchy. Others were assigned to various other functions like runner, messenger, lackey, groom, etc., which were often staffed with representative foreigners. Still others marched as trumpeters, drummers, or oboists (hautboists) with court processions and served in military units. An example of this was the court of Augustus II, where a number of positions were held by “Moors” and “Turks” of various origins. For grand festivities, soldiers were dressed up in “Turkish style,” creating the illusion of an Ottoman court with Augustus II at its center. Smaller courts throughout Germany sometimes employed a significant number of “Moors” as well. In 1714, Frederick William I of Prussia tried to have a staggering 150 to 170 “Moors” delivered from the trading location Arguim on the West-African coast. They were intended for service as musicians in the Prussian army. Although this plan did not come to fruition, it demonstrates the significance attached to employing such personnel.¹⁷

Obviously, the value accorded to so-called “Moors” had repercussions on their status and perception. Eva Lind has aptly characterized their position as one of “privileged dependency”: While “Court Moors” were on equal standing with white servants, drew a salary, and enjoyed numerous benefits, many of them were listed in the lower tiers of the pay registers. For instance, the Württemberg court trumpeter Christian Real only received slightly more than half the wages of his fellow trumpeters. Nevertheless, some such slaves enjoyed remarkable careers: Rudolf August Mohr, purchased by Duke Rudolf

August of Württemberg from a Jewish merchant in 1684, was held in high esteem by the ducal family. He eventually married, received a considerable salary, and was granted a pension. After his death, a printed funeral sermon was published. At the Berleburg court, Ferdinand Christian Coridon, originally brought as a slave from Berbice, eventually served in several administrative functions. Two former Ottoman captives, Mahomet and Mustapha, saved the life of Georg Ludwig of Hanover during the Battle of Vienna in 1683, earning themselves positions of trust close to the future king of England. The “Chamber Moor” Ignatius Fortuna was brought from Suriname to Essen in 1730, where he entered the service of Countess Palatine Franziska Christina of Sulzbach and remained there for nearly forty years. He was ranked third among her retinue and became a wealthy man, lending and donating considerable sums. But even such remarkable examples depended on a patron’s support and generosity, and they cannot be regarded as typical.¹⁸

Most enslaved individuals would receive at least the rudiments of religious education, and many were baptized, since this was considered a responsibility of any Christian master. Especially for nobles and princes, the baptism of “Moors” or “Turks” provided highly valued opportunities for representation. Indeed, a “missionary impulse” was sometimes part of the motivation for buying a slave in the first place: In 1732, the Prussian official Jakob Philip Manitius bought a seven-year-old boy from Guinea for a hundred reichsthaler from the ship carpenter Martin Harnack. The purchase contract explicitly stated that the child was enslaved and that all proprietary rights were transferred to Manitius. What is more, the contract mentions that Manitius was part of a larger group of “gentlemen” who intended to educate the child in the Christian religion and “useful sciences.” The young “Moor” was eventually sent to the Collegium Fridericianum in Königsberg. A later purchase offer for the same individual by the duchess of Holstein is also preserved, further proving the straightforward and ordinary character of such transactions. In a surprising twist, the young man was soon thereafter abducted by several soldiers who may have been acting on orders by Charles Frederick of Holstein-Gottorp.¹⁹

In 1757, the Moravian ship captain Nicholas Garrison bought a young African by the name of Fortune in Suriname, allegedly because “he recognized his pleasant, cheerful, and honest character, which was very different from the character of the other Negroes, and thought he might come to love the Savior; and therefore, he felt a great affection for him.”²⁰ Garrison brought Fortune to Germany and eventually left him with the Moravian congregation in Niesky, where he worked in a bagmaker’s shop. Religious education may also have been considered to increase a slave’s worth, as in the case of a “Surinamese Moor” offered to the landgrave of Hesse by an Amsterdam physician in 1774. The latter assured the landgrave that he had taken pains to teach the “Moor” the “Christian religion” and turn him into a “useful subject.”²¹

Several “Moors” are known to have married into German families. While in itself an indication that integration into German society was possible both

through professional and familial networks, the problems and restrictions encountered by many of these couples show that (former) enslavement could be perceived as a mark of dishonor. Questions of honor also played a role in a violent altercation involving court trumpeter Christian Real in 1669: during a night out in Stuttgart, he was viciously attacked and severely wounded by a group of hunting attendants, who resented his status within the court and military hierarchy. Not only does the persistent labeling of Real as a “Moor” in the extant sources point to an underlying social construction of difference and otherness, but the interrogations and petitions during the criminal case against his attackers reveal that at least some contemporaries essentialized the label “Moor” as dishonoring.²²

Given the considerable discrepancies in the living conditions of enslaved individuals in early modern Germany, it comes as no surprise that the forms and levels of coercion they were subject to also varied substantially. Generalization is hardly possible in this regard; like other servants and bondpeople, slaves’ experiences depended on their ability to fulfill assigned functions, on the possibility of building relationships of trust and support across and along hierarchies, and on the character and predispositions of the individuals involved. War captives employed in large-scale, labor-intensive construction certainly faced harsher realities than a trusted valet. Captives belonging to the Bavarian elector after being taken during the conquest of Buda in 1686, for instance, were put to work digging channels for the waterworks at Schleißheim Palace.²³

But even in the most splendid surroundings, enslaved individuals could face brutal coercion. Jonathan Belcher reported a particularly grim story related to him during his stay at the Hanover court in Herrenhausen in 1704. One of the elector’s musicians, a young enslaved boy, had run away several times, whereupon the elector himself threatened to have two of his fingers cut off. While violence against servants was certainly common enough during this period, such cruel punishment—even if it remained a mere threat—seems rather extreme.²⁴ It is remarkable that a New England merchant accustomed to the face of colonial slavery felt the urge to record this account. In general, the frequently mentioned attempts to run away serve as reminders of the harsh realities of servants’ lives, whether enslaved or not.

An infamous example of how the mark of alterity could persist despite a brilliant career is that of Angelo Soliman. This former African slave rose to prominence in eighteenth-century Vienna as a well-connected courtier, Freemason, and friend of Emperor Joseph II. And yet, after his death in 1796, his skin was removed, stuffed, and displayed clothed in feathers and pearls. Such gruesome disregard was experienced not only by individuals designated as “Moors,” as the example of painter Feodor Iwanowitsch Kalmyk illustrates. Captured as a child by Cossacks somewhere in the Altai region, he was trafficked to the court of Catharina II of Russia and eventually ended up in the service of Princess Amalie of Hesse-Darmstadt in Karlsruhe. There he received artistic training and enjoyed a distinguished career as a painter. He spent years

studying in Italy, and in 1800 accompanied Lord Elgin to Athens to document architecture, statues, and reliefs of classical Greece in marvelous drawings. Not only was this internationally esteemed artist still referred to as “a Kalmuck slave” on an English etching as late as 1815, but after encountering Feodor Iwanowitsch in Karlsruhe in the same year, Johann Wolfgang Goethe quipped offhandedly that he should be stuffed and put on display. Such actions and sentiments would hardly have been aimed at individuals considered to be “Christian” or “Europeans,” allowing the conclusion that “Moors”—despite any honors bestowed upon them or esteem they had garnered—were more vulnerable than other members of the society that had supposedly integrated them.²⁵

EXIT FROM ENSLAVEMENT IN THE HOLY ROMAN EMPIRE

Given the often obscure character of enslavement in the Holy Roman Empire, it is no surprise that the possibilities of exiting slavery are a complex topic as well. There are only a few known records documenting manumissions in Germany.²⁶ This is somewhat bewildering since formal manumission was well known in the context of serfdom. While some documents may not have survived, it seems safe to assume that there were a considerable number of informal manumissions. Especially in the case of “Court Moors” or valets in wealthy households, exit from enslavement may not have occurred by way of a formal act. Instead, it may have been a matter of changes in perception and treatment. In the absence of obvious markers of enslavement in everyday life, the transition to freedom may have been equally indistinct. Indeed, some “Moors” may never have been regarded as slaves by their masters in the first place. Rudolf August Mohr may be a case in point, as may his temporary fellow “Court Moor” at Wolfenbüttel, the famous Anton Wilhelm Amo. The latter was given to Duke Anton Ulrich as a present in 1708 and listed among the household servants between 1721 and 1725. Independently of each other, both men were offered the option to attend university. While Mohr decided against the academic environment, Amo proceeded to read philosophy and law at Halle. Under these circumstances, it seems highly unlikely that the Dukes of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel considered these men bound to them by slavery rather than by a patron–client relationship.²⁷

Transitional rituals—most importantly baptism—may have signified an individual’s exit from slavery in some instances. But while there was a general agreement that non-Christian enemies captured in war could be enslaved, there evidently was no automatism linking baptism to manumission. What is more, contemporary jurists like Christian Thomasius or Ludwig Julius Friedrich Höpfner were quite adamant in their opposition to such notions.²⁸

A further possibility of exiting slavery was abscondence, though there are only a few known cases of fugitive slaves in the Holy Roman Empire. Servants, serfs, soldiers, and others readily used escape as a form of passive resistance, and so did enslaved individuals. At the same time, escaping is an act clearly

demonstrating agency. The future “Court Moor” Rudolf August Mohr first came to the attention of the Duke of Brunswick-Wolfenbüttel at the Leipzig Easter fair in 1684, where he had been hiding in a church to avoid being sold to another merchant by his master. Christian Real had been appointed as a page to Duchess Maria Dorothea before becoming the Duke of Württemberg’s trumpeter. For unknown reasons, he ran away while serving in this function and was returned by force. The “black Malabar” Samuel Johannes, who had been “gifted” to Countess Zinzendorf in 1743, absconded from Herrnhut in 1754. The officials of the countess’ patrimonial court undertook considerable efforts to apprehend the “wild slave,” but came up emptyhanded. Samuel Johannes made his way to Berlin, but finding no employment there, he eventually returned to the Moravians after several weeks.²⁹

Slaves and former slaves also occasionally undertook to define their situation and win autonomy by legal means. In 1780, an anonymous man in the service of Royal Prussian Chamberlain Joachim Erdmann von Arnim petitioned Frederick II of Prussia for his freedom. He argued that he had only entered into a limited service contract with Arnim, while the latter claimed to have bought the man as a slave in Copenhagen. The King made his decision dependent on the petitioner’s ability to produce a contract stipulating terms of service, which he could not. The court case of Franz Wilhelm Yonga against his former master, councilor Franz Christian von Borries, was far more convoluted: Spanning the period from 1790 to 1795, it illustrates both the persistence of slavery and the ambiguities characterizing the position of so-called “Moors.” Borries had purchased Yonga as a youth in London in 1763. Twenty-six years later, he sold him to Count Leopold of Lippe, who employed Yonga at his court. Soon thereafter Yonga, who was experiencing financial difficulties, sued Borries at the Lippe High Court for wages due for twenty-two years of service. He based his claim on two different and somewhat contradictory assertions: First, he claimed to have become free upon his baptism in 1767. Later on, he produced an assessment by an English lawyer stating that he had become free upon arriving in Britain according to the verdict in the famous Somerset case of 1772. But the proceedings ended with the judges denying Yonga’s case and essentially affirming the proprietary rights of masters over enslaved persons brought into the Holy Roman Empire. Remarkably enough, in an unrelated petition to Count Leopold in 1794, the same Yonga—now trying to avert his discharge—argued that he belonged to the Count and could therefore not simply be dismissed. He thus refuted or embraced the status of slavery depending on circumstance, tenaciously juggling arguments in attempts to safeguard his own interests.³⁰

Former “Moors” who had lost their positions or fled from their masters were threatened to a considerable degree by destitution. For individuals who had come to Germany from Africa, the West Indies, or the Indian Ocean region—whether free or unfree—using their ability to assume the role of “Moor” may have been the most feasible or even the only option for supporting themselves. Numerous examples of individuals traveling from

town to town in eighteenth-century Germany seeking employment as servants can be found. For example, on November 4, 1742, a “Moor from Copenhagen” appeared in the Moravian church settlement of Herrnhag to offer his services to Count Zinzendorf. He left the next day, apparently to try his luck at the next likely manor. In 1743, an “employment-seeking Moor” received a handout at the court of the counts of Reuß-Plauen in Obergreiz in Thuringia.³¹

Exiting slavery became more regulated and presumably easier with the introduction of legal measures by German states. Officially, slavery as an institution was ended at different times in various territories. Before the dissolution of the Holy Roman Empire, only the *Allgemeines Landrecht* (General State Laws) of Prussia introduced in 1794 proclaimed that slavery was not to be condoned there. Enslaved individuals brought to Prussia by their owners with the intent to settle there were considered released from slavery, although some obligations to their masters could persist. At the same time, the rights of slave owners bringing enslaved individuals into Prussian territory for a limited time only were explicitly protected. Only in 1857 was slavery unambiguously prohibited in Prussia. In the Austrian Empire, the *Allgemeines Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch* (General Civil Code) of 1811 explicitly outlawed slavery.³²

CONCLUSION

The lives and experiences of enslaved people in early modern Germany defy simple generalizations. It is clear that slavery existed in the Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation at the time: historical case studies as well as jurisprudence provide ample evidence of its persistence and acceptance. At the same time, they confound an understanding of enslavement as something singular and exceptionally drastic. Unlike West Indian plantation economies, where the status of slavery appears as an all-determining factor, its consequences in German society are much more ambiguous, and research has produced fragments of highly distinct and varied biographies. For example, although readily recognized as “Moors,” Rudolf August Mohr or Ignatius Fortuna in their later years were hardly deemed slaves by their contemporaries. Such individuals had considerable status conferred upon them by their noble masters, they undeniably had influence because of their positions, and their wealth and ownership of property confirms them as actively participating members of the society they lived in. At the same time, others were bought, sold, and coerced into obedience by violent measures; captives were forced to perform hard labor, and fugitives were pursued as runaway slaves.

The dependencies and hierarchies imposed on these foreigners in Germany, as well as the roles they filled and the jobs they did, served to obscure slavery. They may even have rendered the enslaved status essentially meaningless in some cases, although one may assume that the affected individuals retained a clear idea of their own enslavement. Nevertheless, it is also obvious that these men, women, and children were set apart in the perception of their German

contemporaries, as evidenced by labels like “Moor” or “Black.” They occupied a specific position open to them because of the origins and qualities attributed to them. And it becomes equally apparent that to many, this did not confer privilege or security. The inherent contradictions in these stories may vex historians; to early modern Germans, however, who were used to navigating a richly stratified society and culture, they may have been much less significant. It is perhaps precisely these contradictions and opacity thwarting the piercing gaze of historical enquiry that represent the most significant characteristic of enslavement in the early modern Holy Roman Empire of the German Nation.

Acknowledgements I would like to thank Giulia Bonazza, Juliane Schiel, and Klaus Weber for their insightful comments on drafts of this chapter.

NOTES

1. Monika Firla, ed., *Exotisch, böfisch, bürgerlich: Afrikaner in Württemberg vom 15. bis 19. Jahrhundert. Katalog zur Ausstellung des Hauptstaatsarchivs Stuttgart; [vom 14. März bis 29. Juni 2001]* (Stuttgart, 2001); Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich: Handel, Migration, Hof* (Göttingen: V & R Unipress, 2013); Markus Friedrich, “‘Türken’ im Alten Reich: Zur Aufnahme und Konversion von Muslimen im deutschen Sprachraum (16.–18. Jahrhundert),” *Historische Zeitschrift* 294, no. 2 (2012); Renate Dürr, “Inventing a Lutheran Ritual: Baptisms of Muslims and Africans in Early Modern Germany,” in *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformations*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020).
2. For debate on enslaved persons in early modern Germany see Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Sarah Lentz, and Josef Köstlbauer, “Beyond Exceptionalism—Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850,” in *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650–1850*, ed. Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2021), 5–9.
3. Magnus Ressel, “Eine Rezeptionsskizze der atlantischen Sklaverei im frühneuzeitlichen protestantischen Deutschland,” in *Theologie und Sklaverei von der Antike bis in die Frühe Neuzeit*, ed. Nicole Priesching and Heike Grieser (Hildesheim: Georg Olms, 2016).
4. “Slave, Leibeigener, Knecht,” in *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon aller Wissenschaften und Künste*, ed. Johann Heinrich Zedler, vol. 36 (Leipzig: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1743), 643–45; “Nigritien, oder das Land der Schwarzen,” in *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, ed. Zedler, vol. 24 (Leipzig: Johann Heinrich Zedler, 1740), 887–91.
5. Sarah Lentz, “*Wer helfen kann, der helfe!*”: *Deutsche SklavereigeegnerInnen und die atlantische Abolitionsbewegung 1780–1860* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020), 123.
6. Manja Quakatz, “‘... denen Sklaven gleich gehalten werden’: Muslimisch-osmanische Kriegsgefangene im Heiligen Römischen Reich Deutscher Nation (1683–1699),” *Werkstatt Geschichte* 66, no. 67 (2015); Friedrich, “‘Türken’ im Alten Reich”; Stephan Theilig, *Türken, Mohren und Tataren: Muslimische*

- (*Lebens-*)*Welten in Brandenburg-Preussen im 18. Jahrhundert* (Berlin Germany: Frank & Timme, 2013).
7. Mark Häberlein, *Aufbruch ins globale Zeitalter: Die Handelswelt der Fugger und Welser* (Darmstadt: Theiss, Konrad, 2016), 161; Arne Spohr, "Violence, Social Status, and Blackness in Early Modern Germany: The Case of the Black Trumpeter Christian Real (ca. 1643–after 1674)," in *Beyond Exceptionalism*, ed. von Mallinckrodt, Köstlbauer, Lentz, 62–65.
 8. Peter Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren: Afrikaner in Geschichte und Bewußtsein der Deutschen* (Hamburg: Junius, 1993), 64, 104–5.
 9. Craig Koslofsky, "Slavery and Skin: The Native Americans Ocktscha Rinscha and Tuski Stannaki in the Holy Roman Empire, 1722–1734," in *Beyond Exceptionalism*, ed. von Mallinckrodt, Köstlbauer, Lentz; Mark A. Peterson, "Theopolis Americana: Boston and the Protestant International," in *Soundings in Atlantic History: Latent Structures and Intellectual Currents, 1500–1830*, ed. Bernard Bailyn and Patricia L. Denault (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2009), 337–38; Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*, 66–67.
 10. Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch Geschichte der Sklaverei: Eine Globalgeschichte von den Anfängen bis zur Gegenwart* (De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2019), 1:569–74; Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*, 66.
 11. Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 129, 131; Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*, 54–55; Firla, *Exotisch, höfisch, bürgerlich*, 65.
 12. Peterson, "Theopolis Americana," 341.
 13. Gerhard Koch, ed., *Imhoff Indienfahrer: Ein Reisebericht aus dem 18. Jahrhundert in Briefen und Bildern* (Göttingen: Wallstein Verlag, 2001), 275–88; Josef Köstlbauer, "‘I Have No Shortage of Moors’: Mission, Representation, and the Elusive Semantics of Slavery in Eighteenth-Century Moravian Sources," in *Beyond Exceptionalism*, ed. von Mallinckrodt, Köstlbauer, Lentz, 120–21.
 14. Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, "Verschleppte Kinder im Heiligen Römischen Reich," in *Transkulturelle Mehrfachzugehörigkeit als kulturhistorisches Phänomen*, ed. Dagmar Freist, Sabine Kyora and Melanie Unseld; Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*, 123–25; Manja Quakatz, "‘Conversio Turci’: Konvertierte und zwangsgetaufte Osmanen. Religiöse und kulturelle Grenzgänger im Alten Reich (1683–1710)," in *Ein Raum im Wandel: Die osmanisch-habsburgische Grenzregion vom 16. bis zum 18. Jahrhundert*, ed. Szabolcs Varga and Norbert Spannenberger (Stuttgart: Steiner, 2014), 224.
 15. See for example "Rechtsgeschichte eines erkauften Mohren," *Beyträge zur juristischen Literatur in den preußischen Staaten*, no. 6 (1780): 296–311; Christoph Heinrich Schweser, *Theatrum servitutum oder Schauplatz der Dienstbarkeiten* (Raspe, 1769), 587–588, 599. See also *Grosses vollständiges Universal-Lexicon*, ed. Zedler, vol. 15 "Knechte," and vol. 38, "Soldatengefangennehmung"; on Höpfner and Hugo see Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, "Slavery and the Law in Eighteenth-Century Germany," in *Beyond Exceptionalism*, ed. von Mallinckrodt, Köstlbauer, Lentz; Christian von Wolff, *Vernünfftige Gedancken Von dem Gesellschaftlichen Leben der Menschen Und insonderheit Dem gemeinen Wesen: Zu Beförderung der Glückseligkeit des menschlichen Geschlechtes* (Frankfurt: Renger, 1747), 131–34.
 16. Kate Lowe, "The Black Diaspora in Europe in the Fifteenth and Sixteenth Centuries, with Special Reference to German-Speaking Areas," in *Germany and*

- the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250–1914*, ed. Mischa Honeck, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov (New York: Berghahn Books, 2013); Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*, 53; Köstlbauer, “I Have No Shortage of Moors,” 123–124; Renate Blickle, “Frei von fremder Willkür. Zu den gesellschaftlichen Ursprüngen der frühen Menschenrechte. Das Beispiel Altbayern,” in *Leibeigenschaft: Bäuerliche Unfreiheit in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Jan Klussmann (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 169–73.
17. Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 112.
 18. Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 130, 140; Stephen Menn and Justin E. H. Smith, eds., *Anton Wilhelm Amo’s Philosophical Dissertations on Mind and Body* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2020), 15–17; Ute Küppers-Braun, “Kammermohren: Ignatius Fortuna am Essener Hof und andere farbige Hofdiener,” *Das Münster am Hellweg* 54 (2001).
 19. See Renate Dürr, “Inventing a Lutheran Ritual: Baptisms of Muslims and Africans in Early Modern Germany,” in *Protestant Empires: Globalizing the Reformation*, ed. Ulinka Rublack (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Rebekka von Mallinckrodt, “Verhandelte (Un-) Freiheit: Sklaverei, Leibeigenschaft und innereuropäischer Wissenstransfer am Ausgang des 18. Jahrhunderts,” *Geschichte und Gesellschaft* 43, no. 3 (2017): 358–59. Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 105.
 20. Gemeinarchiv Niesky, *Lebenslauf Fortune*, March 27, 1763.
 21. Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*, 54–55; Uta Sadjj, “‘Unverbesserlich ausschweifende’ oder ‘brauchbare’ Subjekte? Mohren als ‘befreite’ Sklaven im Deutschland des 18. Jahrhunderts,” in *Literarische Imagologie: Formen und Funktionen nationaler Stereotype in der Literatur*, ed. János Riesz (Bayreuth: Ellwanger, 1980), 43; Mark Häberlein, “‘Mohren’, ständische Gesellschaft und atlantische Welt: Minderheiten und Kulturkontakte in der Frühen Neuzeit,” in *Atlantic Understandings: Essays on European and American History in Honor of Hermann Wellenreuther*, ed. Claudia Schnurmann and Hartmut Lehmann (Hamburg et al.: Lit, 2006), 97; Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 141.
 22. Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 145–51; Spohr, “Violence, Social Status, and Blackness,” 71–73.
 23. Friedrich, “‘Türken’ im Alten Reich,” 341.
 24. Peterson, “Theopolis Americana,” 337–38.
 25. Johannes Werner, *Der Kalmück: Das Leben des badischen Hofmalers Feodor Iwanowitsch* (Ubstadt-Weiher: Verlag Regionalkultur, 2016); Oliver Jehle, “Lord Elgin’s Kalmuk: Feodor Ivannoff und die Pluralisierung der Vaterländer,” in *Von analogen und digitalen Zugängen zur Kunst: Festschrift für Hubertus Kohle zum 60. Geburtstag*, ed. M. Effinger (arthistoricum.net, 2019).
 26. Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 134–35, 181–88; Jonathan Schorsch, *Jews and Blacks in the Early Modern World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).
 27. Menn and Smith, *Anton Wilhelm Amo’s Philosophical Dissertations*; Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 308–27; Jacob W. Heckenhauer, ed., *Adress-Calendar, der Hoch-Fürstlichen Braunschweig Lüneburgischen Haupt- und Residentz-Städte Wolfenbüttel und Braunschweig und daselbst befindlichen Fürstlichen Hofes, auch anderer Collegien, Instantien, und Expeditionen auf das Jahr Christi 1721* (Wolfenbüttel: Heckenhauer, 1721).

28. Christian Thomasius/Henning Adolph Koch, *De Ratione Status Dissertationem XV. & XVI. De votorum pluralitate de Arbitrio imperatoris [...]* cum adjuncta Quaestione An Mancipia Turcica per Baptismum manumittantur (Halle, 1693), § III; Friedrich, “‘Türken’ im Alten Reich,” 340.
29. Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 66, 130; Menn and Smith, *Anton Wilhelm Amo’s Philosophical Dissertations*, 17; Kuhlmann-Smirnov, *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich*, 147–48; Spohr, “Violence, Social Status, and Blackness,” 67; Josef Köstlbauer, “Subjugation by Labelling: Analysing the Semantics of Subservience in a Fugitive Slave Case from Eighteenth Century-Germany,” *Österreichische Zeitschrift für Geschichtswissenschaft* 34, no. 2 (2023).
30. von Mallinckrodt, “There Are No Slaves in Prussia?”; von Mallinckrodt, “Verhandelte (Un-) Freiheit,” 371–78.
31. Annika Bärwald, “Black Hamburg: People of Asian and African Descent Navigating a Late Eighteenth- and Early Nineteenth-Century Job Market,” in *Beyond Exceptionalism*, ed. von Mallinckrodt, Köstlbauer, Lentz; UA, R.8.33.b.3, Kurzes Diarium der Gemeine des Lammes in der Wetterau, vom Jahr 1742, 1742; Martin, *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren*, 157.
32. von Mallinckrodt, “Verhandelte (Un-) Freiheit,” 370–71; Walter Sauer, “From Slave Purchases to Child Redemption: A Comparison of Aristocratic and Middle-Class Recruiting Practices for ‘Exotic’ Staff in Habsburg Austria,” in *Beyond Exceptionalism*, ed. von Mallinckrodt, Köstlbauer, Lentz; Lentz, “*Wer helfen kann, der helfe!*”, 280–83.

FURTHER READINGS

- Brahm, Felix, and Eve Rosenhaft, eds. *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680-1850*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2016.
- Häberlein, Mark. “‘Mohren’, ständische Gesellschaft und atlantische Welt: Minderheiten und Kulturkontakte in der Frühen Neuzeit.” In *Atlantic Understandings: Essays on European and American History in Honor of Hermann Wellenreuther*, edited by Claudia Schnurmann and Hartmut Lehmann, 77–102. Hamburg: Lit, 2006.
- Honeck, Mischa, Martin Klimke, and Anne Kuhlmann-Smirnov, eds. *Germany and the Black Diaspora: Points of Contact, 1250-1914*. New York: Berghahn Books, 2013.
- Kuhlmann-Smirnov, Anne. *Schwarze Europäer im Alten Reich: Handel, Migration, Hof*. Göttingen: V&R Unipress, 2013.
- Lentz, Sarah. “*Wer helfen kann, der helfe!*” *Deutsche SklavereieigenerInnen und die atlantische Abolitionsbewegung 1780-1860*. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2020.
- von Mallinckrodt, Rebekka, Josef Köstlbauer, and Sarah Lentz, eds. *Beyond Exceptionalism: Traces of Slavery and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Germany, 1650-1850*. Berlin: De Gruyter Oldenbourg, 2021.
- Martin, Peter. *Schwarze Teufel, edle Mohren: Afrikaner in Geschichte und Bewußtsein der Deutschen*. Hamburg: Junius, 1993.
- Raphael-Hernandez, Heike, and Pia Wiegink, eds. *German Entanglements in Transatlantic Slavery*. London: Routledge, 2020.
- Theilig, Stephan. *Türken, Mohren und Tataren: Muslimische (Lebens-)Welten in Brandenburg-Preussen im 18. Jahrhundert*. Berlin: Frank & Timme, 2013.

Wimpler, Jutta, and Klaus Weber, eds. *Globalized Peripheries: Central Europe and the Atlantic World, 1680–1860*. Woodbridge: Boydell Press, 2020.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery and Serfdom in Muscovy and the Russian Empire

Hans-Heinrich Nolte^{id} and *Elena Smolarz*

INTRODUCTION

The history of servitude, bondage, and slavery in Russia—that is, in the Tsardom of Moscow or Muscovy (1547–1721) and in the Russian Empire (1721–1917)—includes different expressions, policies, structural dynamics, and institutional configurations. Some of these forms of strong asymmetrical dependency were autochthonous, and some were adapted as a result of political and economic contacts with neighboring states. In both cases, we find various different servile and working relations in the household, in agriculture, in crafts and trades.

Due to military conflicts and the incorporation of established practices from newly annexed territories in the imperial legal and economic space, Muscovy and the Russian Empire acquired non-Christian and non-Russian dependent people. Among them were Muslim, Buddhist, and Animist captives (*iasyri*), imported slaves and *iasak* people¹ in Siberia.²

In this chapter, we will focus on two widespread forms of strong asymmetrical social dependency: *kholopstvo* (indentured servitude) and *krepostnichestvo* (serfdom). Both groups are often considered slaves in academic discourse.

H.-H. Nolte
University of Hannover, Hanover, Germany

E. Smolarz (✉)
Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies, University of Bonn, Bonn,
Germany
e-mail: esmolarz@uni-bonn.de

Particular attention will be paid to the preconditions for becoming dependent or enserfed, to the respective legal status and its modification over time, to working and living conditions as well as occupations, and to ways of exiting the dependency or limiting its oppressiveness.

SLAVERY IN MEDIEVAL RUSSIA

Although foreign trade—including trade in slaves—had played a decisive part in the founding of the Kievan Rus',³ the importance of agriculture for princes and nobilities subsequently grew with the Christianization, the downturn of Byzantium, the surge in nomad power in the steppes between the Black Sea and the northern areas of the territory, and the intensification of control of the countryside. The noble elites increasingly lived off feudal rent rather than trade.

Most of what we know about this period⁴ stems from law codices written in the twelfth century and citing older texts—the “Russkaia Pravda.”⁵ In these codices, dependent people mostly are referred to as *roba*, *kholop*, or *cheliadin*. *Roba* is a word for a female worker derived from the Indo-European root *rb—‘*rabotat*’ (work).⁶ The term for a male worker is *kholop* (young man),⁷ indicating that labor by young people was common⁸; as with the term *deti boiarskie* (children of *boiars*) for the lower nobility, age was used to define social status. *Cheliadin* means a member of the household of a rich and/or noble person. The *cheliad* or household also had community functions: For example, it could hide a criminal member, but then had to pay the fine for him.

Articles 63–71 of the “Russkaia Pravda” describe three ways of becoming a “full” *kholop*: (1) bought before witnesses, (2) married to a *roba*, and (3) accepting a job as manager (*tiun*) of a prince or boyar. A full *kholop* was not allowed to testify in court (except as *tiun* “if necessary”), and if sentenced did not pay his fine to the prince but instead twice the amount to the plaintiff. Article 98 states that when an owner had children with a *roba*, the mother and children were to be set free when he died, albeit without claims to his inheritance. *Kholopy* were also forbidden to lend money, but permitted to trade if their owner agreed.

In the event of murder in the Kievan Rus', vengeance by family members was legal, but a so-called bloodwite (*vira*) could also be paid for killing a non-princely person.⁹ This fine was 16 times higher for the murder of a *tiun* (a steward or a manager of a prince) than for a peasant or a *kholop*; a *roba* was valued slightly higher than the latter. Article 89, which was added later, did away with the bloodwite for *kholopy* and *roby*, but a penal fee could still be paid to plaintiff and prince.

KHOLOPSTVO IN EARLY MODERN RUSSIA

From 1224 to 1226, the Kievan Rus' was conquered and became a western periphery of the Mongol Empire. The territory subsequently had to pay a regular tribute in silver or risk being left open to slaving raids. Until the eighteenth century, Eastern European Christians were captured in such slaving raids and sold in Muslim states from Bukhara to the Ottoman Empire. Similarly, in the wake of Russian victories, non-Orthodox captives became *iasyri*, servants to the Muslim nobility of the tsardom or, if baptized, *kholops*.¹⁰ Supported by the Church, the Moscow branch of the governing dynasty succeeded in uniting the country and stopped paying tribute in 1480. Envoys were employed in Kaffa to buy back enslaved Russians, for whose liberation everyone had to pay a special tax.

In medieval times, the economy north of the Oka River was dominated by slash-and-burn agriculture with migrating fields and villages. Beginning in the fifteenth century, permanent fields and the three-field system were introduced in the central region between the Volga and Oka rivers, providing more yields and economic prosperity and leading to more noble and clerical institutions as well as more control. New textual sources were also added: records maintained by the Church, the government, and the higher nobility.¹¹

Entry

Dependent people in the fifteenth century were called *liudi* (people), but the term could refer to members of the low nobility as well as to persons whose labor belonged entirely to an owner. The term *kholop* gained prominence again. *Kholopy* for life have been called slaves by Richard Hellie,¹² but since they formed the minority within the group and most *kholopy* were only obligated to labor for a certain time, we will translate the word as "indentured servant" following Alessandro Stanziani.¹³ When a *boiar* mentioned *kholopy* in his last will (1497), he noted their occupations as master of the stables, falconer, cook, German cook, bootmaker, tailor, carpenter, and so on. Occupations were also specified for some Tatars. Especially highlighted were *stradniki*, people who provided corvée (*barskchina*). Some *kholopy* handled the management of estates, but many labored as peasants in the socioeconomic sense, paying *obrok* (dues in cash and kind). From the end of the fifteenth century, the records for the city-state of Novgorod Velikii show an increase in the purchase and sale of peasants together with the properties they worked on in some hamlets, which also gave the respective lord influence within those villages. The common procedure was to hand over the keys (and thus the power) to the lord.

In his sample of *kholopy* for 1597 and 1603,¹⁴ Richard Hellie found that around two-thirds had sold themselves, more than one-tenth had become the property of their masters by way of a gift or inheritance, five percent were born into *kholopstvo*, and only few became indentured servants by captivity.

According to the “*Russkaia Pravda*,” a free person marrying an unfree one became a *kholop*. Exceptions did occur, but they did not fundamentally qualify the rule. Furthermore, the sale of family members—especially children—was possible. Children could be born into unrestricted *kholopstvo*, but children born before their parents became *kholopy* remained free.

Many of the 119 articles on *kholopstvo* in the “*Sobornoe Ulozhenie*” (law codex) of 1649¹⁵ regulate how free persons could sell themselves by indenture (*kabala*) for a limited time or for life. The codex begins by forbidding members of the lower nobility (the children of boiars) to become *kholopy*. Men could indenture themselves together with their women and children, and the reasons for voluntary *kabala* were mostly poor living conditions or even starvation.

Labor Extraction and Daily Life

During the seventeenth century, the first autobiography was written in Russia by a cleric, but biographical data on servants remains rare until the eighteenth century.¹⁶ Most of our available sources are lawbooks or estate management records.

Kholopy had to perform any labor ordered by their owner, and they were commonly made to work the land or fulfill administrative tasks. But their obligations could not contradict the rules of the Church, which regulated daily life.¹⁷ Since all Russian Orthodox Christians were obliged to attend mass on Sundays, observe lent, and confess regularly (legally enforced since 1716), nobody was easily able to avoid the Church’s control. Prior to the reign of Peter I, Orthodox parishes were quite small, comprising a few hundred men and women and thus allowing control by the local priests. Lords or masters were held responsible for their servants following the Church rules. If a *roba* had sex with her owner and they had a child, both of them were to be sent to the bishop for judgment. Like all Christian churches, Russian Orthodoxy prohibited and sanctioned sexual intercourse outside of marriage.

The “*Domostroi*,”¹⁸ a commonly used book of household rules, advised the head of a household to keep his servants dressed and well-fed, to ensure obedience by praising good work and applying punishment (which might include beating) only when necessary. Women were to be punished by the wife. The head of the household was also advised to lead his wife, children, and servants in joint prayer every evening and go to mass with them on Sundays. He was admonished against all sins and urged to invite priests often.

Where did they live? Russians in early modern times lived on landed properties called *dvor* (literally: yard) that were surrounded by fences and generally featured several buildings—the residence building *izba*, stables, separate buildings for cool and dry storage, and a bathhouse (*bania*). The people living in such a *dvor* had to accept the rulings of the landlord (*khoziain*). For a long time, the *dvor* was also the basic unit for taxing rural communities and town populations. In the noble estates and towns, there were also wooden houses

with multiple floors; two-story houses were common in Moscow in the seventeenth century. The servants mostly lived on the ground floor, which as a rule did not have windows. One of their jobs was to maintain the fire in the furnace, which heated the house by air respectively with its exhaust smoke. Servants also lived in the market stalls kept by artisans and merchants since it was not common to sell goods in one's own home.¹⁹

What did they eat?²⁰ According to the "Domostroi," servants were to be fed sufficiently. When boyars expelled some of the *khology* from their *dvor* in times of scarcity to save on supplies, they were punished. There was a food hierarchy, of course: table books and lists of expenditures inform us what the tsar and the patriarch had on their tables, but what did the servants eat? The assumption that they "tasted" when they were able to seems reasonable.

Politics Regarding Kholopstvo

All legally free people of Russia, the high and low nobility, serving people (*sluzhbilye liudi*) of all ranks, merchants and artisans (*posadskie liudi*), and even peasants and *khology* themselves could use the service of a *kholog* for a specified or unlimited period of time. Women might own *khology* as well—usually by inheritance as mentioned above, but also through purchase. The period of a limited *kholopstvo* was defined in years.

At the beginning of the fifteenth century, most people sold themselves and their families using the formula "by my own will," but in later sources, this formula is absent. Up until the annexation of Novgorod Velikii by Moscow in 1478, many individuals were bought and sold without any official control or registration. Before the annexation, the employed phrasings point to more individual decisions, thereafter to more control by officials. At the end of the sixteenth century, the central government in Moscow ordered a new registration of all *khology* in the territory of Novgorod Velikii.

Peasants living in the countryside sold themselves by "giving the key" to their *dvor* to the new lord. After the end of the fifteenth century, the records show an increase in purchases and sales of peasants together with their yards. Several Novgorod noble families changed the legal status of peasants into that of *khology*. By obtaining land and workers in the peasant communities in this way, they increased their influence and wealth in terms of acreage, meadows, and wood.

Instigated by the Church, the government promoted the limitation of *kholopstvo* and advised not to take interests from loans, as the law codex of 1551 (*Stoglav*) stated: "so that the peasants stay and that the villages will not fall empty."²¹ Registration was a further instrument to prevent the extension of *kholopstvo* without control. Nevertheless, the number of dependent persons increased during the crisis of the *Smuta* (1598–1613). In the seventeenth century, *khology* represented the second most dependent group of people in Russia. Only the *iasyri*, the nonorthodox prisoners of war, were more dependent since they were not protected by the Church.

From the middle of the sixteenth century, there existed a special department (*Kholopiĭ Prikaz*) where *kholopy* had to be registered.²² Their social and legal status ranged from servants for a limited time to *kholopy* by birth. Only Orthodox people appear in the published cases handled in the *Prikaz* during the seventeenth century, although certain names and definitions (like *murza*, *batrak*, or *tatarka polona*) hint at non-Orthodox family backgrounds.²³ Russians who had been held captive in Poland or the south likewise entered *kholopstvo* upon their return since they were poor.²⁴

In 1649, the “Sobornoe Ulozhenie” of Muscovy was agreed upon by the assembly (*sobor*) of clerics, noblemen, merchants, and townspeople convened by Tsar Aleksei.²⁵ The legal status of *kholopy* is defined in Section 20 of this document. It was determined explicitly, that *kholop* and *roba* belonged to the same status. Indentured servants were considered subjects in terms of jurisdiction, admitted to the oath, and heard in the *Kholopiĭ Prikaz*. They were able to successfully contest being forced into *kholopstvo*.²⁶ A *kholop* had “honor” and was entitled to a compensation of one ruble if his honor was offended; a *kholop* woman to 2 rubles. The value of the work of an indentured male servant was fixed at 5 rubles per year, a female servant received half of that sum. Children of *kholopy* added to the repayment of the owed debt with their work as well—for children above the age of 10, the value was fixed at 2 rubles per year. Redemption of debt by way of labor was thus regulated. Children could also be submitted into time-limited *kholopstvo* by free parents. As was the case all over the world, children learned their trades by working with their parents.²⁷

Prices for *kholopy* in Novgorod around 1600 varied between one and five rubles from children to adults²⁸; in Moscow, between four rubles for someone who had learned a white-collar job and two for a beggar.²⁹ Comparing these prices with the sums they were entitled to in case their honor was offended or to the amount of two rubles a year stipulated for the labor of a youth, the low prices for *kholopy* seem to reflect the limitations of their services.

Exits from Kholopstvo

Time-limited *kholopstvo* ended with the date agreed in the *kaĭbala* deposited in the *Kholopiĭ Prikaz* or with death; it also ended with the death of the owner. Permanent *kholopy* (according to Hellie, around 15 percent of all indentured servants) could be sold, inherited, or passed on. But it was also customary to allow a number of *kholopy* and *roby* to “go into freedom” in one’s last will.³⁰ A *roba* serving her owner sexually was generally set free upon the latter’s death, as already indicated in the “Russkaia Pravda.” In 1558–1559, a member of the lower nobility also granted freedom to “my Kazan and German prisoners, men and women and boys and girls” in his will.³¹

A nobleman who sold himself as a *kholop* was removed from the list of heirs to his family *votchina*.³² When the family tree owning it died out during the

plague and children of the *kholop* petitioned to receive the inheritance, the Tsar allowed them to buy it back in an act of grace in 1474.³³

Murder cases were adjudged in Moscow, but districts were occasionally permitted to judge murders of *kholopy* regionally. Killing a *kholop* was considered murder, but a significant difference was made: In the event that a *kholop* killed his master, he was to be sentenced to death “without mercy”—meaning he was to be tortured heavily.³⁴

What about resistance? The image held by Westerners is one of “resignation and patience.”³⁵ But the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries are full of Russian uprisings—Cossacks and townspeople, soldiers and Old Believers—in the frontier regions. “Subaltern persons” in Russia were definitely prepared to take up arms against their masters and their seas of troubles when the waves became overwhelming and/or the situation seemed promising.³⁶

In many last wills, *kholopy* are mentioned as runaways. They are identified by name and were searched for by the heirs of the deceased. Sometimes they were hidden by other estate owners. They can be found in almost all Novgorod family trees: Absconding was apparently a common option for *kholopy* not only in northwestern Russia. Even when owners knew where a runaway *kholop* was staying, they did not always have the means to get him back.³⁷

The End of Kholopstvo

When the tsardom was changed into an empire, *kholopstvo* was gradually disestablished. The *Kholopiĭ Prikaz* was eliminated in 1704,³⁸ peasants and *kholopy* had to pay the same tax and provide recruits from 1713, and in 1723 the *kholop* status was abolished entirely. From this point on, all servants in towns and countryside were included in the peasant status. Between 1676 and 1762, the percentage of peasants in the Russian population increased from 80 to 91 percent, while the percentage of townspeople decreased.³⁹ This change is not always described adequately in historiography.⁴⁰ After 1723, all people living in the countryside (besides clerics and the nobility) were officially peasants, and many people in the towns—including all of the servants of the nobility—belonged to this social class as well.

SERFDOM IN MUSCOVY AND THE RUSSIAN EMPIRE

The peasantry in the Tsardom of Moscow was not homogenous in its legal status—in other words, it was not limited to serfs. In the fifteenth century, Muscovy’s rural population was comprised of two groups: “black” peasants and “white” peasants. The “black” peasants (*chernososhnye krest’iane*) paid obligatory duties in cash and kind to the lord and lived on the common land. Those who retained their status later became “state peasants” (*gosudarstvennye krest’iane*). After the secularization of monasteries in 1762, the former monastery peasants were also added to this group of personally independent peasants. The burden of taxation on the “white” peasants (*belopashchy*)

was alleviated in the seventeenth century when they began to work on estates owned by the church or the nobility. This group also became bonded (*krepstnye*) to clerical institutions (*cerkovnye* and *monastyrskie*) respectively to estates of the nobility (*pomestnye*) or the Tsar's estates (*dvorcovye*).⁴¹ In 1721, Peter I issued a decree introducing a category of "possessional" (*possessionnye*) peasants owned by merchants and entrepreneurs. Their principal occupation was to labor in manufacturing locations in the Ural and Siberia.⁴²

Russian law texts and administrative documents from the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries never contain the term "serfs," only "peasants" (*krest'iane*) and "bonded people" (*krepstnye liudi*). In Russian and European historiography, the term *krepstnoe pravo* (bondage) is considered the Russian equivalent of "serfdom."⁴³ For this reason, *krepstnye liudi* has been translated as "serfs" in academic meta-language even though the serfdom system in Muscovy and the Russian Empire exhibited certain differences in terms of regularized labor and property relations toward land and peasants.⁴⁴ The strong personal bondage and dependency on landlords allow comparisons to be drawn between Russian serfs and American slaves.⁴⁵ In this regard, it must be highlighted that Russian serfs belonged to the same ethnic and religious group as their landlords, meaning they were Russians and Russian Orthodox Christians.

Studies on serfdom can be conducted from the perspective of different historical disciplines based on specific sources. These include official legal codes and regulations concerning property conditions and dependency relations, institutional reports and correspondence related to taxation and obligation, peasants' petitions and unrest, archival documents on the working and living conditions in local estates, and preserved memoirs of serfs.

Entry into Serfdom

Historiography has identified various reasons that may have led to the establishment of peasants' bonds to individual landowners. According to the "decree" interpretation based on legal documents, the mobility of peasants was limited by several state decrees, culminating in the legal codex ("Sobornoe ulozhenie") of 1649. This measure was primarily dictated by state needs, specifically the need to support the army. The "non-decree" interpretation emphasizes the importance of peasants' indebtedness due to adverse economic developments (mass starvation, population decline, and fluctuations in farm prices) as a crucial factor for enserfment in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. According to a further theory, the rise of the service gentry to landlords and their need for resident agricultural laborers may have led to an increase in bondage of peasants to their landlords. The state may also have been interested in bonding peasants to land or landlords in order to facilitate the collection of taxes and ascertain the rendering of state obligations.⁴⁶

The Russian peasants became serfs through the restriction of their right to leave the estate on which they tilled fields and move to another. The first

limitation of peasant mobility can be found in the law codex (*sudebnik*) of 1497: According to Article 57, peasants were allowed to leave their home estate one week before and one week after St. George's Day (November 26). The second condition for their departure was a one-off payment (*pozbiloe*) to the estate owner for the right to leave. The *sudebnik* of 1550 confirmed this practice and increased the amount of the required fee. With the introduction of the so-called "forbidden years" from 1580 to 1581 in the western part of the Tsardom of Muscovy, the peasants finally lost their right to move entirely. From 1592 to 1593, the scope of this regulation was extended to the entire territory of Muscovy; it was briefly suspended during a period of mass starvation in the early seventeenth century. Estate owners were entitled to search for and retrieve fugitive peasants, even if they were already working for a different estate owner. The period granted for the recovery of peasants—the so-called "allotted years"—was first limited to five years, then extended to 15 years in 1607 to strengthen the position of the service gentry.⁴⁷

Section XI of the law codex of 1649 further restricted the mobility of peasants, bonding them to their respective estate owners according to the land register of 1626 and the census records of 1645–1647. Fugitive peasants could now be recovered (Articles XI-1, XI-2, XI-3, XI-9, XI-10, XI-11) without any time limitation. Most of the new regulations focused on the identification of peasants, on the conditions for their return, and on the punishment of estate owners sheltering them. Furthermore, they addressed the rights of estate owners to exercise judicial power over all residents of their estate including peasants (Article XII-1).⁴⁸ Bonded peasants were thus effectively excluded from state jurisdiction and became objects of law. While the 1649 codex thus did not explicitly establish serfdom in Muscovy, it crucially contributed to the enhancement of peasants' bondage.⁴⁹

The limitation and legal prohibition of peasant mobility led to bondage to the landed estates of nobles, and eventually to the nobles themselves. This strong personal dependency was evidenced by the concentration of local fiscal, judicial, legislative, and executive power in the hands of estate owners.⁵⁰ Bonded peasants received allotments of land for use, and in return were required to serve the estate owners as well as pay obligations in labor (*barshchina*) and dues (*obrok*) in cash and kind. The personal bondage to the landlord extended to the descendants of serfs and was transferred from one generation to the next. The purview of this system of peasant bondage was initially restricted to the area of the Tsardom of Moscow. Following the territorial expansions during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, however, its application was extended to new regions with large rural populations.

Extraction of Labor

Originally, the term *krepostnoi* (serf or bondsman) was applied to peasants living and working on the land of estate owners in the central governments of Muscovy and Russia. Upon closer consideration, we can observe further

occupations by bonded people in Russia. Besides agricultural labor, serfs also worked in the households of their landlords as well as in the manufactories and factories, while some of them acted as well-known artists and even as successful entrepreneurs.⁵¹ In the latter case, they traded in their masters' name, developed their own businesses. These traders, craftsmen, and hired industrial workers were called "traveling serfs" (*otkhodniki*); they received a passport from their master and were only obliged to pay dues in cash and kind (*obrok*).⁵²

By contrast, bonded peasants had to pay dues as well as provide agricultural services to estate owners. Further areas of occupation were household labor and the maintenance of postal and road connections. The peasant community (*mir*) constituted the local unit of self-government with collective responsibility toward the lord, and later toward the state.⁵³ Its key tasks were land repartition, tax collection, and welfare provision, with further responsibilities including the maintaining of estate granaries and the management of pastures and forests for use by the serfs. The *mir* cooperated with the estate administration to implement the landlord's policies and defend its own interests. These peasant communities had more autonomy in their everyday life, though their agency was still limited by the respective landlord's ultimate authority.⁵⁴

While the relations between estate owners and bonded peasants in Muscovy were based on informal agreements, the state began to regulate certain aspects of the lives of serfs following the establishment of the Russian Empire in 1721. In 1724, poll taxation for serfs was introduced. This duty toward the state was added to the recruitment obligation: Every peasant community had to send recruits (one man per 25 community members) to the imperial Russian army for a service period of 25 years. The proclamation of April 5, 1797, regulated the duration of peasants' work for the landlord: Labor service on Sundays was forbidden, and the other six days could be equally divided between noble and peasant land. The latter stipulation was formulated more as a recommendation than an obligation, however. Only in 1832 would the "Digest of Laws in the Russian Empire" bindingly codify the limitation of serfs' labor services to three days a week. The decree on "Beholden Peasants" (1842) permitted nobles to regulate relations with their serfs via contracts. These voluntary official agreements governed the size of parcels of land as well as the scope of labor obligations and dues. With the "Auctions Decree" (1847), serfs received the right to purchase the part of the estate they lived on if it was being sold at public auction to pay the landlord's debts. This allowed them to both own the land and become a free person.⁵⁵ As we can see from this overview of official regulations, the imperial state sought to expand its influence on relations between landlords and bonded peasants by introducing added economic dependency for serfs in the form of taxation and state obligations, as well as by governing and controlling the rights and duties of both parties.

As personally dependent persons, the serfs judicially belonged to the local court of a landlord. In the official law codices, enserfed peasants are mostly mentioned as objects of law. Nevertheless, they had the opportunity to submit

petitions (*chelobitnaia*) not only to their landlord but also to the chief of their local administrative unit (*voevoda*), to the respective governor, and ultimately to the tsar. Most peasant petitions concerned taxation issues, devastation by soldiers, and misgovernment by landlords.⁵⁶ In 1775, Empress Catherine II introduced local peasants' courts and abrogated the right of peasants to contact the tsar directly. The cases heard at these courts frequently had to do with illegal bondage and unlawful obligations toward estate owners. Even though some local judges were corrupt and the investigations and proceedings were often slow, this measure represented a first step toward limiting the legal monopoly of landlords regarding their serfs.⁵⁷

Peasants could also engage in other, non-legal forms of resistance. Disobedience and refusal to work were common reactions to excessive and unjustified obligations and service requirements. In order to reduce their tax burden, some serf communities submitted false data concerning the size of lots and the number of male family members. A further means of avoiding suppression was abscondence to towns or to remote or frontier regions. These forms of resistance can be identified as non-violent. In some cases, however, peasants would also take arms and use them against their estate owners or state officials. Another form of violent resistance was the establishment of autonomous paramilitary units to protect the interests of local rural actors, including serfs. In most official sources, these groups are called "bandits" (*bandity*), implying a specific perspective and connotation. The list of violent reactions is completed by the local revolts and popular movements generally referred to as "peasant wars" by Soviet historians. Most local riots, including those led by the Cossacks Stepan Razin (1670–1671), Kondratii Bulavin (1708), and Emel'ian Pugachev (1773–1775), took place in the border regions. Escaped serfs joined such rebellious groups in the hope of finding freedom. Nevertheless, these popular movements never aimed to abolish serfdom, instead simply seeking partial economic relief and the improvement of serfs' legal status. In all cases of violent resistance, the landlords and state actors invariably responded with force—and were invariably successful.⁵⁸

Exit from Serfdom

The legal way of exiting serfdom was by manumission.⁵⁹ According to available legal documents, serfs could be freed by judicial decision (*otsuzhdennye*), due to completion of their military service in the case of retired soldiers, due to returning from exile and imprisonment, or due to conversion. Furthermore, serfs could be released into freedom by the choice of their landlords. The most widespread form was manumission upon the landlord's death as documented in a will. Obtainment of freedom by self-purchase also required the agreement of the estate owner. The manumission document (*vol'naia gramota*) confirmed the landlord's ownership—and thus their right to manumit—as well as the complete fulfillment of the serf's duties toward the state. After their manumission, former serfs had access to various official social ranks (*sosloviia*)

such as merchant, townsperson (*meshchane*), or artisan; they were able to choose a new occupation and become members of specific estate-based societies. This process facilitated the successful integration of former serfs into the imperial society without social exclusion by way of forming a separate social group, as in many other well-known slave societies.

A further common but illegal way out of bondage was abscondence. While official documents from the seventeenth century often mention the escape of entire peasant communities, the size of escapee groups decreased in the second half of the eighteenth century with the establishment of serfdom in the central governments of Russia and Ukraine. Now it was generally families or individuals who ran away. Although abscondence to the nearest city or *posad* community did not equate to escaping the legal status of serf, runaway peasants regularly managed to leave their estate owner and end their personal bondage by joining the craftsman community.⁶⁰ The more promising opportunity to escape serfdom consisted of fleeing to the imperial border regions and joining local Cossack units. The preferred regions varied according to the territorial expansion of Muscovy and the Russian Empire: Siberia in the seventeenth century, Ukraine in the first half of the eighteenth century, and the Caucasus and the Kazakh steppes in the second half of the eighteenth and in the nineteenth century. Becoming members of a Cossack unit facilitated the transition to other legal statuses (essentially, from serf to Cossack) and protected runaways from official search agents. However, the integration of annexed territories into the imperial legal and social system restricted the autonomy of local Cossack units and impeded the inclusion of runaway serfs—a development that helps to explain the shifting of preferred escape destinations.⁶¹

The gradual release of certain groups of bonded peasants was implemented by the state through various legal provisions. The official regulation of the relations between nobles and peasants began in the second half of the eighteenth century. According to the manifest of March 21, 1762, the Church's estates became secularized and the respectively bonded peasants became "state peasants" (*gosudarstvennye krest'iane*). The personal judicial dependency relation to the Church as the landlord was abolished for these peasants. Their new legal status of "state peasant" implied personal independence combined with the obligation of increased tax payments to the state—more precisely, the amount of 170 copecks compared to the 70 copecks for estate peasants. Moreover, they received the formerly Church-owned land for cultivation without any labor obligations or requirements to pay dues in cash and kind. In this case, the abolition of Church peasants was characterized by the abrogation of economic obligations to the landlord and the transfer of jurisdiction over the affected individuals from the ecclesiastic intermediators to the state.⁶²

The second state-introduced possibility for peasants to obtain freedom with the approval of their estate owner was adopted in the Decree on Free Agriculturalists (*vol'nye khlebopushcy*) of February 20, 1803. Indenturing estate

owners were now able to conclude contracts with their entire peasant community, granting the latter ownership of the land. Moreover, the affected peasants became personally free as a group of state peasants called “free agriculturalists.” In return, the serfs had to pay for their right to own the land. This manumission based on a voluntary decision by the respective estate owner had little impact in practice: By 1855, only 114,000 male serfs were registered as “free agriculturalists.”⁶³ The state-initiated measure provided the landlords with an additional opportunity to free individual serf villages or communities, but the serfs themselves did not have the right to initiate such a process. In summary, the agency of the peasantry depended on the power balance between the state and nobles. Gradual reforms in the direction of abolishing serfdom compromised the prosperity and wealth of nobles and thus had to be negotiated carefully.

The complete abolition of serfdom in the Russian Empire began in 1816–1819 in the three Baltic provinces (Estonia, Livonia, and Kurland), with the three provinces of right-bank Ukraine (Kiev, Volhynia, and Podolia) joining the process in 1847–1848.⁶⁴ Finally, in 1861, serfdom was abolished in all regions of the Russian Empire.⁶⁵ This legal act mainly granted the serfs personal freedom in a legal sense; the possibility or the right to acquire and possess land was not considered in the abolition process in the Baltic provinces. The imperial manifest of September 19, 1861, eventually provided the option for serfs to own land, but only with the agreement of the estate owners.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, we have presented two widespread Russian autochthonous forms of asymmetrical social dependency, namely the *kholopstvo* (often translated as slavery) and the *krepostnichestvo* (often translated as serfdom). We hardly can consider either form a stable system with a consistent repertoire of economic and social coercive mechanisms. Rather, the two mechanisms represent a set of multifarious servile and working practices that changed over time under the domestic and foreign political influence as well as due to demographic, fiscal, and legal developments.

Even if *kholopstvo* is often considered equivalent to slavery in academic literature, this form of strong personal dependency in early modern Russia in fact possessed many similarities to indentured servitude in the West. The rights and obligations of both owners and *kholopy* were regulated by the state through legal policy and controlling institutions. The degree of social engineering manifested in the activity of the Russian government was considerable, as shown by the abrogation of *kholopstvo* during the reign of Peter I.

Russian serfs (*krepostnye*) can be considered bondservants⁶⁶ or bondspeople, as they could pursue various occupations in the nineteenth century, working as merchants, craftspersons, manufactory workers, or artists. Originally, Russian serfs were bonded both to the land and to the estate owner. But the obligation to provide agricultural services could be compensated by

paying higher dues in cash or kind with the permission of the estate owner. In contrast to American slaves, Russian serfs were not foreigners recruited through the slave trade or captivity; they belonged to the same ethnic and religious group as their owners. With regard to enserfed peasants, the entire rural community (*mir*) was responsible for satisfying obligations, paying taxes, and providing local communal services. Their representatives were a mediating authority between the individual serfs and the respective estate owner—a further difference from the American master–slave relation.

Further research on the incorporation of other dependency relations in annexed territories into the legal space of Muscovy and the Russian Empire could provide valuable contributions to the historical exploration of local forms of servitude, bondage, and slavery.

NOTES

1. The tributary indigenous peoples of Siberia. The origin of *iasak* can be traced to a tax collected from native populations in the Golden Horde. Iasak tribute was gradually introduced in North Asia after the Muscovy's conquest of Siberia in the seventeenth century. Elena Smolarz, "Zwischen Integration und Segregation: Die Anwendung der imperialen Kategorie der Fremdstämmigen (inorodcy) auf die Steppennomaden im Russischen Reich im 18. Und 19. Jahrhundert," in *Taxing Difference. Empires as Spaces of Ordered Inequality*, ed. Sarah Albiez-Wieck (St. Ingbert: Röhrig Universitätsverlag, 2020), 117–22.
2. William G. Clarence-Smith, "Slavery in Early Modern Russia," in *Mediterranean Slavery Revisited (500–1800)*, ed. Stefan Hanss and Juliane Schiel (Zurich: Chronos, 2014), 123–38.
3. Hans-Heinrich Nolte, *Russische Geschichte*, 3rd edition (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2021).
4. For details on the following text, see Hans-Heinrich Nolte, "Terms for Dependent People in Rural Russia in Early Modern Records," in *Semantic Fields of Dependency*, ed. Stephan Conermann and Jeannine Bischoff (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2022).
5. Oleg Ivanovic Chistiakov, ed., *Rossiiskoe zakonodatel'stvo X–XX vekov* (Moscow: Iuridicheskaja literatura, 1984–1994) [hereinafter RZ]; *Russkaja Pravda* in RZ 1, 64–132.
6. Friedrich Kluge, *Etymologisches Wörterbuch der deutschen Sprache*, 20th edition (Berlin: De Gruyter, 1967) 28–30, 170; Andrea Komlosy, *Arbeit: Eine global-historische Perspektive* (Vienna: Promedia, 2014), 36–52.
7. Sergei Pushkarev, *Dictionary of Russian Historical Terms* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1970), 37, 53–58, 110.
8. Michael Zeuske, *Handbuch der Geschichte der Sklaverei*, 2 vols. (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2019), 292–344.
9. Money paid to the family/owner of a killed person instead of blood vengeance.
10. Hans-Heinrich Nolte, "Jasyry," in *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History 1200–1860*, ed. Christoph Witzernath (Ashgate: Farnham, 2015), 247–64.
11. Cherepnin, L. V. ed., *Akty feodal'nogo zemlevladieniia i choziaistva XIV–XVI vekov*, vols. 1–2 (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk, 1951–1956)

- [hereinafter AFZCh]; Grekov, D., ed., *Akty social'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii Severo-vostochnoi Rossii konca XIV—nachala XVI v.*, vols. I–III (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1952–1964) [hereinafter ASEI]; Schmücker-Brelower, Maritta, ed., *Das Hausarchiv der Fürsten Pozharskij* (Cologne etc.: Böhlau, 1996); and a collection of sources translated into German: Hans-Heinrich Nolte, Bernhard Schalhorn, and Bernd Bonwetsch, eds., *Quellen zur Geschichte Russlands* (Stuttgart: Reclam, 2014). The *Ulozhenie* (RZ III, 75–446) is cited by chapter and paragraph.
12. Richard Hellie, *Slavery in Russia* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982).
 13. Alessandro Stanziani, “Serfs, Slaves or Wage Earners?” *Journal of Global History* 3, no. 2 (2008): 183–202.
 14. Hellie, *Slavery*, 82–83 and 356–58.
 15. The “fundamental law,” RZ III, 75–446, is cited by chapter and paragraph.
 16. Nolte, *Geschichte*, 86–87, 103, 125–26.
 17. Carsten Goehrke, *Russischer Alltag*, vols. 1–3 (Zurich: Chronos, 2003–2005); Angela Rustemeyer and Diana Siebert, *Alltagsgeschichte der unteren Schichten im Russischen Reich (1861–1914): Kommentierte Bibliographie zeitgenössischer Titel und Bericht über die Forschung* (Stuttgart: Steiner, 1997).
 18. Klaus Müller, ed., *Altrussisches Hausbuch “Domostroi”* (Leipzig – Weimar: Kiepenheuer, 1987). This Russian version of economy books was written in Novgorod in the sixteenth century and in use until the beginning of the nineteenth century. *Domostroi* is a direct translation of Greek οἰκονομία (rules on how to maintain a household).
 19. Arcikhovskii, A. V., ed., *Ocherki russkoi kultury XVII veka* (Moscow: Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo universiteta, 1979), 165–201.
 20. L. P. Vdovina, “Pishcha i utvar” [eating and tableware], in Arcikhovskii, *Ocherki*, 219–33.
 21. RZ II, 242/500, citation 354.
 22. *Gosudarstvennost'*, vol. 4, 384–85; Grigorii Kotoshikhin, [1664], in *O Rossii v carstovanie Aleksia Mikhaïlovicha*, ed. Aleksandr Barsukov (St. Petersburg: Akheograficheskaiia Kommissiia, 1906), 113.
 23. “Dokumenty: Tiazhby po kholop'im delam,” in *Kholopstvo i kholopy v Moskovskom gosudarstve XVII veka*, ed. Iakovlev, A. (Moscow – Leningrad: Izdatel'stvo Akademii Nauk, 1943), 323–27, 401–414, 496–512. For the preceding period, see Zimin, A. A., *Kholopy na Rusi s dreneishikh vremen do konca XV v.* (Moscow: Nauka, 1973).
 24. Paneiakh, V. M., *Kholopstvo v pervoi polovine XVII v.* (Leningrad: Nauka, 1984), 80–86, 124–25; Paneiakh, V. M., *Kholopstvo v XVI—nachale XVII veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1974).
 25. RZ III, 75/446.
 26. Iakovlev, *Kholopstvo*, 513–62; Hellie, *Slavery*, 540–53.
 27. On children in Russia, see Mironov, B. N., *Social'naia istoriia Rossii (XVIII – nachalo XX v.)*, vols. 1–2 (St. Petersburg: Dmitrii Bulanin, 1999), 233.
 28. Iakovlev, *Kholopstvo*, 60–65.
 29. Hellie, *Slavery*, 366.
 30. ASEI 1, no. 612, cit., 524.
 31. AFZCh 2, no. 274, citation 281.
 32. *Votchina* was a land estate that could be inherited and belonged to a family or an individual person, while a *pomest'e* belonged to the Tsar or the Church

- and was “lent” for service. See Hans-Heinrich Nolte, “Eigentumsrechte im Moskauer Russland,” in *Rechts- und Verfassungsgeschichte in Mittelalter und Früher Neuzeit. Gedenkschrift Joachim Leuschner*, ed. Katharina Colberg and Herbert Obenaus (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 226–244.
33. ASEI III, 357.
 34. Evgenii Anisimov, *Dyba i knut* (Moscow: Novoe literaturnoe obozrenie, 1999).
 35. Max Weber, *Present State*, vol. I, 191–92.
 36. G. G. Nolte, “Russkie ‘krestianskie voiny’ kak vosstaniia okrain,” *Voprosy Istorii* 11 (1994): 31–38.
 37. AFZCh II, 15–16; ASEI III, 357; Nolte, Schalhorn, and Bonwetsch, eds., *Quellen*, 2.24.
 38. *Gosudarstvennost’*, vol. 4, 384–85; Erik Amburger, *Geschichte der Behördenorganisation Russlands von Peter dem Grossen bis 1917* (Leiden: Brill, 1966), 3 and 117; Hellie, *Slavery*, 695–710.
 39. Hellie, *Slavery*, 129–30.
 40. Mironov, *Social’naia istoriia Rossii*.
 41. Hans-Heinrich Nolte, *Kleine Geschichte Russlands* (Bonn: Bundeszentrale für politische Bildung, 2005), 53–55.
 42. Roger Bartlett, “Serfdom and State Power in Imperial Russia,” *European History Quarterly* 33, no. 1 (2003).
 43. Alessandro Stanziani, *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries* (New York: Berghahn, 2014).
 44. Christoph Schmidt, *Leibeigenschaft im Ostseeraum: Versuch einer Typologie* (Cologne: Böhlau, 1997).
 45. Peter Kolchyn, *Unfree Labor: American Slavery and Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1987).
 46. Richard Hellie, *Enserfment and Military Change in Muscovy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), 1–18.
 47. Jan Kusber, “Leibeigenschaft im Russland der Frühen Neuzeit: Aspekte der rechtlichen Lage und der sozialen Praxis,” in *Leibeigenschaft: Bäuerliche Unfreiheit in der frühen Neuzeit*, ed. Jan Klußmann (Cologne: Böhlau, 2003), 142–44; Schmidt, *Leibeigenschaft im Ostseeraum*, 66–67.
 48. *Sobornoe ulozhenie 1649 goda. Tekst i kommentarii*, ed V.I. Buganov (Leningrad: Nauka, 1987).
 49. Hellie, *Enserfment*, 141–47.
 50. Kusber, “Leibeigenschaft,” 142.
 51. Elise Kimerling Wirtschafter, *Russia’s Age of Serfdom, 1649–1861* (Malden: Blackwell, 2008), 169–89; Richard Stites, *Serfdom, Society, and the Arts in Imperial Russia: The Pleasure and the Power* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005): 30–40, 71–83, 238–42, 332–42.
 52. Bartlett, “Serfdom,” 31–32.
 53. V.I. Neupokoev, *Gosudarstvennye povinnostin krest’ian Evropeiskoi Rossii v konce XIX veka* (Moscow: Nauka, 1987).
 54. Tracy Dennison, *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 93–130; Steven L. Hoch, *Serfdom and Social Control in Russia: Petrovskoe, a Village in Tambov* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986), 133–59; V.B. Bezgin, *Sel’skoe pravosudie i pravovye obychai russkikh krest’ian vtoroi poloviny XIX – nachala XX veka* (Tambov: Izdatel’stvo IP Chesnokova, 2014).

55. David Moon, *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1762–1907* (London: Routledge, 2001), 29–36.
56. Kusber, “Leibeigenschaft,” 148.
57. Stanziani, *Bondage*, 112–13.
58. Nada Boskova, “‘Dort werden wir selber Bojaren sein.’ Bäuerlicher Widerstand im Russland des 17. Jahrhunderts,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 37, no. 3 (1989): 345–86; *Materialy dlia istorii krepostnogo prava v Rossii. Izvlecheniia iz sekretnykh otchetov Ministerstva vnutrennikh del za 1836–1856*, (Moscow: Gosudarstvennaia publichnaia istoricheskaia biblioteka Rossii, 2010).
59. Alison K. Smith, “Freed Serfs without Free People: Manumission in Imperial Russia,” *The American Historical Review* 118, no. 4 (October 2013): 1029–46.
60. A.G. Man’kov: *Razvitie krepostnogo prava v Rossii vo vtoroi polovine XVII veka* (Moscow – Leningrad: Izdatel’stvo Akademii Nauk SSSR, 1962), 22–119.
61. David Moon, *Russian Peasants and Tsarist Legislation on the Eve of Reform: Interaction between Peasants and Officialdom, 1825–1855* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1992), 23–61; Alison K. Smith, “‘The Freedom to Choose a Way of Life.’ Fugitives, Borders, and Imperial Amnesties in Russia,” *The Journal of Modern History* 83, no. 2 (June 2011): 243–71.
62. Igor’ K. Smolitsch, *Geschichte der russischen Kirche, 1700–1917* (Leiden: Brill, 1964).
63. Moon, *Abolition*, 41.
64. Moon, *Abolition*, 43–45.
65. Larisa G. Zakharova, *Aleksandr II I otmena krepostnogo prava v Rossii* (Moscow: ROSSPEN, 2011).
66. Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani, “Introduction,” in *The Palgrave Handbook of Bondage and Human Rights in Africa and Asia*, ed. Gwyn Campbell and Alessandro Stanziani (New York: Palgrave, 2019), 6.

FURTHER READINGS

- Dennison, Tracy. *The Institutional Framework of Russian Serfdom*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Hellie, Richard. *Slavery in Russia*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982.
- Moon, David. *The Abolition of Serfdom in Russia, 1762–1907*. London: Pearson, 2001.
- Nolte, Hans-Heinrich. *Russische Geschichte*. 3rd Edition, Stuttgart: Reclam, 2012.
- Panciakh, V. M. *Kholopstvo v XVI-do serediny XVII veka*, vol. 1–2. Moscow – Leningrad: Nauka, 1974–1984.
- Schmidt, Christoph. *Leibeigenschaft im Ostseeraum: Versuch einer Typologie*. Cologne: Böhlau, 1997.
- Stanziani, Alessandro. *Bondage: Labor and Rights in Eurasia from the Sixteenth to the Early Twentieth Centuries*. New York: Berghahn, 2014.
- Witzenrath, Christoph, ed. *Eurasian Slavery, Ransom and Abolition in World History 1200–1860*. Ashgate: Farnham, 2015.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in Late Ming China

Claude Chevaleyre 

INTRODUCTION

Was there slavery in late imperial China? Rigorously speaking, the answer to this question should be no. The medieval Latin word “*sclavus*” (and all its declinations) was not part of the languages used in late imperial China. Furthermore, as a universal category, “slavery” did not enter Chinese societal and legal debates until the end of the nineteenth century. And since the fall of the imperial regime in 1911, historians have hardly ever associated any form of late imperial bondage with “slavery,” whatever its definition.

At the same time, from the sixteenth century onward Western observers frequently reported practices “analog” or “similar” to slavery (in today’s parlance) in China. When the imperial government abolished the “buying and selling of people” in 1910, it presented the reform as a commitment to the abolition of slavery (in line with the international standards of the so-called “civilized” nations).¹ Also, in spite of their reluctance to use the “slave” label, many historians of China still implicitly define late imperial bondsperson with reference to archetypal “slaves”—i.e., as persons subjected to extreme forms of social and legal discrimination, over whom masters exercised rights tantamount to “property” for the purpose of “exploitation.” As a consequence,

C. Chevaleyre (✉)

CNRS–Lyons Institute for East Asian Studies, Lyon, France

e-mail: claude.chevaleyre@cnrs.fr

Bonn Center of Dependency and Slavery Studies, Bonn, Germany

analyses of human bondage in late imperial China often leave historians with an impossible conundrum: to translate bondage categories as “slaves,” at the risk of distorting the Chinese context considerably; or not to translate, at the risk of perpetuating unintelligibility and the all too widespread (and similarly distorting) perception of China’s cultural alterity.

Despite its narrow focus on labor relations, the approach proposed in 2016 by Marcel van der Linden offers an interesting alternative to “universal” taxonomies of social relations of domination and an opportunity to overcome the conundrum.² This chapter thus attempts to “dissect” *nubi* bondage in late Ming China (1368–1644) in a more dynamic way. As a social and legal category, *nubi* shows many similarities with “slaves” in other historical contexts. It existed long before the Ming and persisted long after the fall of the dynasty in the middle of the seventeenth century, as well as after its legal abolition in 1910. *Nubi* also played the role of a conceptual matrix used to define various relations of subordination in Ming China. And it was present, with substantial variations, in medieval Japan (*nubi*) as well as in early modern Korea (*nobi*).³

For the purpose of contextualization, this chapter focuses on one singular moment in the changing history of *nubi* bondage. The late Ming crisis and the violent transition from Ming to Qing rule (1644–1911) saw the eruption of many armed revolts across China, including hitherto unknown *nubi* revolts. *Nubi* revolts were so unique in Chinese history that contemporaries felt the need to forge a new term to characterize them (*nubian*, literally “slaves’ catastrophe”). They wrote extensively on the topic of *nubi* revolts, thereby providing invaluable information about late Ming bondage practices. This chapter offers a brief introduction to *nubi* revolts and uses the sources produced in the aftermath of this particular moment as an entry point to analyze the three “moments” of *nubi* bondage.

ENSLAVEMENT CONTRACTS: THE FICTION OF VOLUNTARY BONDAGE

Let us start with one short document selected both for its exemplarity and its uniqueness. By a contract dated 23 December 1645, a man named Jiang Guanda from Qimen district (Huizhou prefecture) was returned to his “former master.” Cataloged as a “self-sale contract” by the Museum of Anhui province, the document reads as follows:

New marriage contract by Jiang Guangda.

Being unable to feed and clothe myself because of scarcity, I formerly called on a middleman to be sold, as a couple with my wife (two persons), and placed in the service of the Hong [family]. As a marital present, I received the full sum of sixteen taels of pure silver [ca. 600g]. After we crossed the gate [of the Hongs’ house] we served without fail. During the *yiyou* year [1645], as the seditious Wan Biao and others enlisted crowds and built an organization

to plunder riches and kill masters, I wrongly joined the crowds. I retrieved the original contract from my master without returning the marital present. [Since then,] I have submitted to my punishment without a word. Now that [the situation] has been settled and clarified, thanks to pawnbroker Siguan, I establish a new marriage contract, by which I am returned to my former master, whom I will serve forever. From now on, would I turn my back again on my master and run away or steal, may I be fully punished according to the law. Fearing that there is no trace, I establish the present [contract] as proof.⁴

Like many Chinese contracts transferring authority over a person to the head of another household (as a wife, concubine, uxorilocal husband, bonded tenant, adopted child, etc.), Jiang's contract is labeled as a "marriage agreement." It is nonetheless representative of the few enslavement contracts preserved from the Ming-Qing period.

Using standard formulae that circulated in vernacular almanacs, the contract briefly recounts the circumstances that led Jiang Guanda and his wife to sell themselves and, later, to be returned to the Hong family. As the principal contracting party, Jiang singled out poverty as the main incentive to enter into a bondage agreement. Destitution was a common motivation for selling oneself and one's children, but it was also a necessary justification. Laws and norms during the Ming period did not prohibit self-sales, but they made enslavement a monopoly of the judiciary and ownership of enslaved people the privilege of a small and poorly defined group of "meritorious officials." In theory, "honorable people" (i.e., commoners—as opposed to "mean people," a social and legal group encompassing *nubi*, entertainers, outcast communities, and unclean professions) could not be privately enslaved. In practice, however, (self-)sales were tolerated as alternatives to starvation. Thus, almost all surviving contracts from early-modern China (like Jiang Guanda's) open with ready-made references to "poverty" to legally justify enslavement.

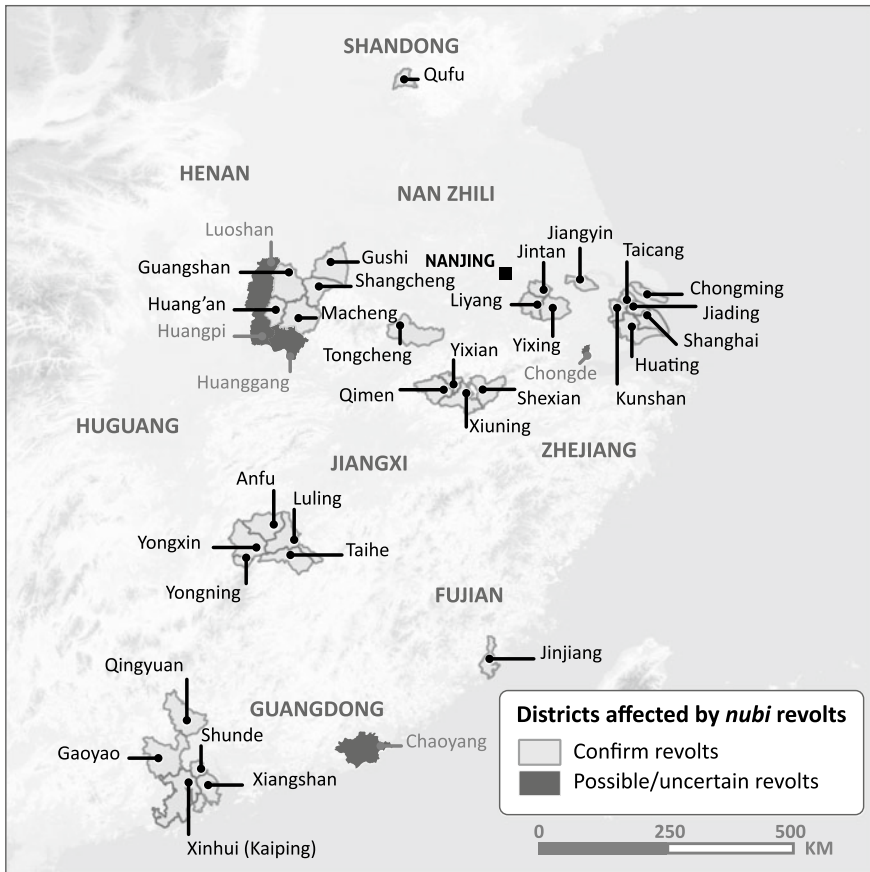
Another typical feature of this contract is its emphasis on the "voluntary" nature of the transaction. Whatever the purpose of a sale, the holders of legal authority (usually parents) had to declare their consent in the opening section of an agreement. These statements served to defuse suspicions of coercion and trafficking. Indeed, whereas self-sales and sales of children were tolerated on grounds of poverty, "trafficking" was illegal and fiercely repressed.⁵ As Chinese families were by nature "transactional," trafficking did not amount to buying and selling people; neither was it limited to trading slaves.⁶ What defined trafficking was the act of usurping the power held by others over their subordinates (children, wives, concubines, or *nubi*). Consent from the legitimate owners and guardians was thus an absolute precondition for lawful transactions.

As it unfolds through preserved written agreements like Jiang Guanda's, *nubi* bondage thus presents the characteristics of a form of contract and of voluntary slavery. Borrowing from Orlando Patterson's terminology, enslavement was the result of a process of "extrusion": individuals were extracted

from the society of “commoners,” severed from their natal kinship ties, permanently relegated to the socio-legal group of “mean people,” and re-socialized as *nubi* under the exclusive authority of the father-like figure of a household head.⁷ Combined with the prohibition on trafficking, the transactional nature of enslavement seemingly made it a non-coercive process: the choice was formally made “willingly” by oneself or by one’s father (whose authority was indisputable), and the relationship so created was understood as mutually beneficial. Consequently, “coercion” was not even conceivable in that context.⁸ This helps explain why bondage in late imperial China is often presented as a form of “humane” and “mild slavery,” or sometimes even as a poverty-relief system of sorts. Yet, this picture of a pacified form of bondage should be taken with a grain of salt. Like normative sources, contracts are crucial to appreciating the underpinning rationale for enslavement, but they mainly convey the perspective of the masters’ society, not the actual practices.

Coercion can only be suspected behind the standardized phrasing of late imperial contracts. The stereotyped mention of “scarcity,” for instance, says nothing about the true motivations for pledging oneself and one’s wife to “serve forever.” Even if no pressure was exerted on Jiang, his decision was still the result of a “constrained choice” dictated by economic hazards. Coercion also transpires behind the polished depiction of Jiang’s apparently straightforward submission to punishment and voluntary return after a liminal phase of escape and violent resistance. His participation in a revolt aimed at “plundering riches,” “killing masters,” and retrieving enslavement contracts also suggests resentment against a situation he had allegedly entered “willingly.”

Reference to armed insurrection is probably the most unusual detail in Jiang’s contract. Late Ming *nubi* revolts were so unprecedented that they drew unusual attention to bondage practices (a topic formerly deemed too trivial to be worth writing about). The sources produced during that particular moment in Chinese history are extremely useful to explore the many dimensions of *nubi* bondage and to dissect its coercive dimensions. The revolts themselves, a collectively unsuccessful attempt to “exit despite impediments” in van der Linden’s terminology, are little known to historians of slavery, and require a brief presentation.

FROM SHADOWS TO LIGHT: *NUBI* REVOLTS

Nubi revolts erupted amidst the multifaceted late Ming crisis. They lasted for three decades and culminated in the cataclysmic years of 1644–1645—better remembered for the fall of the Ming, the Manchu conquest of China, and the sequels of enduring “peasant revolts.” Starting in the 1630s, *nubi* took up arms in more than 30 districts and caused “a catastrophe like no other in thousand years.”⁹ Some revolts lasted for years, but most were short-lived and unfolded in a similar pattern. Fueled by the nearby presence of rebel and military troops or by rumors of emancipation allegedly decreed by the Manchus, *nubi* rose up in “hundreds,” “thousands,” and “tens of thousands” to bring destruction upon their masters. They burnt and pillaged houses, humiliated and killed masters, and systematically demanded the return of their contracts.

Soon enough, they faced brutal repression, only to be remembered as renegades by the new dynasty, although it had occasionally used them as local proxies in its conquest.

The sources documenting *nubi* revolts were mostly written to condemn the insurgents. Very few authors attempted to dig into their root causes and to propose reforms, but all attributed them either to the “ungratefulness” of the enslaved or to the excesses and brutality of their masters. Marxian historians, who have written extensively on the subject, mainly analyzed these revolts as another manifestation of a nascent “class consciousness” in a context of exacerbated “antagonisms” and inequalities. Their conclusions are based on solid evidence, but *nubi* revolts are more complex and multicausal than it seems.

Nubi revolts had at least one common denominator: opportunity. With very few exceptions, *nubi* never took arms in isolation but in the context of a surrounding insurrectionary environment (the advance of the Manchu Banners or the struggles of Ming loyalists and the so-called “peasant” armies). In other words, although persistent *nubi* unrest is attested long before the end of the Ming, its transformation into full-fledged revolts was directly correlated to the collapse of the sociopolitical order that, in ordinary times, contributed to maintaining *nubi* under control and to empowering masters.

Opportunity, however, does not explain why this form of insurrection erupted at this particular moment in Chinese history. The transformation of bondage practices provides further explanation. Despite the absence of even approximate figures, evidence points at a steady increase of privately-owned *nubi* from the fifteenth century onward, reaching unprecedented numbers by the end of the Ming. The economic growth of the Ming period, the commercialization of the economy, urbanization, and a growing taste for luxury goods and external signs of wealth all contributed, among other factors, to increasing the demand for enslaved manpower. The concentration of land ownership, rampant inequalities, the burden of taxes, and the effects of a disastrous social and humanitarian crisis simultaneously contributed to fuel the supply side of the market.

The greater presence of *nubi* in late Ming society not only contributed to raising the levels of violence used to control the enslaved, as evidenced by many sources, but also to increasing their role as agents of violence in an often-brutal society. If the majority of *nubi* were strictly disciplined and sometimes subjected to unbridled physical violence, a growing minority was no stranger to exercising brutality on their own account or as the “claws and teeth” of *their* powerful masters. Employed in private militias, used as the strong arms of their masters, and sometimes connected to groups of outlaws, many revolt leaders were ambiguous figures with a shady past who maintained close ties with marginals and who had formerly been entrusted with prominent roles in the local defense against other insurrections. Pan Mao, the leader of the Liyang revolt (Jiangsu, 1645), for instance, was a former “hereditary servant” turned soldier and brigand, who set up a rebel organization after he was handed the

defense of the city against the Manchu armies. The unprecedented numbers of the enslaved and their familiarity with the use of violence played a significant role in the ways *nubi* resentment unfolded in the late Ming insurrectionary context.

The greater place of *nubi* in society also contributed to changing attitudes toward enslavement. Although (self-)enslavement was permanent and hereditary, in the late Ming period, an ever-growing fraction of the population seems to have been conceiving it more as a convenient lifeline to overcome transitory economic difficulties. The resultant ambiguities are well illustrated by the variety of demands formulated by the insurgents. *Nubi* revolts are usually depicted as a homogeneous struggle for “personal freedom.” Some of them undoubtedly demanded unconditional emancipation and propagated egalitarian mottoes. In Jintan (Jiangsu, 1644), for instance, *nubi* took an oath at the city temple and decreed: “Heaven and Earth are tumbling, the honorable and the mean are reversed, why must we remain enslaved forever?”¹⁰ Others, however, rather demonstrated a shared impatience with changes to the rules of bondage, in particular the ways out of it. This is well exemplified by the demands of Yu Boxiang in Taicang (Jiangsu, 1645) that bondage be limited to one generation and no longer hereditary. Another illustration is provided by the third revolt that broke out in Macheng (Anhui) in 1651, sparked by the rumor of an edict allowing *nubi* to redeem themselves. Before taking arms, their leader, Fang Jihua, attempted to negotiate changes in bondage practices. A “Proposal about enslaved and masters in nine points” was submitted to the local gentry. Its content has not survived, but it seems to have concerned, among other things, the fiscal liability of enslaved people, rather than immediate emancipation.¹¹

Changing attitudes toward enslavement not only surface in the ways in which people engaged with enslavement in the late Ming, but also in numerous texts of moral inspiration reflecting upon the nature and functions of bondage in society. In a period of growing competition and uncertainty (even for literati), marked by increased social and geographic mobilities, intellectual speculation about the human condition flourished. The greater visibility of bondage, its manifest abuses, a growing sense of crisis, and the perceived threats that *nubi* posed to the social order drew significant attention to the ethical standards of enslavement. Although a few radical thinkers spread subversive messages attacking traditional hierarchies and questioning the moral foundations of enslaving others, the reflection on bondage mostly remained within the framework of Confucian ethics and aimed at correcting excesses and restoring social harmony. In the process, late Ming moralists outlined the contours of a proper and ideal(ized) vision of human bondage. This vision insisted on acknowledging that *nubi* shared the same human nature and ought to be treated accordingly. The ideal they professed was marked by “benevolence” toward fellow humans on the verge of starvation. They considered bondage as a mutually beneficial relationship framed by “human sentiments” that could not arise from taking advantage of the weakness of

others. In general, this vision was no more than a form of paternalism that did not challenge established hierarchies and the existence of human bondage. It nonetheless contributed to set ethic boundaries to human exploitation and to weaken the ideas that *nubi* were inferior by nature and that bondage was by default permanent. Its effects on practices remained marginal, but they can be sensed in late Ming judgments on contested *nubi* identities and in the steady development of charitable activities to help the poor and to free the enslaved. This vision of bondage also contributed to influencing a population of enslaved who was not completely immune to popular education and its subversive messages.

The late Ming *nubi* revolts thus epitomize the tensions that pervaded society in general and bondage relations in particular. They highlight the many ambiguities of bondage and the discrepancies between practices and norms. In Confucian terms, denominations no longer matched realities. Together with other factors, these contradictions help explain the eruption of *nubi* armed violence.

ENTRY: BECOMING *NUBI*

How were individuals enslaved in late Ming China? Enslavement was not among the five regular punishments prescribed by Ming law. Although one of them, “penal servitude,” is said to have originated in ancient slavery, it then mainly consisted of temporary penal labor. However, Ming-era normative sources and legal specialists still envisioned punishment as the only lawful way to produce *nubi*. According to jurist Wang Kentang (1549–1613), enslavement was an ancillary punishment imposed on the families of criminals convicted of crimes against the state (treason, rebellion, and sedition). As he notes, *nubi* were “men and women convicted by extension of liability” and “seized by the administration.”¹² The founder of the dynasty had sentenced people to enslavement on various occasions, but in its final version (1397), *The Great Ming Code* included very few provisions for penal enslavement. By the end of the dynasty, punishment by law did not produce significant numbers of enslaved. Neither did capture in war, which was sometimes considered by legal commentators another legitimate source of *nubi*. Like penal enslavement, war capture is poorly documented and does not seem to have reached levels comparable to those observed later during the Qing conquest of China and Western territories.

The main and unanimously accepted path to enslavement in late Ming China was “sale for a price” (i.e., private contract enslavement mediated through money). In the ideal framework depicted above, bondage was socially acceptable only when mutually beneficial and voluntary. Reciprocity and willingness were deemed necessary to instill in *nubi* a sense of gratitude and to produce a harmonious relationship in which they would be “content with their lot,” and naturally obey and respectfully submit to the authority of the head of the household. In exchange for surrendering themselves to a master, *nubi*

(or their parents) frequently received monetary compensation upon signing the contract and were always given assurance that their basic needs would be taken care of (including marriage and burial). Said otherwise, only the contract of voluntary (self-)sale—or the illusion of it—guaranteed the proper fabric of a natural bond shaped by “human sentiments.”

Due to their lack of reciprocity, alternative modalities of entry into bondage were either controversial or denied any legitimacy. “Being born in the household” was another common way to become *nubi*, as illustrated by a provincial proclamation issued in the aftermath of the 1651 revolt in Macheng, which listed only four “legal” ways into bondage: penal enslavement, war capture, sale, and birth.¹³ After the last serious *nubi* revolt in Guangshan (Henan, 1658), prefect Jin Zhen (1622–1685) nonetheless proposed to limit entry only to “sales for a price.” Jin Zhen did not mention birth, but he might have had in mind the violent rejection of heredity voiced during the revolt. To him, apart from selling oneself and being sold by parents, other modalities of entry were disloyal and unlikely to create a balanced, reciprocal, and solid relationship. Among those, “commendation” was considered particularly harmful.¹⁴

Commendation proceeded from a more genuinely “voluntary” choice, but its legitimacy was strongly disputed. Commendation took various forms. The practice known as *toukao* (literally to “pledge” oneself and “lean on”) consisted in offering oneself (or money, according to some authors) to an influential master in exchange for subsistence and protection. Another practice, known as *touxian* (literally to “pledge” oneself and “offer”), consisted in securing similar protection by offering one’s properties (or the properties of one’s former master). In the first years of Qing rule, commendation also consisted in giving oneself to members of the Manchu Banners (*touchong*), although the practice was outlawed in 1646. Commendation had become so common in the late Ming that various authors recount how cohorts of aspirants rushed to the lists of examination laureates in search of the name of a potential master to whom they could offer themselves. A form of clientelism, commendation was unanimously decried as a fraud motivated only by self-interest (offering not only protection against taxes and prosecutions but also potential access to wealth and power). Late Ming masters who accepted too many commended people were later judged responsible for the loosening of hierarchies and the proliferation of disloyalty among enslaved people, who “inevitably” fought back when the opportunity arose.

Aside from “voluntary” forms of enslavement and birth, becoming *nubi* was also the result of physical compulsion and deception. Among the causes of the slave revolts, Jin Zhen notes that “seizing by force” was common practice in the late Ming: poor people were frequently lured by false promises or kidnapped, sequestered, enslaved, and held captive by means of false contracts and threats of prosecution. Such practices, which funneled people into trafficking networks that purveyed various markets in people (sometimes over very long distances), are well documented all across Ming and Qing China.

The *Ming Veritable Records*, for instance, mention the case of a gang of traffickers who, in the 1480s, abducted vagrant and displaced people in Jiangxi province to provide purchasers with “household slaves” and “tenant slaves.”¹⁵

Forcible enslavement was also a potential outcome of indebtedness. Ming officials repeatedly complained about the practice of seizing debtors (and their relatives) in repayment of a debt, which was not only immoral and illegal,¹⁶ but also decreased tax incomes. Although illegal, the practice was common enough for pettifoggers to circulate model complaints against the undue appropriation of children by moneylenders.¹⁷ Yet, children could also be placed as collateral for loans. Models of pawn agreements read like *nubi* contracts and leave no doubt as to the outcome of a default on repayment.¹⁸ If forcibly seizing debtors was illegal, pawning a child only differed from an outright sale in that it was delayed and conditional.

Finally, two typical forms of compulsion are worth mentioning: the diversion of other social and labor identities; and a phenomenon that could be called contamination. Jin Zhen, again, testifies to the practice of forcing hired workers (*gugong*) and tenants (*dian*) into permanent bondage. The legal status of “hired worker” was very similar to *nubi*, with the difference that it was temporary and that *gugong* were considered “mean people” *only* in relation to their employer. The practice that Jin Zhen describes was a mix of hired work contract and uxori-local marriage, by which men agreed to work for a fixed period of time in exchange for an enslaved woman to marry (one such contract set the term to 22 years).¹⁹ Yet, once the term was over, employers threatened to report *gugong* as “runaway slaves” and retained them permanently. Tenants, for their part, were “honorable people.” Landowners, however, had made it a habit to call them “tenant-slaves” (*dianpu*) so as to extract labor and services indefinitely, increase the rent as they pleased, and even sell their children and wives, as they could with *nubi*. The practice was not limited to Guangshan district. It is evidenced in Huizhou prefecture, in Guangdong province, and all across Southern China. It was also common enough in the late Ming for pettifoggers’ manuals to include model accusations for “confusing tenants with slaves.”²⁰

The late Ming period is thus characterized by a widespread extension of *nubi* status to other contract relationships (hired work, uxori-local marriage, tenancy, but also adoption) and a blurring of social and labor identities. This extension sometimes took the form of more subtle contamination. With the importance given to the concrete performance of social roles in assessing *nubi* identities, *acting like* an enslaved person could lead to actual enslavement. Such was the fate of a man named Tang Yuan in the early seventeenth century. For reasons that remain unclear, Tang had moved with his aunt and her husband, two *nubi* in the service of the Han family in Huating district (Jiangsu). Tang was undoubtedly of commoner status, but for sharing the roof of his relatives’ master for years and for accepting money to help him marry, Tang was reported as a runaway slave when he left to settle on his own. Although Tang ultimately committed suicide, the magistrate concluded

that he had benefited from the Hans' benevolence. This fact alone had created a bond similar to signing a bondage contract. In the magistrate's terms, it had created a "difference between master and slave" (*zhupu mingfen*).²¹ For failing to acknowledge the porosity of *nubi* status, Tang Yuan chose a radical exit (suicide) over a life in bondage. The Han family, on the other hand, knew that demonstrating benevolence combined with the passing of time were key factors in establishing *nubi* status.

In the late Ming, the paths leading to bondage had multiplied and extended far beyond the framework envisioned by the founder of the dynasty. This multiplicity led to a steady growth of the *nubi* population. It also contributed to changes in the perception of bondage as a permanent condition, and in the meaning of being enslaved.

NUBI EXPERIENCE AS LIFE IN "SERVICE"

Historians disagree about the most adequate way to characterize *nubi* bondage. Many studies have attempted to evaluate the level of oppression and violence *nubi* experienced, to elaborate taxonomies based on the tasks they performed, or to measure the discrimination they suffered. Approaches based on material factors (on labor in particular), however, face several limitations. First, because the sources available seldom provide information about the labor that *nubi* performed. Second, whatever the chosen criteria, nothing was more different from one *nubi* than another *nubi*. Third, no criterion *alone* seems likely to distinguish *nubi* from other social groups.

Characterizing *nubi* according to their functions and labor roles thus generally proves unhelpful. The ideal-type male tilling the soil and female doing household work was still prevalent in Ming times, but in terms of gender distribution of labor, this was not different from what was expected in commoners' households. Aside from household and fieldwork, *nubi* performed multiple tasks and were present at almost every level of every sector of activity, including, in extremely rare cases, the upper echelons of the prestige ladder, as imperial examinations laureates. *Nubi* could be land tenants, porters, estate managers, militiamen, traders, artisans, accountants, wet nurses, housekeepers, gardeners, shopkeepers, envoys, etc. They performed many tasks on a single workday and at various stages in their life cycles. Some of them had no productive utility at all and did not perform work. They were nonetheless always useful to their masters, like the ostentatious processions of fine-dressed retainers with whom rich scholars paraded on the streets in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.²²

So, rather than searching for one distinctive labor condition, let us look at the variety of *nubi* conditions through the lens of their autonomy. Taking autonomy as an analytical criterion, Ming-Qing observers as well as modern historians have come to distinguish two extreme archetypes of *nubi*. Seemingly irreconcilable (and both deemed equally responsible for *nubi* revolts), these

archetypes illustrate the apparent contradictions of *nubi* as a condition and the range of autonomy that they enjoyed in practice.

On the one hand, we find the great majority of *nubi* living in extremely harsh conditions and subjected to ongoing violence. In an ideal relationship shaped by “natural feelings,” violence was deemed unnecessary and should have remained exceptional and moderate. From the precepts for *nubi* management outlined in lineage regulations, however, masters were much more concerned with discipline and control than with demonstrations of benevolence and compassion. The brutality of *nubi* life is well documented, and the majority of authors testifying to it can hardly be suspected of excessive sympathy. An exhaustive list of the recorded forms of violence would be endless, ranging from deprivation to cruel punishments and sexual abuses. To Zhang Lüxiang (1611–1674), late Ming masters had simply ceased to treat *nubi* “with humanity” as they were expected to. Many suffered from cold and hunger, worked from dawn to dusk, and performed “hundreds of services” until exhaustion. They were often denied the right to mourn their parents; their wives and daughters were sexually abused; and it was frequent, says Zhang, that masters killed *nubi* and disposed of their bodies without being prosecuted.²³

The levels of violence unleashed by *nubi* during the Ming-Qing transition also offer a mirror image of everyday brutality. Retaliation against cruel masters was the most common incentive for *nubi* to take up arms. Besides killing masters, insurgents performed rituals of role inversions and brought their masters to judgment. They forced them to serve, throwing and beating them on the floor as soon as they failed to comply with orders, as was the case in Ji’an (Jiangxi) in 1644. Zhang Mingbi (1584–1653) extensively recounts how such trials were carried out in Jintan in 1645: while beating their masters, after each blow and after each cry of pain, *nubi* kept asking “does it hurt?” and why they used physical violence when they knew how hurtful it was.²⁴

On the other hand, we also find *nubi* enjoying high levels of autonomy. In Huizhou, where land was scarce and properties scattered, *nubi* were often settled on isolated properties like tenants to cultivate the land and watch over their masters’ remote properties (like graveyards and precious plots of commercial woods). There are also testimonies of *nubi* leasing their workforce as tenants to others than their owners.²⁵ Evidence of wealthy and powerful *nubi* also abound in late Ming sources. An anecdote from the *Miscellanea about Songjiang* recounts the stupefaction of one Mr. Xu when discovering that an old *nubi* of his owned a bed padded with sable fur and dressed with dragon-embroidered robes.²⁶ However, the archetype of the autonomous *nubi* is mainly epitomized by the despised figure of the so-called *haonnu* (literally “porcupine slaves,” or “brazen bondservants”).²⁷

The antithesis of the enslaved who were exploited and oppressed, *haonnu* have been depicted as an uncontrolled body of elite slaves who abused their masters’ influence, reputation, and protection for their own benefit. To Shen

Li (1531–1615), they accumulated wealth by diverting their masters' properties, tyrannized the local society, changed masters as they pleased, and ultimately caused the ruin of many families.²⁸ *Haonu*, however, is neither a social nor a legal category. It is a judgmental label, a criticism of the permissiveness of masters, and a denunciation of the diversion of *nubi* status for the purpose of personal advancement. As noted by Wang Jiazhen at the beginning of the Qing dynasty, *haonu* were people who “fed from their owners' benevolence,” and a serious threat to the local social order. This was illustrated by the numerous inter-familial vendettas led by *haonu* and by the frequent eruptions of local violence provoked by the exactions they committed for their own sake or in their masters' name. One such famous example is the episode that opposed the inhabitants of Huating to the renowned painter and statesman Dong Qichang (1555–1636).

By the level of autonomy they demonstrated, the wealth they accumulated, and the power they exercised in local society, *haonu* and their involvement in the late Ming revolts have been an embarrassing challenge to the narratives depicting *nubi* as a homogeneously oppressed “class.” Some historians chose to simply ignore this contradictory figure. Others concluded that *haonu* belonged to the “ruling class.” This apparent contradiction, however, can be resolved by highlighting what best characterizes *nubi* is that they were people who “served” (usually “forever”). From contracts to lineage regulations and court cases, depictions of *nubi* experience always come down to this unique feature: “service” (*yi*)—a notion never clearly defined that cannot be reduced to “domestic service.”

In enslavement contracts, “to serve” is expounded as “obeying orders.” Wang Jiazhen, for instance, explains that once a contract was signed, *nubi* “would never stand and walk side by side [i.e., like brothers] for the rest of their days. When called to accomplish a task, they would not lose a second.” Wang thus underlines that *nubi*, as a status and as a condition, was permanent, that to be “in service” produced a strong relational asymmetry, and that it barely amounted to obeying orders.²⁹ An early seventeenth-century model accusation addressing cases of *nubi* abductions confirms that the essential function of *nubi* was to “work in place of others.” It argues that taking them away from their master amounted to cutting off the latter's hands.³⁰ To “serve” thus meant that *nubi* were men, women, and children of all tasks, and that their functions and their autonomy were only determined by the demands (and the permissiveness) of their masters. In this regard, the despised figure of the powerful and protected *haonu* no longer appears as an anomaly. It is a manifestation of the polymorphism of *nubi*, whose autonomy (and lack thereof) depended exclusively on what masters allowed them to do.

Being “in service,” however, was not an exclusive feature of *nubi*. Hired workers, for instance, had to serve their “employers” in a similarly asymmetric relationship. What distinguished *nubi*, however, was that they were exclusively and permanently defined by that single role, both within the household and

in society. Whereas hired workers were in a position similar to *nubi* vis-à-vis the household head, they remained “honorable” in relation to outsiders and within their own household. *Nubi*, on the contrary, remained permanently at the bottom of the social and household hierarchies. Besides, all of their formal social relations were mediated through the person of their master. When committing a crime, their position vis-à-vis the other party was not evaluated directly, but always indirectly according to the hierarchical and/or ritual bonds between their owner and the other party. In other words, the bond between *nubi* and master was a total and exclusive relationship, which granted masters constant and almost absolute control. If actual coercion was not necessary, its potential was present at all times. The ubiquitous analogy with the father-children relationship invested masters with almost absolute power and impunity. Like children, *nubi* could neither accuse their master nor disobey orders; like fathers, masters held extended disciplinary powers bestowed by the law and guaranteed by imperial and lineage justice (provided that they did not kill *nubi*).³¹

This potential for permanent and almost absolute control is what best characterizes *nubi* bondage. Compulsion could be mobilized (by threat) and realized (through discipline and reporting to lineage and imperial justice) at all times during the relationship, even against *haonnu*. It was all the more crucially felt in the impediments to exiting the relationship.

EXIT: THE UNRAVELING KNOT

Lawful ways out of bondage were very few in Ming China. Whatever the entry modalities and the levels of autonomy, exit was seldom a choice that *nubi* could make on their own. The two principal paths out mentioned in Ming law were redemption and emancipation. Both could be granted by masters or imposed by judgment.

Redeeming oneself and redemption by relatives were probably the most common exit scenarios. The prevalence of such lawful ways out of bondage cannot be evaluated, but according to Wang Jiazhen and others, doing so required “lots of money” and the approval of one’s master.³² Lifting the impediments to redeeming was a major demand in the late Ming. The first documented revolt (in Macheng, 1630) was for instance triggered by the rumor of an edict allowing redemption. It unfolded as a movement demanding that masters be compelled to allow redemption and that *nubi* gain greater control over the formal mechanisms of exit.³³

Emancipation was mainly enacted as a gesture of benevolence and gratitude. Examples of emancipations by testament or by symbolically burning bondage contracts are fairly rare and usually found in edifying stories and model biographies. Zhang Lüxiang recounts the story of a third-generation loyal *nubi* in Wuxing (Zhejiang), who was emancipated after taking his master out of prison.³⁴ In the context of a rampant social crisis, late Ming sources nonetheless testify to the growing practice of buying bondspeople only to

grant them emancipation,³⁵ and court cases provide evidence that emancipation was an actual, albeit exceptional, prospect—as was the case for two slaves that one Mrs. He allowed to “leave the household” in her last wills.³⁶

Emancipation and redemption were sometimes pronounced by magistrates. Since *nubi* could not appeal to justice against their masters, traces of plights for emancipation are quite rare in Ming China. The ideal of a harmonious and reciprocal bondage relationship could nonetheless work in their favor, provided that the local authorities decided to get involved. When presented with masters who had long forsaken their (limited) obligations and who treated *nubi* with (unusual) cruelty, magistrates could offer redemption or order emancipation. Such situations occurred when masters were brought before justice for other crimes, or when they attempted to claim rights over former *nubi* property. As prefectural judge of Songjiang (Jiangsu) in the 1600s, Mao Yilu (?–1629) once emancipated the family of a man violently killed by his master, in full compliance with the *Code*’s provisions.³⁷ In cases of extreme cruelty, however, Mao not only formally broke the bonds of servitude but also imposed compensations. So he did when called upon to judge a man named Zhang Ying who had been apprehended for other crimes. Upon discovering that Zhang had willingly blinded one *nubi* named Gu Liang and sold the latter’s wife away because Gu had objected to him having sexual intercourse with her, Mao Yilu sentenced Zhang to paying Gu 10 taels of silver and a piece of land so that he could effectively “leave the household” and make a living of his own.³⁸

The frequency of emancipations and redemptions can hardly be evaluated, but the crucial point is that bondage contracts seldom stipulate the terms of exit—except in rare and ambiguous configurations mixing various identities with *nubi* (like tenant-slaves and bonded uxorial husbands). *Nubi* could never decide to exit on their own volition. Wealth and influence offered negotiating leverages, but not the power to exit unilaterally.

Other paths out of bondage either increased vulnerability or preceded a phase of re-entry into bondage. None of the alternatives to proper emancipation and redemption did permit to recover commoner status and the relative degrees of autonomy associated with it. “Eviction” from the household was a convenient means for masters to informally break the bonds without formally relinquishing control. An extreme example of this practice is found in early seventeenth-century model complaints against masters who evicted male *nubi* to secure sexual intercourse with their wives and threatened to report them as runaways.³⁹

Some *nubi* revolts persisted for years, but all ended in the same manner. Leaders were sentenced to death and cohorts of insurgents ended up begging for forgiveness before being returned to their former masters (like Jiang Guanda).⁴⁰ Records of successful escapes only tell us that no one heard about the runaways anymore, that they joined the ranks of outlaws, or that they were caught and returned to their masters.⁴¹ Thus, although “turning one’s back on a master” was a possible way out, it implied living under the threat of arrest,

prosecution, and return into servitude. To those who actually managed to escape, it often meant commending oneself to another, more powerful master. Such was the case of many *baonu*, like the wealthy Lu Zhaofang who escaped his master's racketeering around 1615 by submitting to a more influential one⁴²; or like the many *nubi* who joined the Manchu Banner armies as slaves and soldiers in the 1640s, despite the prohibitions.

The question that remains, though, is whether exit ensured autonomy—as much as autonomy can be construed in a context where obligations and hierarchies shaped the many dimensions of interpersonal relations. In view of the numbers of commoners attracted by the protection offered by enslavement in the late Ming, access to commoner status was not necessarily desirable. With a few significant exceptions, *nubi* revolts did not take the form of struggles for “freedom,” but rather demanded adaptations of the rules and conditions of bondage. Exit to commoner status may have seemed desirable for many reasons (e.g., as an escape from cruelty), but less so without the prospect of minimal economic independence. Unfortunately, *nubi* usually cease to exist in the sources when their behavior and their qualities cease to be exemplary (for good or for ill), but it is clear that not all wished to thread into autonomy when offered to do so. Among other examples, the two slaves of Mrs. He mentioned above preferred to stay in their mistress's household despite being offered emancipation after 40 years in service. When achieved formally and legally, exit did mean status improvement, but it did not necessarily involve better material conditions and the end of subordination.

With regard to exit, gender was a crucial factor. Being a woman offered additional paths out of *nubi* status, but those paths resulted in very little improvements in terms of autonomy. As a married woman, the wife of Jiang Guanda could not expect to exit servitude by marriage, but she could expect sexual abuses and even being sold away and separated from her husband, as some examples mentioned above illustrate. Despite being very strict with regard to “fornication,” Ming law made no provision to prevent sexual intercourse between male members of the household and enslaved females (early Ming normative sources even placed female *nubi* within the reproductive and sexual spheres of their masters). To unmarried girls, enslavement certainly increased the risk of sexual abuses, but the promise of “benevolence” also provided some assurance of marriage when coming of age (unless they were denied marriage to avoid contact between household women and enslaved men, as was the practice in some merchant families). Marriage, however, offered no automatic access to commoner status. Besides being married to male *nubi* (which closed the door to prospects out of bondage), female *nubi* could be sold as concubines, and sometimes as principal wives to commoners, as in the above-mentioned case of a commoner offered a female *nubi* in uxori-local marriage in exchange for 22 years of labor. Concubines being “honorable,” the shift from *nubi* to concubine was a social improvement. However, concubines were closely assimilated into enslaved women and their actual condition may not have differed much. Although marriage offered an

additional road out for enslaved women and *could* improve their status and even their condition, it was never *their* choice to make.

Finally, exit did not necessarily end the cycle of bondage and subordination. The only way out envisioned in contracts was death, be it natural (as implied by the formulae stating that *nubi* would serve “forever” or “all their life”) or accidental (as suggested by the clauses absolving buyers of responsibility in case of “unfortunate” death). Death could also be “chosen” as a last resort (as in the case of Tang Yuan) or could be the result of excessive discipline and abuses. However, death did not end the cycle of enslavement. Historians still disagree as to whether *nubi* bondage was hereditary. The localized use of labels like “hereditary slaves” in Huizhou and in other places has led to the conclusion that heredity was not the rule. The absence of formal rules on heredity also led late Qing officials in charge of the abolition of slavery in China in 1910 to state that heredity was an exception and a subversion of the fundamental principles of bondage. Yet, examples of hereditary transmission abound, and *nubi* revolts demonstrate that ending it was a staunch demand among the insurgents. A telling case is found in Mao Yilu’s *Brief Accounts of Judgments in Songjiang*—also testifying to the many varieties of *nubi* condition—in which a man adopted by his wealthy *nubi* uncle was left with the choice between inheriting the wealth *and* the status of his uncle, or neither of them.⁴³

In addition to the perpetuation of bondage through heredity, exit to commoner status left significant stigmata. The stains of bondage were not explicitly formalized in the Ming as they would be in the Qing period, when people of *nubi* ancestry were barred from partaking in the imperial examinations for three generations. However, as noted by Wang Jiazhen and others, even after paying the price of emancipation, *nubi* could “never be on the same level” as commoners.⁴⁴ They continued to demonstrate “the difference between master and slave” by providing services, showing deference, and honoring their former masters and their offspring, sometimes for generations.

CONCLUSION

The world that *nubi* lived in during the late Ming was one of excesses, confusion, and ambiguities. It appears all the more ambiguous to us, who tend to evaluate all forms of subjugation according to modern categories that we have learned to regard as universal. To understand this world properly, we need more than the norms that transpire through the elusive content of the *Great Ming Code*; and more than references to absolute “freedom” and “slavery.” Identifying forms of slavery in contexts where heteronomy is the norm rather than the exception is always a delicate task, for there is hardly one single criterion that distinguishes enslavement from other forms of domination. In Ming China, saleability was not an exclusive feature of captives traded to be enslaved, since children and women were customarily sold to assume a wide variety of roles. Being cast out from the realm of “honorable people” was also

not an exclusive feature of *nubi*, who were nevertheless the largest component among various groups of “mean people.” Being subjected to the almost absolute power of a household head was not a distinguishing feature either, since the power exerted by masters mimicked the authority that fathers held over their children. What distinguished *nubi*, however, was that enslavement produced a total and unique form of excommunication from the standards of belonging to society and of membership in the household, which reduced people permanently to the sole function of “serving” others and to one single direct social relationship (with their master).

Faced with the effects of an unprecedented growth of the enslaved population, of changing practices, and of the increased use of bondage as a means to overcome economic difficulties, late Ming thinkers paid particular attention to outlining an ethics of bondage that insists on its voluntary, reciprocal, and benevolent nature. Examining the many paths into bondage demonstrates that the ideal of a mutually beneficial contract of slavery was a fiction, since it resulted from a wide array of constrained choices. More important is the fact that coercion was present—effectively or potentially—at all time during the relationship, and even more when it came to exiting it. Although the ways into bondage might have had an effect on the condition of *nubi* and on the levels of autonomy they could enjoy in practice, those had little effect on the possibility to end the relationship. In other words, despite the illusion of the contract, *nubi* bondage was a total relation of subjugation safeguarded by the sociopolitical order. For a brief moment, the collapse of that very order made armed revolts and demands for reforms possible. The new dynasty violently suppressed the revolts and sent *nubi* back to their masters. In the course of the eighteenth century, the Qing would nonetheless pay increased attention to clarifying and formalizing the norms of *nubi* bondage, without putting an end to it until 1910.

NOTES

1. Claude Chevaleyre, “Under Pressure and out of Respect for Human Dignity: The 1910 Chinese Abolition,” in *Distant Ripples of the British Abolitionist Wave*, ed. Myriam Cottias and Marie-Jeanne Rossignol (Trenton: Africa World Press, 2017), 147–98.
2. Marcel van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labour,” in *On Coerced Labour. Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 291–322.
3. On *nubi* in Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910), see the chapter by Sun Joo Kim in this volume.
4. *Ming Qing Huizhou shehui jingji shiliao congbian*, ed. Anhuisheng bowuguan, vol. 1 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1988), 554–55 (author’s translation).
5. Claude Chevaleyre, “Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China,” in *Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia, 1250–1900*, ed. Richard Allen (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 168.

6. Johanna Ransmeier, *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in Northern China* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017), 2–13.
7. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1982), 41–44.
8. Claude Chevalyere, “Acting as Master and Bondservant: Considerations on Status, Identities, and the Nature of Bondservitude in Late Ming China,” in *Labour, Coercion and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th–20th Centuries*, ed. Alessandro Stanziani (Leiden: Brill, 2013), 253–60.
9. Fu Yiling, *Ming Qing nongcun shehui jingji* (Beijing: Sanlian shudian, 1961), 95.
10. Gu Cheng, *Mingmo nongmin zhanzheng shi* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 1984), 342.
11. William Rowe, *Crimson Rain: Seven Centuries of Violence in a Chinese County* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007), 155–56.
12. Wang Kentang, *Da Minglü fuli jianshi* (Tōyō Bunka: Oki collection, pref. 1612), 20: 15b.
13. *Hubei tongzhi* (1921), 69: 7b.
14. *Guangshan xianzhi* [1786] (Guangshan: Guangshan xianshu, 1889), 19: 16a–18b.
15. *Ming Xianzong shilu* (Taipei: Zhongyang yanjiuyuan lishi yuyan yanjiusuo, 1966), 4744.
16. Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code/Da Ming Lü* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005), 105–6.
17. Buxiang Zi, *Fajia tou danhan* [pref. 1618], *Legalizing Space in China*, online ed. by Sun Jiahong and Gong Rufu, 151, https://lsc.chineselegalculture.org/Asset/Source/lscDocument_ID-241_No-01.pdf.
18. Zhang Chuanxi, *Zhongguo lidai qiye huibian kaoshi* (Beijing: Beijing daxue chubanshe, 1995), 1069.
19. *Ibidem*, 1063.
20. Buxiang Zi, *Fajia tou danhan*, 97.
21. Mao Yilu, *Yunjian yanlüe* [n.d., Wanli era], in *Lidai panli pandu*, ed. Yang Yifan and Xu Lizhi, vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongguo shehui kexue chubanshe, 2005), 574.
22. He Liangjun, *Siyou zhai congshuo* [1569] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997), *juan* 35, 320–21.
23. Zhang Lüxiang, *Yangyuan xiansheng quanji* [1704] (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 2002), 575.
24. Fu Yiling, “Mingmo nanfang de dianbian, nubian,” *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 5 (1975): 62–63.
25. Zhang Lüxiang, *Yangyuan xiansheng quanji*, 1024.
26. *Yunjian zazhi* [1615] (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1997), 3: 7b–8a.
27. Harriet Zurndorfer, *Change and Continuity in Chinese Local History: The Development of Hui-Chou Prefecture 800–1800* (Leiden: Brill, 1989), 203.
28. Chen Hongmou, *Xunsu yigui* [1742] (Jinan: Qi Lu shushe, 1997), 2: 20a.
29. Wang Jiazhen, *Yantang jianwen zaji* [Qing], in *Taiwan wenxian shiliao congkan*, vol. 5 (Taipei: Taiwan datong shuju, 1984), 30.
30. Buxiang Zi, *Fajia tou danhan*, 161.
31. Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code*, 183–85, 198–200.
32. Wang Jiazhen, *Yantang jianwen zaji*, 30.

33. *Macheng xianzhi* [1904], 17: 11b.
34. Zhang Lüxiang, *Yangyuan xiansheng quanji*, 910.
35. *Shaoxing fuzhi* [1584], 45: 15b.
36. Mao Yilu, *Yunjian yanlüe*, 562.
37. Mao Yilu, *Yunjian yanlüe*, 580; Jiang Yonglin, *The Great Ming Code*, 184–85.
38. Mao Yilu, *Yunjian yanlüe*, 417–18.
39. Buxiang Zi, *Fajia tou danban*, 79.
40. *Qi Zhongmin gong nianpu*, [pref. 1837], in *Taiwan wenxian shiliao congkan*, ed. Wang Siren et al., vol. 107 (Taipei: Taiwan datong shuju, 1987), 150.
41. Mao Yilu, *Yunjian yanlüe*, 441.
42. Shen Bingxun, *Quanzhai laoren biji*, in *Wuxing congshu* (Beijing: Wenwu chubanshe, 1986), 3: 11b–12a.
43. Mao Yilu, *Yunjian yanlüe*, 512.
44. Wang Jiazhen, *Tantang jianwen zaji*, 30.

FURTHER READINGS

- Chevaleyre, Claude. “Acting as Master and Bondservant: Considerations on Status, Identities, and the Nature of Bondservitude in Late Ming China.” In *Labour, Coercion, and Economic Growth in Eurasia, 17th–20th Centuries*, edited by Alessandro Stanziani, 237–72. Leiden: Brill, 2013.
- . “Under Pressure and Out of Respect for Human Dignity: The 1910 Chinese Abolition.” In *Distant Ripples of the British Abolitionist Wave*, edited by Myriam Cottias and Marie-Jeanne Rossignol, 147–98. Trenton: Africa World Press, 2017.
- . “Human Trafficking in Late Imperial China.” In *Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia, 1250–1900*, edited by Richard Allen, 150–77. Leiden: Brill, 2021.
- McDermott, Joseph P. *The Making of a New Rural Order in South China*. Vols. 1–2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013, 2020.
- Ransmeier, Johanna S. *Sold People: Traffickers and Family Life in Northern China*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Rowe, William T. *Crimson Rain: Seven Centuries of Violence in a Chinese County*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007.
- Yonglin, Jiang. *The Great Ming Code/Da Ming Lü*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2005.
- Zurndorfer, Harriet T. *Change and Continuity in Chinese Local History: The Development of Hui-Chou Prefecture, 800–1800*. Leiden: Brill, 1989.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in Chosŏn Korea

Sun Joo Kim

INTRODUCTION

One of the most enduring and prolific slave societies in world history was Chosŏn Korea (1392–1910), where, between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, slaves represented over thirty percent of the population. The relevant Korean term, which included males and females, is “*nobi*,” translated as “slaves” in this chapter because they were regarded as property that was bought, sold, inherited, and gifted. A rich scholarship debates the precise definitions of slave and slave society, but it converges on key criteria including slaves as property, elites’ economic dependency on slaves, violent domination of slaves by their owners, and natal alienation of slaves. While Korean slavery largely manifests these traits, this chapter examines the complexity of Korean slavery as it developed over several centuries with particular attention to entry into slavery, experiences of slaves, and exit from and decline of slavery.

ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

Slaves on the Korean peninsula appear in historical sources as early as the second century. In the compilation *Book of Han* (*Han shu*), completed in 111 CE, an observer of the Later Han (25–220 CE) reports that one of the

S. J. Kim (✉)

Department of East Asian Languages and Civilizations, Harvard University,
Cambridge, MA, USA

e-mail: sjkim@fas.harvard.edu

eight laws practiced by the people of Old Chosŏn (?–108 BCE) under the rule of Han’s Lelang Commandery (108 BCE–313 CE) was to enslave thieves.¹ According to the third-century history *Records of the Three Kingdoms* (*San guo zhi*), the ancient state Puyŏ (?–494 CE) enslaved the family members of a murderer.² Regarding the three kingdoms centered on the Korean peninsula—Koguryŏ (37 BCE?–668 CE), Paekche (18 BCE?–660 CE), and Silla (57 BCE?–935 CE)—numerous entries in the *History of Three Kingdoms*, compiled in 1170, record penal enslavement, debt slavery, and enslavement of conquered people or prisoners of war. The Silla village documents dated between the late seventh and ninth century show that although they amounted to just five percent of the total population, slaves were an integral part of the village scape.

Historical records from and on the Koryŏ (918–1392) dynasty prove the presence of slaves throughout its period, although it is difficult to estimate the scale of slavery during that time. The slave population was replenished by enslaving prisoners of war, especially at the beginning of the dynasty when Koryŏ was contesting supremacy on the Korean peninsula with Later Paekche (892–936) and declining Silla. Other sources of new slaves were penal enslavement, self-enslavement due to severe economic deprivation, and forceful enslavement of commoners by powerful local magnates. The major source of slaves, however, was probably that slave status was hereditary: according to the 1039 law, a slave’s child is owned by the owner of the child’s mother. Further evidence comes from King Ch’ungnyŏl’s (r. 1274–1308) letter in 1300 to the Yuan (1271–1368) emperor countering his demand that Koryŏ change its slave laws. After quoting instructions, allegedly handed down from the Koryŏ founder, that defined those of base status as different, it states that if one parent is base then the child is too. It adds that even the descendants of manumitted slaves should remain slaves.³ Since international human trafficking and enslavement of captured people from outside the Korean peninsula were minimal, slaves in premodern Korea were racially indistinguishable from their owners.

Slaves were ubiquitous in Chosŏn Korea and they frequently appear in both official and unofficial sources, although there are no known primary sources penned by slaves themselves. Young-hoon Rhee and Donghyu Yang suggest that from about the fourteenth century, slaves composed over thirty percent of the total population. They also argue that elites who settled in the countryside desired to expand their landholding by applying new agricultural techniques, and acquired the extra labor for this enterprise by enslaving people. Using Orlando Patterson’s two modes—intrusive and extrusive—of representing the social death of enslaved people, Rhee and Yang note that this form of enslavement was extrusive in drawing from within Chosŏn society.⁴ Increasing numbers of legal codes and court discussions in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries concerning forceful enslavement of commoners, transactions of slaves as gifts and donations, slave sales, and slave ownership and inheritance rules reflect these socio-economic changes.

Indeed, the Chosŏn government inherited a tremendous backlog of petitions and lawsuits concerning slave ownership and the clarification of slave status caused by decades of forced enslavement, self-enslavement, seizure of other's property, and confusion in inheritance rules and practices during the late fourteenth century when Koryŏ state authority was much weakened—a situation exacerbated by the loss of slave rosters during the Red Turban invasions in the mid-fourteenth century. The state set up a temporary agency called the Directorate for Inspection of Slaves in 1391, but in 1413 the number of unresolved cases reached 13,000. In 1414, the Ministry of Penal Affairs proposed a plan to limit the ownership of slaves by individuals, ranging from 150 male slaves for the royal relatives of the first rank to 10 for commoners. Due to heavy opposition from officials who would stand to lose considerable resources, the court rejected the proposal.⁵ In fact, it was not unusual for a local elite household to possess a few hundred slaves, as shown in fifteenth- and sixteenth-century family inheritance documents that reveal the size of individual holdings in the region of northern Kyŏngsang Province. Of thirty-six cases, one family had 757 slaves; six had 200–400; seven had 100–200; nineteen had 40–100; and three had less than twenty. The seven top-holding families produced either incumbent officials with mid to upper rank positions or descended from such officials, while the remaining families also had close ties with officeholding, which shows the close relationship between official positions and slaveholding.⁶

While both official and private documents confirm slavery as a key social and economic institution in Chosŏn, overall slave population data are rather thin. Rhee and Yang estimate that in 1467 there were about 3.5 million slaves (not counting runaways), 39 percent of the estimated total population of 9 million.⁷ Many case studies of household registers from the seventeenth century provide a wide range of slave population ratios in different periods—over 75 percent in 1663 in the northern part of Seoul and 10.8 percent in 1672 in Kŭmhwa, Kangwŏn Province. In the Taegu area, Kyŏngsang Province, the slave population decreased overall from 44.6 percent in 1690 to 33.3 in 1729–1732, to 16.5 in 1783–1789.⁸ On the basis of numerous case studies, scholars largely agree that over thirty percent of the population were slaves until the mid-eighteenth century, followed by a decline.

Chosŏn, though to a lesser degree compared to Koryŏ, was a highly stratified society in which one's status was largely determined by birth, where a person belonged to either “good” or “base” status. Social, economic, and political elite called yangban as well as commoners had good status and were in principle eligible for government posts in return for providing military services—an obligation which, by the latter part of the sixteenth century, fell mostly on commoners either in the form of physical service or tax payment. Slaves belonged to the base status group together with certain occupational groups such as butchers, Buddhist monks, shamans, government courtesans, and traveling entertainers.

Founders and rulers of the Chosŏn dynasty were professed Confucians, who used the Confucian notion of social distinction to rationalize hierarchical social order and slavery. Hierarchical social order would be maintained only if each member of the society knew their place and lived by the values governing interpersonal relationships. These were epitomized in the concepts of three cardinal relationships between ruler and subject, parent and child, and husband and wife, and the five moral imperatives: righteousness between sovereign and subject; proper rapport between father and son; separation of function between husband and wife; proper recognition of sequence of birth between elder and younger brother; and faithfulness between friends. Social distinction was a natural manifestation of different moral dispositions among people, and the purpose of governance was to maintain such a morally defined social order. In this scheme, the relationship between owner and slave was akin to the relationship between the king and his subjects. The absolute loyalty of slaves toward their owners was therefore demanded. The murder of owners by their slaves was regarded as one of the most heinous crimes, equivalent to treason. In Confucian teaching, however, social harmony required that relationships be reciprocal. While subjects owed absolute loyalty to their lords, the rulers were obligated to treat their subjects with benevolence and rule the country humanely. Laws, therefore, had to keep the balance between the need to maintain social hierarchy and an equivalent need to display benevolence and fairness to all subjects.

The ideological contradictions and moral ambiguities arising from hereditary slavery and treating a human being as an object were clear to Chosŏn rulers from the beginning. As early as 1391, officials recognized a slave's humanity by insisting that "slaves, though they are base, are still Heaven's people," and they deplored that slaves were traded without hesitation alongside oxen or horses.⁹ Like other societies with slavery, which recognized the basic humanity of slaves to varying degrees, Chosŏn kings and elites repeated that slaves, like all others under their rule, were also human beings and children of the king and should therefore benefit from their benevolent rule. The kings also found their practice of hereditary slavery awkward because it was absent in Chinese antiquity, their inspiration and model for an ideal society. Moral and philosophical standards and inconsistencies, however, did not discourage slavery nor lead to its abolition because the state and elites saw the preservation of slavery as essential in sustaining their material interests, which is to say that the fate of slavery was determined largely by complex socio-economic processes.

EXPERIENCES OF SLAVES

There were two categories of slaves: those owned by the government, and those owned privately. The Chosŏn state was the largest slave owner. Public slaves, who worked in royal palaces, central and provincial government offices, and other state establishments, provided a wide range of services, including

attending to the royal family's domestic needs, miscellaneous services at palaces and offices, producing various artifacts as skilled artisans, and laboring on government land and royal estates. Private slaves, too, worked on lands and as domestic servants. Since land together with people were the primary sources of state revenue, this set up competition for resources between the state and private slave owners, mostly yangban, whose slaves did not owe any labor or military services to the state because their bodies were privately owned. More private slaves meant a decrease in tax-paying subjects. At the same time, the state had to protect the slaveholding yangban's economic interests since they were the pillars of the state. Yangban were primary candidates for official court positions and were also essential in controlling local populations since the county magistrate, the sole court-appointed official assigned to govern a given county, needed the cooperation of local yangban. Slaves were the hands and feet of a yangban's daily life, their economic foundation, and a symbol of their ruling status. It was thus in the state's interest to ensure yangban slaveholding.

Registration status reveals a further distinction between resident and nonresident slaves, the former being registered under the owner's household but living either in the owner's household complex or separately in the same or a nearby village, and the latter being registered as an independent household and often living away from the owner, sometimes in different counties or provinces. The percentage of nonresident slaves in the total slave population ranges from 47.8 in 1609 in Ulsan to 71.8 in 1690 in Taegu. At Tosan Private Academy in 1765, nonresident slaves composed 42.6 percent (970 of 2275 slaves), an increase from 31 percent in 1619 (40 of 129 slaves).¹⁰ An inheritance document drawn in 1494 by the heirs of Yi Maeng-hyŏn (1436–1487) reveals that 757 slaves were located in seventy counties, including Hamgyŏng and Chŏlla provinces far away from both Yi's residence in Seoul and his farm in Kyŏnggi Province.¹¹ Kwŏn Tae-un's inheritance document of 1678 shows that his slaves were living in forty-two locations in five provinces.¹² One reason for this wide dispersal of slaves was generations of equal division of patrimonial property among siblings, which was based not only on the number of slaves, but also on a slave's age, talent, health, and location.

Resident slaves usually worked under the direct supervision of their owners as domestic workers or worked on land located near their owner's home. They were fed and clothed by the owner and sometimes given a monthly subsistence allowance. Yu Hŭi-ch'un (1513–1477), a high-ranking official from Haenam, Chŏlla Province who lived in Seoul during his service to the central court, provided a monthly provision of three *tu* of rice to a female slave and five *tu* of rice to a male slave, both of whom moved with Yu to Seoul to continue service. These amounts accord with the assessment of one month's diet for an adult female slave at the time, which was three *tu*.¹³ In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, Tosan Private Academy bi-annually paid about 7.5 *tu* to one *sŏk* of rice to a slave.¹⁴ A study of slave labor in the mid-nineteenth century finds that the owner compensated a slave's labor in cash or in kind in

varied amounts depending on the kind and duration of work performed. For example, female slave Kŭm-nyŏl's debt of two *tu* of unhulled rice was forgiven as compensation for her extra work on cotton production in 1849.¹⁵ This last case seems to indicate that the owner customarily paid a slave extra labor like a wage worker.

In addition to slaves who provided labor, both public and private slave categories also included those who provided tribute: as nonresident slaves they submitted to their owners, either the state or private, an annual tribute consisting of cotton cloth, grain, or various agricultural products, or cash after cash was introduced and circulated from the latter part of the seventeenth century. They enjoyed more "freedom" since they were not under the constant watchful eyes of the owners, but they were also subject to ad hoc service requirements, could be sold, exchanged, gifted, and inherited, and were liable for household taxes in the form of corvee labor—one of the three primary taxes together with land tax and military services—or other miscellaneous taxes.

Many public slaves assigned to royal families and government offices paid tribute. Tribute payment for a public slave was two *p'il* of cotton cloth per slave regardless of gender, the amount commonly applied to private slaves. This was the same amount as the military service tax on an adult commoner male until the rate was decreased by half in 1751. The rate of a slave's annual tribute had decreased over time to 1.5 *p'il* for males and 1 *p'il* for females during the reign of King Hyŏnjong (r. 1659–1674). After 1755, the legal rate was 1 *p'il* for males and 0.5 *p'il* for females, although from 1774 tribute payment was waived for female slaves.¹⁶ One study, however, shows a wide range of irregularities in submitting tribute payments. Not every nonresident slave submitted annual tribute payment, and when they submitted payment, usually it was not annually. The highest submission rate for the Ŭisŏng Kim household in the eighteenth century was 46.2 percent in 1762 and the lowest was only 15.6 percent in 1757.¹⁷ In 1765, 54 percent of Tosan Private Academy's tribute-paying slaves submitted their personal tribute.¹⁸

In early Chosŏn, slaves were not liable for military tax, but in late Chosŏn, especially by the mid-eighteenth century, private slaves, and nonresident slaves in particular, qualified for military taxes, though their tax rate was one half of a commoner's. When comparing the economic burden of commoner men after 1751 (military tax of 1 *p'il* of cotton cloth) to that of nonresident male slaves (tribute payment of 1 *p'il* plus military tax of 0.5 *p'il*), it would appear that the slave burden was about 50 percent heavier. However, since the rate of annual tribute submission was relatively low, one can argue that in the aggregate, the economic burdens for commoner men and slave men were not so different. Like commoner households, nonresident slaves, if registered as tax-paying households, were liable for state taxes such as labor services, grain loan tax, and other miscellaneous taxes levied on households. But slaves were protected from such taxation once they were registered under their master's household

as resident slaves. In fact, there are numerous examples of yangban household registers that listed dozens of resident slaves throughout late Chosŏn. To prevent them from getting taxed, many yangban owners went so far as not to register their slaves at all.

Slaves as agricultural workers had a few different labor arrangements. In the sixteenth-century “*chakkae*” system, the slaveowner allocated to an individual slave a certain amount of land for the owner’s plot (*chakkae*) and some other land as a personal plot (*sagyŏng*). All production from the owner’s plot belonged to the owner while the harvest from the personal plot provided the slave’s subsistence. The system, which was often instituted in newly reclaimed land, allowed slaves to exercise entrepreneurial freedom, but slaves were often called to provide additional services, forbidden to sell their personal plot, and censured with punishment when unable to meet production expectations. With increasing land pressure from the latter part of the seventeenth century and the fragmentation of elite landholdings caused by repeated equal inheritance practice, the *chakkae* system disappeared in late Chosŏn and slaves worked on their owner’s land like sharecroppers, or like commoner peasants under tenancy.¹⁹

Elites depended on slave labor not only for agricultural production but also to expand their landed estates. In the early Chosŏn period, elites actively engaged in land reclamation in the countryside for various social, economic, and political reasons. Various laws established in the fifteenth century secured private ownership rights and the land tax was set at much lower than ten percent of the harvest, an ideal Confucian tax rate. Political turbulence caused by irregular royal succession and a series of literati purges ordered by despotic rulers in the fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries accelerated the migration of frustrated elites to the countryside. These elites, who had access to information on advanced agricultural methods, land reclamation, and water control, were eager to increase their wealth by experimenting and putting their knowledge into practice. Their reclamation activities turned wasteland, lowlands near the coasts, wetlands created by rivers, and hilly uplands into arable land, enabling them to accumulate landed assets. After the two major wars with the Japanese (1592–1598) and Manchu (1627 and 1636), the surviving elites engaged in another wave of agricultural expansion, including opening up ownerless land and adding new agricultural plots. These activities waned as they exhausted reclaimable lands in the eighteenth century.

Slave labor was key for this expansion of land. As a way to increase slave labor, owners discovered the profitability of mixed-status marriage between slaves and commoners, though such unions had been forbidden from the Koryŏ period. Despite a repeated ban, which was reaffirmed by the Chosŏn government, the law stood only in name. Because the offspring of mixed status inherited inferior status from either parent, slaveholders could increase their slaveholding by encouraging mixed unions. This slave breeding through mixed-status marriage, of course, meant a reduction of tax-paying commoners to the state. The state, therefore, tried to control the status of offspring

from mixed-status marriages by adopting either the patrilineal or matrilineal rule of succession. While Confucian moralists, who recognized the defining importance of the father, supported the patrilineal rule, others promoted the matrilineal rule because paternity was difficult to prove. The problem was that either law provided loopholes, both for the slave owners who wanted to breed slaves and for slaves themselves who wanted to avoid having their children inherit slave status. The crux of the court discussion on the matter was to preserve an acceptable balance of population size between slaves and commoners and the distinction between social status groups.

Until the eighteenth century, the economic demand for slave labor on the part of slaveholders doomed any legal efforts to discourage mixed-status marriage and reduce the slave population by adopting either a patrilineal or matrilineal rule of succession, and so we find good evidence for the widespread practice of mixed-status marriages. According to an inheritance document of 1418, of 80 slaves divided among Kim Mu's heirs, 37 percent were offspring of mixed unions. Another inheritance document of 1429, detailing the division of 225 slaves, shows a mixed-union rate of 22 percent. In the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the percentage was often closer to 50 percent. Labor shortage caused by the wars and reclamation of wasteland as an important activity of dynastic recovery after the wars further encouraged mixed-status marriages in the seventeenth century. One study of a household register in Ulsan in 1609 finds that 70 percent of resident slaves and 55 percent of nonresident slaves had mixed marriages.²⁰

Views of slaves by their yangban owners were overwhelmingly negative. They regarded slaves as stupid, lazy, deceitful, and also lascivious in the case of female slaves. Slaves in general lacked a family name, reflecting added degradation of the slave's social standing in a society where ancestry and kinship were determinative. Probably due to frequent mixed-status marriages, some slaves obtained a family name from their non-slave status fathers. In legal documents, however, it was common practice not to record their family name. Their given name, moreover, often had derogatory connotations including dog, pig, excretion, stone, and such.

Chosŏn slaves married and formed a family. Existing studies have conflicting views on the stability and continuity of slave families. A study of 3309 slaves appearing in 31 inheritance documents in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries finds that about 80 percent of slaves formed some kind of family including a nuclear family or an extended family composed of three generations.²¹ An analysis of 181 slave families owned by several generations of the P'yŏngsan Sin family in Chinch'ŏn County from 1669 to 1891 shows that 65 households (35.9 percent) were one-generation families (a family of siblings), 102 (56.4 percent) were two-generation families, 13 (7.2 percent) had three generations, and 1 extended to a fourth generation. Additionally, out of 424 slave households, 226 (53.3 percent) were single-person households while 86 (20.3 percent) were households consisting of parents and children. From this data, the author argues that slave families were, in general, unstable and often

dissolved due to sales and bequests.²² In contrast, a study by Kim Kŏn-t'ae analyzing slaves owned by the Ŭisŏng Kim family in Andong County from 1710 to 1771 observes that 13 out of 20 slave families were nuclear, consisting of parents and their children. Out of 75 slaves, only 7 were either single-person households or sibling households. Kim considered the possibility of family dissolution caused by sales and inheritance but finds that even when slave family members were inherited by different members of the owner's family, they usually lived in the same place, and that in any case, slave sales were not very popular in Chosŏn. Kim concludes that slave families generally maintained their stability.²³

While these statistical studies based on household registers have limitations in revealing whether or not slaves had a stable family life, we can find more insight about a slave's family life and social world from other sources such as diaries, litigation documents, and inquest reports. An example of a slave family's coherence comes from the aforementioned Yu Hŭi-ch'un and his slave status concubine Ku-jil-tŏk (1528?-?), who was owned by a man named Yi Ku. The couple produced four daughters, who at birth became the property of Yi Ku, their mother's owner. When they reached their teens, however, only the second daughter was owned by Yi Ku. The first daughter was owned by a person whose relation to Yi Ku is unknown while the third and fourth daughters became the property of Yi Ku's son-in-law Yi Chŏng, probably as a wedding gift. The girls, who were born during their father Yu Hŭi-ch'un's nineteen-year exile in the northeastern part of the Korean peninsula, lived there with both parents until Yu was freed from exile in 1567. After that, they moved with their mother to Haenam in the southwest while their father mostly stayed in Seoul to serve at the court. He sent annual tribute payments to the owners on behalf of his daughters and concubine and eventually freed them from slavery as discussed later in this chapter.²⁴

Another vignette of a slave family comes from an inquest report in 1842. A private slave named Yi Pong-dol, his slave-status wife (owned by yangban Sin P'il-ho), his slave-status sister Yi Ing-sim, and his eldest brother Yi Pong-un, who had a yangban title probably purchased by making grain contributions to the government, all lived in a same village. At least two cousins of Pong-dol lived there too. Pong-dol formed an independent household and had his own fishing pond. His brother also owned a bean field and family members cultivated the land together. The fact that the two brothers had a family name and some wealth suggests that their paternal blood might have come from either yangban or the commoner. Pong-dol drowned himself out of extreme frustration after Sin P'il-ho, his wife's owner, barged into Pong-dol's house and broke his precious sauce jars. Sin's transgression was an infuriated reaction to Pong-dol's challenge when Sin caught fish from his fishing pond. Though Pong-dol's death by suicide was clear, his resentful sister reported the incident to the authorities, which unleashed an official investigation of the death including the interrogation of yangban Sin. The authorities did not find Sin guilty of any crime but sentenced him to one round of beating for his unruly

and excessive behavior in breaking sauce jars.²⁵ From this case, we learn that a larger slave family lived in a village side by side with other members of the community. Family members worked together and cared for each other. They also invoked their legal rights to seek justice and protect themselves when needed.

As Yi Pong-dol's death case reveals, Chosŏn slaves were recognized as legal subjects: they could buy and sell properties, bequeath their property, enter into contracts, and litigate. While the idea that all the people of Chosŏn, including slaves, were like children of the king partly explains the legal standing of slaves, the state designed the legal system to maintain and preserve social hierarchy and status distinction, clearly awarding privileged status to yangban. For example, slaves could not testify against their owners except for cases of treason and rebellion. Slaves who did so would be punished by strangulation. Slaves who struck their owners were punished by decapitation. Punishment for injuring one's owner was 100 strokes with a heavy stick and life exile to the remotest areas in the kingdom. Intentional killing of an owner would incur death by slicing while accidental killing meant strangulation.²⁶

In stark contrast, the private use of violence against disobedient slaves was not punishable. Owners who killed their insubordinate slaves by accident while punishing them according to the law were not punished either. In 1597, O Hŭi-mun (1539–1613) flogged Han-bok's soles seventy to eighty times as punishment for his flight with O's female slave and his wife Kang-bi, who also received fifty lashes. Han-bok died the next day while imprisoned at a county jail. Han-bok was a drifter or a refugee during the Japanese invasion of Korea and worked under O's care. Because Han-bok also stole a horse from a man named Hŏ Ch'an, Hŏ, too, beat Han-bok's soles. The exact cause of the death is unknown, but O wrote in his diary on the day of Han-bok's death, "I don't regret his death.... His was not a crime deserving death, and I felt a little uncomfortable in my mind."²⁷ O lost a night's sleep over the incident but was not censured for Han-bok's death. Simply put, slaves and even slave's spouses were constantly exposed to arbitrary violence, which could lead to death.

At the same time, the state had to check a slaveowner's tyrannical behavior and the oppression of commoners and former slaves as if they were slaves, because such unchecked abuse could not only cause social disturbances but also decrease the tax-paying commoner population. The *Supplementary Great Code (Soktaejŏn)*, compiled in 1746, stipulates the punishment of 100 strokes with a heavy stick and life exile to the remotest place for those tyrannical local magnates who violated and abused people.²⁸ The range of tyrannical behaviors also included contempt of government and the court, evasion of taxes, and forced enslavement.

From early on, the state also established the petition system, which was available for all status groups and genders. In order to resolve grievances, people could submit a petition to the county magistrate's office. If unsatisfied with the magistrate's handling of the case, they could move up the administrative ladder and lodge a complaint at the provincial office. Petitioners

who were still discontented could seek justice by appealing to the Ministry of Penal Affairs or other relevant central government offices. They could also appeal directly to the king by striking a gong and blocking a royal procession to obtain royal attention. It must have required extraordinary courage and resources for ordinary illiterate people including slaves to submit a petition to the authorities, for the petition had to be written in Literary Sinitic though the use of vernacular Korean script was apparently allowed. Even reporting a suspicious and resentful death was not a natural recourse for ordinary people, for inquests often involved unwelcome disruptions in daily life as well as an enormous mental, physical, and financial drain. Yet, there are plenty of cases in which slaves took advantage of the system to settle their grievances.

The following case illustrates a slave's use of the legal system to seek justice in the wake of tyrannical behavior by a yangban. In 1737, Myŏng-dol, a private slave owned by Mr. Yi, was attacked by a gang of slaves under the supervision of a former military officer Kim Sang-yong, who was known to be tyrannical, malicious, and unruly.²⁹ Kim's oppression of Myŏng-dol began in 1732 when Myŏng-dol married Ch'ŏn-mae, a private slave owned by yangban Yang Sŏng-ha. Kim, under the pretext that he had previously had a sexual relationship with Ch'ŏn-mae, beat Myŏng-dol and exacted thirty *yang* of money. Then in the second month of 1737, Kim, who stealthily bought Ch'ŏn-mae from her owner Yang—who was under financial difficulties and had originally planned to sell her to Myŏng-dol—led a gang of his slaves, some armed with bows and arrows and others with clubs, and stormed into Myŏng-dol's house one night, tied Myŏng-dol, kicked, and beat him. Kim's gang also stole Myŏng-dol's horse, suspended Myŏng-dol upside down with his feet tied to the saddle and drove the horse over the rocky ground in the courtyard. Kim then demanded not only fifty *yang* of money to be paid in fifteen days but also dunned him to transfer six *turak* of fine paddies to him.³⁰ This malicious behavior and oppression came to the light because Myŏng-dol's father and brother submitted multiple petitions to the authorities. The magistrate of Namwŏn County, who was in charge of the case, vehemently criticized the vicious nature of Kim, who had been in trouble with the magistracy for trying to avoid paying taxes, and arrested him for investigation. Ultimately, Kim was punished with a round of beating and his purchase of Ch'ŏn-mae was invalidated.

While the fragmentary nature of primary sources often generates more questions than answers, a few takeaways are worth noting. First, slaves were exposed to arbitrary violence by not only their owners but also anyone who harbored a personal grudge or was jealous of a slave's personal fortune. Kim's vengeful attack might have grown out of lust, jealousy, and greed, or he might have been frustrated and angered at losing Ch'ŏn-mae to a wealthy slave. Myŏng-dol initially submitted to physical molestation and material extortion. When his life was at stake, however, the slave family appealed to the law, which in turn recognized and punished the injustice done to him.

Slaves not only lived side by side with the non-slave population in the same village but also frequently married commoners, resulting in fluid social and

cultural boundaries between commoners and slaves. As we have seen, slaves as legal subjects also accrued wealth, filed complaints against abusive overlords, and sued tyrannical rulers. This may help explain why, throughout Chosŏn, there were no known rebellions led by slaves. While slaves were no doubt economically exploited and physically abused, they had productive ways to exercise their agency, including legal pathways for airing their grievances. This relatively benign form of slavery, the product of an equivocal state that tried to balance slaveholder interests and a slave's humanity, might have contributed to the longevity of the institution.³¹

EXITS FROM SLAVERY

Slaves escaped from slavery through several routes including legal manumission, making a payment, serving in the military during national emergencies, and running away. Opportunities for obtaining freedom by legal means were relatively few and tightly controlled by the state and elites, who worried that manumitted slaves and their descendants would also feel freed from social mores and distinctions and thereby erode the social fabric. Yet, the court ultimately provided legal paths to freedom for slaves in certain cases. One was the offspring of a yangban father and his slave status concubine: since status in principle followed the mother's, that offspring was thus a slave at birth. But numerous court discussions in the early Chosŏn period revolved around whether to grant good status following the father and highlight the tension between two starkly contrasting ideas about these children. Opponents relied on the widely-shared argument that, if awarded good status, these offspring would mix with the yangban, go beyond their social standing, and even hold offices, and thus undermine the social status and leading to rebellion or treason against the state. Subscribing to Confucian ideas of paternalism, proponents countered that the father's blood should outweigh the mother's. They also invoked paternal compassion, declaring that the children of slave status concubines are also "flesh and blood" of yangban fathers, and questioned what compassionate father would let his children fall into a slavery.³²

The resolution encoded in the *Great Code of Administration* (*Kyŏngguk taejŏn*) of 1485 reflects the deep-seated anxiety and ambivalence of yangban toward these children. The law provided "high and low officials" a legal pathway to free their own slave-status children by going through a set of the process before they reached sixteen years of age. If the child was owned by other people because its mother was not the property of its father or father's wife, the child had to be bought from the owner before filing the manumission paperwork. Once the administrative procedures were complete, the government issued a manumission certificate, and the freed child, if male, would be registered with the Auxiliary Army.

Historical records detail some cases in which a compassionate father took advantage of this law and freed his slave-status children. One example, discussed earlier, is Yu Hŭi-ch'un, who had four daughters whose mother was

a female slave owned by someone else. One by one, Yu followed through the process to manumit his daughters, which included negotiating the price of one horse to purchase his own daughters from their owners, and submitting the necessary paperwork to the relevant offices. To Yu, it was the right thing to free them, his own flesh and blood. Not all qualified yangban fathers, however, used this law to free their slave-status children, opting instead to keep them in a slave roster. The 1554 royal edict declared that, while it is inappropriate to enslave one's own siblings or cousins, it is acceptable to treat as slaves one's nephews and nieces or more distant blood relations. This relieved the owners from guilt over treating their kin as slaves. The legal philosophy embedded in these statutes held that human emotions such as compassion apply to human beings differently depending on the closeness of their kinship relations, and should thus be stratified just like the social structure.

The state adopted several measures allowing the manumission of slaves in return for military service during national emergencies caused by wars. Slaves were even allowed to stand for military examinations and hold offices. Slaves who provided notable service in the suppression of rebellions also had an opportunity to gain freedom as a reward. Though rare and expensive in early Chosŏn, manumission could also be granted by making grain contributions during a famine. In 1485, the slave Im Pok paid 750 *sŏk* of grain to purchase the freedom of his four sons. In 1553, the price dropped to 50–100 *sŏk*, still a significant sum. During the Japanese invasions, the opportunities for this kind of manumission expanded, with prices ranging from 50 to over 500 *sŏk*.³³ The state usually compensated a slave owner's loss with official ranks and other perks.

In late Chosŏn, manumission by making a payment or providing the owner with a replacement slave (of the equivalent age and gender) became common, and relevant laws were codified in the *Supplementary Great Code*, compiled in 1746.³⁴ In 1398, the Chosŏn state set the price for a slave between the ages 15 and 40 at 400 *p'il* of cloth, equivalent to a horse, and 300 *p'il* for slaves outside that age range.³⁵ The price codified in the *Great Code of Administration* promulgated in 1485 was 4000 paper money for a slave aged between 15 and 50, which was comparable to one horse or 20 *sŏk* of rice or 400 *p'il* of cotton cloth.³⁶ This was what Yu Hŭi-ch'un paid when he "bought" each of his daughters before freeing them. Though the actual price of manumission fluctuated in response to immediate circumstances, like increased vagrancy during wars and repeated famines, the maximum price the state set in 1731 was 100 *yang* in cash, equivalent to 20 *sŏk* of rice.³⁷ Over time, the price of this ticket to freedom declined. In 1735, a male slave named Cho Kap-sul paid 80 *yang* to exit slavery. A mother and her three children paid 70 *yang* in 1789, and in 1812 a boy paid 8 *yang*.³⁸

Running away was prevalent throughout Chosŏn. In the fifteenth century, 100,000 of 450,000 public slaves were counted as runaways, a flight rate of 22 percent.³⁹ Flight was also widespread among private slaves. We already

noted the flight of Kang-bi, O Hŭi-mun's female slave, and her husband Han-bok in 1597, which led to Han-bok's death. O Hŭi-mun's diary also reports one slave named Song-no, who repeatedly tried to run away. In 1593, Song-no took a leave to visit his mother but returned late with the excuse of his father's illness. Next year, he took a leave and went to his home but did not come back for half a year. His excuse this time was that his father died and he himself got sick. He outright ran away in 1595 but was caught by O's son and returned to his owner together with other family members such as his mother, uncle, and nephew. After a few months, however, he had illicit relations with O's trusted slave Mak-chŏng's wife Pun-gae and they took off together. After several years, Song-no, who lived with Pun-gae's mother as a fugitive, voluntarily returned to O and reported that the couple now had two sons. No doubt Song-no and Pun-gae calculated the pros and cons of living as runaway slaves. If they were falsely recognized as commoners by the authorities, they would have been liable for various taxes. The prospect of their sons qualifying for military service might have loomed large as well. Private slaves in early Chosŏn were usually exempted from military service. Even when they formed their own household, they were often protected by their owners from being levied for miscellaneous taxes by the local government. Importantly, the law stipulated that when runaway slaves turned themselves in, they were not to be punished and their unpaid tribute payments were waived.⁴⁰ Though this law begins to appear in dynastic codes in the early eighteenth century, Song-no learned from his prior attempts to run away that O did not punish him when returned and therefore decided to take his chances. This episode shows Song-no and Pun-gae adapting and calculating their moves in response to evolving circumstances. Using their family resources, they chose, planned, and managed life as runaways. But when changing circumstances, including the presence of offspring, convinced them it was more beneficial to return, they did. For his part, O sometimes mobilized his own human resources—his son who held provincial posts as well as other officials with whom he was acquainted—to track down runaway slaves. But sometimes those actions proved impractical or impossible, leaving him little redress for his runaway slaves.⁴¹

Slave flight was still a major issue in late Chosŏn. One in every 5 slaves in the household registers of the northern part of Seoul in 1663 were runaways. One wealthy yangban household reported twenty runaways among 203 reported slaves.⁴² Of 587 slaves recorded in household registers of the Kyŏngju Ch'oe family in Taegu from 1672 to 1807, 171 (29 percent) were runaways.⁴³ The Chŏnŭi Yi family in Kwangju reports that from the late seventeenth to the late eighteenth century, only eight of 82 runaway slaves were recovered.⁴⁴ Slaveholders continued to rely on their connections or hired professional slave hunters to catch these runaways. Many slave owners in late Chosŏn, however, had weakened political and social networks which meant less ability to mobilize official assistance for their private causes, and thus much less capacity overall to track down runaway slaves. The high opportunity cost of searching for and recovering runaways and the diminishing need to have

slaves as cultivators surely helped discourage slave hunting. Yangban owners still kept a record of their runaway slaves but, more and more, made no earnest effort to recover them.

Some scholars see running away as a form of popular resistance against exploitative overlords, leading to a dissolution of slavery and the hierarchical social status system.⁴⁵ Reduced capability for slave owners to capture their runaways and the state's repeated prohibition of slave hunting certainly made the flight more successful than in earlier periods. Other studies challenge this view, arguing that the socio-economic conditions of the time were not ripe for runaway slaves to find a stable livelihood, which motivated their voluntary return to their owners. Indeed, along with returning runaway slaves, many commoners, confronting the contracted economy of late Chosŏn, were busy enslaving themselves or selling their family members such as wives and children as slaves. This new supply of slaves secured the maintenance of slavery all the way to the end of Chosŏn, leaving probably 10–20 percent of the total population in enslavement by the mid-nineteenth century.⁴⁶

What, then, contributed to a decline of slavery in Korea? Scholars often credit the adoption of matrilineal law in 1731 as a direct cause. The surviving household registers confirm a decreased slave population from the 1730s on. The Chŏnŭi Yi family's slaveholding, for example, numbered more than 100 until the mid-eighteenth century but decreased to 50–60 in the latter part of the century. In the 1798 register, only five slaves were recorded, and less than 10 appear throughout the entire nineteenth century.⁴⁷ But it is simplistic to think a new law led to a drastic change in the centuries-old institution of slavery. Indeed, many previous attempts to institute matrilineal rule were ineffective because the power of slaveholding elites and their domination of the government were too great to overcome. What had changed during late Chosŏn was the agricultural economy. Yangban, weaker but still a force to be reckoned with, no longer needed a large gang of slaves working their landed estates because opportunities to expand arable land through reclamation had diminished sharply. In addition, fragmented and scattered land ownership due to generations of equal inheritance meant that the costs of using slave labor now outweighed its benefits. Maintenance of tribute-paying nonresident slaves grew more difficult as owners found reduced means of reinforcing their subordination. A general population increase and smaller landownership together with advanced intensive agricultural technology such as transplanting also shifted the type of labor needed. Landowners found sharecropping more profitable than using slaves, which required large enforcement costs. As Rhee and Yang observe, the decline of slavery overlapped with "the emergence of independent peasants and the maturity of peasant society based upon them."⁴⁸

Did moral argument make any impact on the decline of slavery or its abolition? A slave's humanity had long been acknowledged but more elaborate and critical views on hereditary slavery in Chosŏn emerged in the late seventeenth century, spearheaded by Yu Hyŏng-wŏn (1622–1673).⁴⁹ The abolition decree of public slavery was announced in 1801, freeing about 66,000 tribute-paying

public slaves. This monumental decision was preceded by numerous court discussions on the pros and cons of abolition. The proponents argued that the stigma attached to slave status, rather than their tribute payment obligation—which was the same amount as a commoner’s military tax—made life difficult for public slaves and led them to flee. Accordingly, they proposed to remove the stigma of slavery by changing their title from slave to commoner. They indicated that there was no financial utility in keeping the people in bondage and that slavery was against the manifestation of a benevolent government, in whose eyes all people are children of the king—a fundamental Confucian idea that yangban officials and scholars alluded to repeatedly throughout the dynasty. Opponents, meanwhile, stuck to their previous script that said abolition would encourage private slaves to rebel against their owners and disrupt the distinction between noble and base, the foundation of Chosŏn society. Interestingly, the royal edict of 1801 subscribed to affective terms as encoded in Neo-Confucian ideas to justify the historic emancipation. Quoting key Confucian texts, it advocates the idea that the king should love and care for his people and treat all the people equally with compassion without making a distinction between noble and base and between men and women as all human beings are the same.⁵⁰ When hereditary slavery was abolished in 1886, the reigning king also justified his reform with the argument that inheriting slave status forever was detrimental to a benevolent government.⁵¹ In 1894, the institution of slavery together with the hierarchical social status system was abolished.

The ideological justifications either to support or deny slavery were available all the time, but it was not ideology that led to its abolition. Rather, it was socio-economic changes, and slave policies of the state that weakened the boundaries between slaves and commoners, which made the decline and the eventual abolition more acceptable to slaveholders, whose holdings had contracted to a significant degree anyway. They were probably also satisfied by the durability of status distinctions, which remained unchallenged when using hired laborers or tenants instead of slaves. And the new mode of production was also more stable and profitable to them by the eighteenth century. Though Chosŏn intellectuals had discussions on historical precedents and the legitimacy of slavery as an institution as well as the humanity of slaves, the eventual abolition of slavery was not the result of any radical or persistent abolitionist movement.

NOTES

1. *Han shu*, zhi, dilizhi xia, 103, <https://ctext.org/han-shu/di-li-zhi-xia>. Accessed 15 July 2021.
2. *San guo zhi*, Wei shu 30, Fuyu chuan, 1, <https://ctext.org/text.pl?node=603338&if=en>. Accessed 15 July 2021.
3. *Koryŏsa* [History of the Koryŏ Dynasty], 85: 43a–44a. All *Koryŏsa* citations are from Koryŏ sidae saryo database (Database of Primary Sources Concerning the

- Koryŏ Dynasty), http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/item/level.do?itemId=kr&bookId=%E5%BF%97&types=r#articleList/kr_085r_0010_0060. Accessed 15 July 2021.
4. Young-hoon Rhee and Donghyu Yang, “Korean Nobi and American Black Slavery: An Essay in Comparison,” *Millennial Asia* 1 (2010): 5–39 (21).
 5. *T’aejong sillok* [Veritable Records of King T’aejong], 1414.intercalary 9.27 (lunar). For the *Chosŏn wangjo sillok* (Veritable Records of the Kings of the Chosŏn Dynasty), I used the online edition provided by the Kuksa p’yŏnch’an wiwŏnhoe (National institute of Korean history), http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kca_11409127_001. Accessed 15 July 2021.
 6. Yi Yŏng-hun, “Komunsŏ rŭl t’onghae pon Chosŏn chŏn’gi nobi ŭi kyŏngjejŏk sŏnggyŏk” [Economic Aspects of Early Chosŏn Slavery Seen through an Analysis of Family Documents], *Han’guk sabak* 9 (1987): 91–172 (103–5).
 7. Rhee and Yang, “Korean Nobi and American Black Slavery,” 7–8.
 8. Edward W. Wagner, “Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century Korea: Some Observations from a 1663 Seoul Census Register,” *Occasional Papers on Korea* 1 (1974): 36–54; Susan Shin, “The Social Structure of Kŭmhwa County in the Late Seventeenth Century,” *Occasional Papers on Korea* 1 (1974): 9–35; James B. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty* (Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1996), 251.
 9. *Koryŏsa*, 85: 45b, http://db.history.go.kr/KOREA/item/level.do?itemId=kr&bookId=%E5%BF%97&types=r#detail/kr_085r_0010_0060_0240. Accessed 15 July 2021.
 10. Yi Su-hwan, “Chosŏn hugi sŏwŏn nobi sin’gong e kwanhan yŏn’gu” [A Study of Tribute Payment Submitted by Slaves at a Private Academy in Late Chosŏn], *Minjok munhwa nonch’ong* 10 (1989): 109–62 (119 and 136).
 11. Rhee and Yang, “Korean Nobi and American Black Slavery,” 18–19.
 12. Martina Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors’ Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea* (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015), 136–37.
 13. Yi Sŏng-im, “Chosŏn chunggi ŏnŭ yangban’ga ŭi nongji kyŏngyŏng kwa nobi sahwan—Yu Hŭi-ch’un ŭi Miam ilgi rŭl chungsimŭro” [Land and Slave Management of a Yangban Family during the Mid-Chosŏn Period—Findings from Yu Hŭi-ch’un’s Diary], *Chindan hakpo* 80 (1995): 115–51 (144); Rhee and Yang, “Korean Nobi and American Black Slavery,” 17. One *tu* = 5.976 liter.
 14. Yi Su-hwan, “Chosŏn hugi sŏwŏn nobi,” 116. One *sŏk* is either 15 or 20 *tu*.
 15. Kim Hyŏn-suk, “19 segi chungban yangban’ga ilgi e nat’anan nobi wa nobi nodong” [Slaves and Their Labor Recorded in a Yangban’s Diary in the Mid-Nineteenth Century], *Chosŏn sidae sahakpo* 67 (2013): 429–64.
 16. Though prices fluctuated, one *p’il* of cotton cloth was equivalent to 2 *yang* in cash or 6 *tu* of rice in the eighteenth century.
 17. Kim Kŏn-t’ae, “18 segi chungyŏp sanobi ŭi sahoe kyŏngjejŏk sŏnggyŏk” [Socio-economic Characteristics of Private Slaves in the Mid-Eighteenth Century], *Taedong munhwa yŏn’gu* 75 (2011): 87–150 (127–31).
 18. Yi Su-hwan, “Chosŏn hugi sŏwŏn nobi,” 136.
 19. Rhee and Yang, “Korean Nobi and American Black Slavery,” 17–18.
 20. Deuchler, *Under the Ancestors’ Eyes*, 139–40; Yi Yŏng-hun, “Komunsŏ rŭl t’onghae pon Chosŏn,” 107–8.

21. Yi Yŏng-hun, “Komunŏ rŭl t’onghae pon Chosŏn,” 119.
22. Kim Ŭi-hwan, “Chinch’ŏn P’yŏngsan Sin-ssi nobi kajok ũi chonjae yangsang—nobi ũi kyŏlhon kwa kage kyesŭng ũl chungsimŭro” [Slave Families Owned by a P’yŏngsan Sin Family from Chinch’ŏn—Slave Marriage and Family Succession], *Komunŏ yŏn’gu* 52 (2018): 313–41.
23. Kim Kŏn-t’ae, “18 segi chungyŏp,” 101–6.
24. Sun Joo Kim, “My Own Flesh and Blood: Stratified Parental Compassion and Law in Korean Slavery,” *Social History* 44, no. 1 (2019): 1–25.
25. Sun Joo Kim and Jungwon Kim, *Wrongful Deaths: Selected Inquest Records from Nineteenth-Century Korea* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2014), 57–61.
26. Sun Joo Kim, “Resilience of Korean Slavery: Tyrannical Owners, Resourceful Slaves, and the Equivocal State,” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 81, no. 1 & 2 (2021): 133–55.
27. Kichung Kim, “Unheard Voices: The Life of the Nobis in O Hwi-mun’s Swaemirok,” *Korean Studies* 27 (2003): 108–30 (124).
28. *Soktaejŏn*, 5: 16b, http://db.history.go.kr/law/item/level.do?levelId=jlaw_205_0260_0060. Accessed 15 July 2021.
29. *Namwŏn-hyŏn ch’ŏppo imun sŏngch’aek* [Namwŏn County Official Correspondences] (1736–1737), reprint in Yi Yŏnghun, ed., *Han’guk chibangsa charyo ch’ongsŏ: Poch’ŏp-p’yŏn*, 1–2 [Collected Local Sources of Korea: Official Correspondences 1–2] (Seoul: Yŏgang ch’ulp’ansa, 1987), 2: 189–95.
30. *Turak* is a unit of land sufficient to sow 1 *tu* of grain seeds.
31. Sun Joo Kim, “Resilience of Korean Slavery.”
32. Sun Joo Kim, “My Own Flesh and Blood.”
33. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions*, 228–29.
34. *Soktaejŏn*, 5: 28a–b, http://db.history.go.kr/law/item/level.do?levelId=jlaw_205_0260&position=-1. Accessed 30 September 2021.
35. *T’aejo sillok* [Veritable Records of King T’aejo], 1398.6.18 (lunar), http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kaa_10706018_003. Accessed 30 September 2021.
36. *Kyŏngguk taejŏn*, 5: 16b, http://db.history.go.kr/law/item/level.do?levelId=jlaw_105_0240_0050. Accessed 30 September 2021.
37. *Sŭngjŏngwŏn ilgi* [Record of the Royal Secretariat], 1731.10.2 (lunar), <http://sjw.history.go.kr/id/SJW-F07100020-02400>. Accessed 30 September 2021; *Soktaejŏn*, 5: 28b, http://db.history.go.kr/law/item/level.do?levelId=jlaw_205_0260_0020. Accessed 30 September 2021.
38. Sun Joo Kim, “Resilience in Korean Slavery.”
39. Rhee and Yang, “Korean Nobis and American Black Slavery,” 7–8.
40. *Chŏllok t’onggo* [Comprehensive Code of Administration], 12: 30a, http://db.history.go.kr/law/item/level.do?levelId=jlawb_060_0120_0060_0020_0120&position=4. Accessed on 15 January 2020. *Chŏllok t’onggo* was compiled in 1707.
41. Kim Kichung, “Unheard Voices.”
42. Wagner, “Social Stratification in Seventeenth-Century Korea,” 44.
43. Chŏng Chin-yŏng, “Chosŏn hugi hojŏk charyo rŭl t’onghae pon sanobi ũi chonjae yangt’ae—Taegu Kyŏngju Ch’oe-ssi-ga rŭl chungsimŭro” [Private Slaves in Household Registers in Late Chosŏn—a Case of a Kyŏngju Ch’oe Family from Taegu], *Chibangsa wa chibang munhwa* 11 (2008): 183–223 (200).

44. Chŏn Hyŏng-t'aek, "Chosŏn hugi han yangban'ga ūi hojŏk charyo rŭl t'onghae pon sanobi ūi chonjae yangt'ae—Kwangju Chŏnŭi Yi-ssi Munŭi-gong-p'a chongga sojang munsŏ ūi sarye punsŏk" [Private Slaves Recorded in Household Registers of One Yangban Family—a Case of the Munŭi-gong Branch of the Chŏnŭi Yi Lineage from Kwangju], *Chosŏn sidae hakpo* 15 (2000): 115–51 (129).
45. Bok-rae Kim, "Korean Nobi Resistance under the Chosun Dynasty (1392–1910)," in *Slavery and Resistance in Africa and Asia*, ed. Edward Alpers, Gwyn Campbell and Michael Salman (London and New York: Routledge, 2005), 67–81.
46. Chŏn Kyŏng-mok, "Chosŏn hugi chamae ūi wŏnin kwa yangt'ae" [The Causes and Status of Self-Condensation in Late Chosŏn], *Chŏnbuk sahak* 43 (2013): 141–78; Chŏng Chin-yŏng, "Chosŏn hugi hojŏk charyo," 202.
47. Chŏn Hyŏng-t'aek, "Chosŏn hugi," 149.
48. Rhee and Yang, "Korean Nobi and American Black Slavery," 30.
49. Palais, *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions*, 232–68.
50. *Sunjo sillok* [Veritable Records of King Sunjo], 1801.1.28 (lunar), http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kwa_10101028_003. Accessed 30 September 2021.
51. *Kojong sillok* [Veritable Records of King Kjong], 1886.1.2 (lunar), http://sillok.history.go.kr/id/kza_12301002_002. Accessed 30 September 2021.

FURTHER READINGS

- Deuchler, Martina. *Under the Ancestors' Eyes: Kinship, Status, and Locality in Premodern Korea*. Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2015.
- Hejtmanek, Milan. "Devalued Bodies, Revalued Status: Confucianism and the Plight of Female Slaves in Late Chosŏn Korea." In *Women and Confucianism in Chosŏn Korea*, edited by Youngmin Kim and Michael J. Pettid, 137–49. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2011.
- Kim, Bok-rae. "A Microhistorical Analysis of Korean Nobis through the Prism of the Lawsuit of Damulsari." In *What Is a Slave Society?: The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, edited by Noel Lenski and Catherine M. Cameron, 383–409. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019.
- Kim, Jisoo M. *The Emotions of Justice: Gender, Status, and Legal Performance in Chosŏn Korea*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2015.
- Kim, Joy S. "Representing Slavery: Class and Status in Late Chosŏn Korea." Ph.D. dissertation. Columbia University, 2004.
- Kim, Kichung. "Unheard Voices: The Life of the Nobi in O Hwi-mun's Swaemirok." *Korean Studies* 27 (2003): 10–37.
- Kim, Sun Joo. "Resilience of Korean Slavery: Tyrannical Owners, Resourceful Slaves, and the Equivocal State." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 81, no. 1 & 2 (2021): 133–55.
- . "My Own Flesh and Blood: Stratified Parental Compassion and Law in Korean Slavery." *Social History* 44, no. 1 (2019): 1–25.
- Palais, James B. *Confucian Statecraft and Korean Institutions: Yu Hyŏngwŏn and the Late Chosŏn Dynasty*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1996.
- Rhee, Young-hoon and Donghyu Yang. "Korean Nobi and American Black Slavery: An Essay in Comparison." *Millennial Asia* 1 (2010): 5–39.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the Indian Ocean World

Titas Chakraborty

INTRODUCTION

The “Indian Ocean World” (IOW) spans a coastline, or littoral scape, from the tip of Southern African to the Persian Gulf, the whole of peninsular Indian subcontinent, Burma, Vietnam, Thailand, and archipelagic South East Asia up to the Philippines. Historians are yet to decide how far inland this littoral scape extends; as Ashin Das Gupta, one of the founding historians of the Indian Ocean World (IOW) cautioned, “an important task for the historian of the Ocean is to understand the limits of the littoral.”¹ While the limits of the hinterland vary widely, suffice it to say, for historians of the IOW, the changing nature of human interactions with the ocean is central to the history of the societies ensconced within its coastline. Over the years, Indian Ocean-centric histories have unveiled the role of commerce in state formation in Asia and Africa, laid bare maritime dimensions of imperial diplomacy and competition, and intimated ecumenical and sectarian religious networks. Most significantly, these works have revealed interconnected social milieus of major and minor political figures, merchants, mercenaries, scholars, religious itinerants, sailors, pirates, and slaves. This chapter summarizes a sliver of these findings in recounting the history of IOW slavery from the vantage point of maritime imperial interactions.

T. Chakraborty (✉)
Duke Kunshan University, Suzhou, China
e-mail: titas.chakraborty@duke.edu

The scholarship on Indian Ocean world slavery reveals linked systems of bondage in Asia and Africa, which European empire-building cemented together. Scholarly interest in Indian Ocean slavery originally stemmed from the findings of Atlantic historians who showed that the extension of European plantation economies in the late eighteenth century had turned the East coast of Africa into a hotbed of slave trading. As scholars probed further, it became clear that European practices of slavery and slave trading in the vast region east of the African continent had older roots, connected to several systems of dependence and servility in Africa and Asia. Thus, in Siam, an important node of slave trading in the Indonesian Archipelago, the social concept of “that” explained a whole range of servitude from debt bondage to male and female slaves who could be bought and sold. Slavery was also second nature to family structures. The origin stories of Thai ruling dynasties, for instance, mention dynastic heads descending from heaven with a full family, including dependents, and slaves. Such practices gave rise to several discrete networks of slave trading in Asia and East Africa. From the sixteenth century, European empire builders tapped into these networks, opened new sources of slave capture, introduced new forms of enslavement, transformed the existing ones and created conjoined webs of slave transfer that spanned the entire Indian Ocean. These imperial webs were often fragile and frequently collapsed as a result of intra-European imperial competition, conflictual relations with various local states, or slave revolts. Yet in its wake, this maritime nexus of slavery created many new relationships, institutions, and identities.

The late eighteenth century saw transitions in the world of Indian Ocean slavery. In increasing numbers, non-European states began employing slave labor to produce commodities for a global market. Apart from the clusters from whence they sourced their slaves, these transitioning slave societies were not in direct relationship with each other. Nonetheless, all these societies shared the pressing need of integrating into a globalizing market economy. Slavery in many of these societies was not a new institution; yet, the old institution adopted several new usages, while retaining some of the old meanings. Hence, in the Arabian Peninsula slavery burgeoned in the late nineteenth century as a form of labor commercially producing dates and pearls at a time when pilgrims to Mecca were buying slaves only to free them as “charitable action” of Islamic piety. At the same time, while non-European states were turning to slave trading, European imperial powers were preaching abolition. In fact, abolition became both the practical and ideological maneuver for ousting political competitors and creating a (primarily British) imperial edifice justified by a civilizing mission and racial superiority. The imperial politics of abolitionism had far-reaching effects on Asian and African polities and social relations. Imperial ambitions also drew the limits to abolition. In places where slavery ended formally, new forms of servility took root. European imperial vigilante abolitionism and subsequent experiments in alternative kinds of forced labor regimes created once again a mesh of an Indian Ocean network.

The essay narrates the evolution of the Indian Ocean network of slavery from the sixteenth to the nineteenth century. Within this chronological arc, it situates who were enslaved and how they were enslaved, what the labors of slavery were, and how people experienced the end of their enslaved condition. Over the extensive geographical expanse pathways into slavery were many, including warfare, kidnapping, indebtedness, and poverty. Forms of service were also multiple, but predominantly labors involving hard physical exertion, especially from the eighteenth century. Trajectories of freedom involved initiatives of slaves resisting their masters, manumission following the legal conventions of the states and societies where the enslaved found themselves, and European imperial abolitionist interventions. As European imperial projects transpired with their manifold interface with local polities and people, they brought together this vast variety of practices into an oceanic network.

EMPIRES AND THE CONSOLIDATION OF PAN-INDIAN OCEAN SLAVING NETWORKS

Several localized clusters of slave trading had emerged in different parts of the Indian Ocean world by the early years of the sixteenth century. Of these, perhaps the most extensive was the network of trade in African slaves in the Arabian sea. Information on this and other networks in this early period is often sketchy and historians have relied heavily on European sources, especially Portuguese archives, to reconstruct these circuits. The island of Madagascar, Cape Delgado, the Swahili coast and the Horn of Africa became a source of slaves for primarily Arab, Swahili, and Comorian merchants. Most of these merchants were followers of some form of Islam. In the Horn region, they colluded with the Christian Ethiopian kingdom transacting with non-Christian/non-Islamic pagans belonging to small polities such as Damot, Kambata, and Hidaya. Most ended up in the markets of Hejaz, Yemen, and Hadramawt, places ensconced in trade relations with the Persian Gulf and the west coast of the Indian subcontinent. The Indian ties with the East African slave trade are evident in the cotton fabric from India that Ethiopian royalty received in exchange for slaves while various Indian political elites received a small but steady supply of slaves from the Horn (Habshi) or the Swahili coast (zanji). A second maritime network of slave trading emerged in the Indonesian archipelago, centering Malacca in the Malay peninsula and Makassar in South Sulawesi. Malay, Makassarese, and Bugis traders redistributed human cargo from the eastern islands from Java, Buton, Sulu, Mindanao, northeast Borneo, Timor, Manggarai, Tanimbar, Solor, and Alor into the important city-states and polities in the western archipelago and mainland Southeast Asia in Malacca, Brunei, Pasai, Banjarmasin, Jambi, Johor, and Siam. This archipelagic trading nexus did not overlap with the Western Indian Ocean slave trade.

These slaves performed a variety of services, occupying a range of positions within the hierarchies of the societies where they were enslaved. East African slaves reaching India were often military slaves. The condition of slavery

imparted to these men kinlessness, a much sought-after attribute amongst the political elites of various sultanates in the Indian subcontinent, who were so often distrustful of their own kin. Many of these slaves could expect emancipation and possibilities of social mobility within their lifetime. The life and career of the Habashi, Chapu, renamed Ambar, the slave of the peshva of the Nizam Shahi Sultanate, is instructive. Following his manumission after his master's death in 1575, Ambar rose to the position of "Malik" or leader of a small contingent of troops. The next few years saw Malik Ambar's ascent as the kingmaker of the Nizam Shahi sultanate and an undaunted adversary of the northern Mughal state. The Mughals resented the "crafty Ambar" for foiling their imperial ambitions of southward expansion even while their court chroniclers could not help but observe "in warfare, in command, in sound judgement, in administration, he [Ambar] had no rival or equal."² One group of military Habashi slaves had even captured the seat of Bengal sultanate for a period in the late fifteenth century. Despite the enormous power of these military slaves, generations of Persian court chroniclers have shown that as deracinated people they found status commensurate with their power difficult to achieve. More humble slaves labored for their masters in agricultural, domestic or urban, mercantile settings. In Makassar and Aceh, slaves tilled rice fields, while in Sumatra (Pasai and Jambi) they worked the pepper groves alongside independent peasants. In port cities such as Malacca merchant proprietorship of slaves was ubiquitous. The Portuguese general and conqueror of Malacca, Afonso de Albuquerque, received a list of three thousand slaves belonging to Malacca merchants soon after the conquest. A large number of these slaves were domestics, enslaved women figuring prominently within merchant households. Amongst male slaves, many worked as crew on merchant vessels. Some even worked as agents of the merchants, a practice commonly observed amongst Muslim and Jewish merchants in the Western Indian Ocean from at least the tenth century. Some even rose to the position of business partners of their masters. For these slaves, Indian Ocean crossings were multiple going beyond the middle passage of bondage.

The Portuguese crown and traders forged for the first time a pan-Indian Ocean slave trading network. They brought East African slaves from Mozambique into their settlements as far away as Malacca. Goa, the capital of Estado da India, an impressive city in the sixteenth century became the primary destination for slaves not only from east Africa but also from different parts of India, particularly Bengal in eastern India. Though formally part of the Estado's territorial jurisdiction, Bengal was a weak link in the empire, settled primarily by semi-independent Portuguese *casado* merchants, the chief supplier of slaves to Goa. An estimate from 1635 mentions 800 settlers in Goa, each possessing at least two slaves. The church establishments in Goa were major slaveholders. As a Jesuit visitor from 1576 noted, all Jesuit residences owned slaves and he wistfully wished that the Jesuits would free them all.³ Not all slaves brought from Eastern Africa remained in Portuguese territories in Western India as they were sold to the neighboring sultanates where

there was always a demand for military slaves. Within the Portuguese empire too African slaves, from time to time, found places in the military. However, unlike the Habashis, these were not elite military slaves and were only given arms when the Portuguese army was hard-pressed. As auxiliary troops, they were mobilized between settlements whenever the need arose. The majority of slaves in Goa did menial work that the Goan aristocracy and skilled workers, who were organized in guilds, refused to do. Amongst the slave population in Goa, ones with Asian origins were particularly confined to these jobs. As slave traders, the Portuguese merchants connected the Indian Ocean world to the Spanish empire. The “Chino” slaves of Spanish America had their origins in places dotting the Indian and Indonesian littoral and were sold in the slave marts of Manila. Portuguese Malacca emerged as the transshipment point of this long-distance slave trade. This massive network crystallized during the years of the union of the Portuguese and Spanish crowns (1580–1640).

If the Portuguese had created a slave trading network spanning the breadth of the Indian Ocean, the Dutch East India company (VOC) diversified the use of slave labor in the making of their colonial enterprise in Asia. Between 1618 and 1622, the VOC under the commandship of Jan Pieterszoon Coen conquered Jayakarta, on the island of Java, as well as the nutmeg-growing island of Banda. The VOC thereby established a firm foothold in Asia out of what once was a precarious presence in a fort on the island of Amboina. The conquest of the islands was violent; the VOC wiped out indigenous people to create a blank slate upon which the plantations of Banda islands and the city of Batavia, the headquarters of the VOC, were built. While Batavia emerged as one of the biggest conurbations in Asia, Banda, and Amboina produced spice under VOC monopoly—the first European-controlled plantation agriculture in Asia. By 1673, fortress Batavia housed approximately 27,000 people, of which half were slaves. While a substantial section of the enslaved were craftsmen, others were kuli slaves doing menial work on the waterfront as well as in the agricultural lands on the outskirts of the city. As menials, they worked alongside chained gangs of convict laborers or prisoners of war. Slaves at Banda and Amboina were plantation slaves, laboring in commercial agricultural production. Thus, within the nucleus of the Dutch empire in Asia, the VOC not only continued bondage existing in the city-states of indigenous polities but also introduced forms of slavery unknown in the region. They extended slavery in agricultural production on their new possession, the Cape, a colony which the VOC had wrested from English control in 1652. Slaves here labored on privately owned ranches, wine and wheat farms, apart from doing urban maintenance work for the VOC in Cape town. Farm produce fetched profits in the markets servicing ships passing through the Cape. Nigel Worden has argued that the profitability of Cape slave labor-based agriculture was comparable if not more profitable than slave labor-based commercial agriculture in the Caribbean. Finally, the VOC brought slaves to all its settlements in the Indian subcontinent. Of these, the most prominent was Ceylon where the VOC had come to occupy the entire coastline between the 1640s and

1680s. In moving slaves amongst these settlements, the VOC had created a functional linkage within its Asian empire.

With expanding demand for slave labor, the VOC continued and intensified the multiregional network of slave trading that the Portuguese had originally established. For much of the seventeenth century, various Dutch settlements on the Indian subcontinent—Malabar, Bengal, Coromandel—supplied slaves for key settlements in the VOC empire, namely, Batavia, Ceylon, and the Cape. The VOC tapped into a second major source of slaves by the 1660s, when the Dutch inflicted defeat on the kingdom of Makassar in 1669 and set up their settlement in Vlaardingen in Makassar. The immediate benefit was access to the well-established slave traffic passing through Makassar. The Cape colony received slaves from both India and Indonesia. Africans coming from different parts of the West-Central region, like Madagascar, were also part of the enslaved demography of the Cape. Apart from the VOC, several private merchants, or VOC officials operating in private capacities, swelled the number of slaves bought and sold in the VOC settlements. They were extremely crucial to the slave trade centered upon VOC settlements in the eighteenth century. Malabari slaves were brought to the Cape as part of their operations. Thanks to these traders, enslaved people from the Indonesian archipelago also ended up in various settlements of the Indian subcontinent. Even as the Dutch wove a thick multidirectional network of slave movements throughout the Indian Ocean, by the eighteenth century the trade tended to move slaves from eastern to western parts of the Ocean.

In order to extract slaves, the Portuguese and Dutch imperial networks utilized existing asymmetrical relationships in indigenous societies but transformed them in the process. The nexus of caste and slavery in European settlements is illustrative. Caste, or *jati*, is one of the pillars of Indian society. There is no universal caste system in India, but many regional variations of asymmetrical hereditary group relations emerged in the first millennium CE. These identities were important social markers and sometimes survived enslaved people's entire experience of slavery, even under European slavery. Manumission documents from Portuguese Goa between 1682 and 1760 reveal that caste identities of slaves were documented even at the moment of the formal end to their enslaved status. Most of these 750 manumitted slaves came from lower-caste backgrounds. Elsewhere, such as in Dutch Malabar people hailing from untouchable castes found themselves in slavery. Most regions in the Indian subcontinent have groups of untouchables whose status paradoxically placed them outside the pale of caste society, only to bind them in an exploitative relationship with it. Some of these untouchables were bound to upper-caste proprietors as bonded labor on the land. Some proprietors could even sell these bonded laborers. In South Asian history, such caste-based servile labor is called praedial caste. Demographic information on slaves sold in Dutch Cochin shows that an overwhelming majority of slaves came from untouchable castes such as Paryar and Pulayas. Indigenous inequality thus articulated with long-distance maritime slave trading, structuring the

demographic profile of slaves moving between European settlements. Yet, indigenous provenance did not exhaust caste relations. In Dutch Ceylon, the VOC designated certain praedial castes, such as Chandios, Coviayar, Nalavar, and Pallar, as “slave castes,” thus distinctly assigning to these people the juridical condition of slavery. Such a legal transformation had far-reaching social consequences. Not only were these “slave castes” attached to the VOC as servile labor, but they also became the focus of abolitionist efforts under English colonial rule in the nineteenth century.⁴

Transactions in slaves structured diplomacy between European powers and indigenous states in the IOW. As scholars of IOW connections have shown, with the coming of the Portuguese, the sea became a theater of imperial diplomacy and high politics involving amongst others, the Ottomans, the Mughals, the Safavids, and sultanates such as Gujarat. It is thus not surprising that slave trading—an important vector of the Indian Ocean network by the seventeenth century—figured prominently in these diplomatic relations. Mughal relations with “firingis” (Europeans) revolved around the slave trade. In Bengal, Mughal–Portuguese relations deteriorated as a result of Portuguese enslavement of native populations leading to the expulsion of the Portuguese from their settlement in Hugli in 1632. Similarly, the English East India Company earned the wrath of the Mughal emperor in Madras in 1687, leading to Governor Elihu Yale and the Madras Council’s decision to ban slave trading in 1688. For each illegally traded slave, a penalty of 50 pagodas was set. In Bengal, the Nazim continually issued orders to the VOC and the EIC prohibiting buying and selling Muslim subjects. In 1719 a few VOC employees paid an exorbitant sum of Rs. 760 to a Mughal imperial officer as a shield for their clandestine trade in a Muslim boy. The enslavability of subjects was always a thorn in relations between European companies and the Nazim. Even as late as 1774, when the EIC had considerable control over the judicial system in Bengal, a woman named Naintarra successfully convinced Islamic judicial experts in an EIC court of her unlawful kidnap and detention by four men, arguing she was born to “good parents and never was a slave.”⁵ Such subtle definitions of who deserved to be enslaved determined the legitimacy of European practices of slavery in the eyes of the Mughals or the Nazims.

The European slave trade in the Indian Ocean influenced indigenous politics, including state-making, in the seventeenth century. The quick rise and fall of the Arakanese kingdom of Mrauk U, between the 1630s and 1660s, depended upon VOC slave trading in the region. As slaves from the Bengal littoral, funneled through the port of Dianga, and Chittagong and Mrauk U satiated the VOC empire’s needs for slaves from the 1620s, the Arakanese kingdom gained a firm fiscal base for consolidation. As a kingdom economically founded on maritime commerce, the Arakanese found the arrival of the VOC a relief from the maritime blockade which Portuguese freebooters had maintained for decades. The Arakanese kingdom also supplied rice which constituted the diet of VOC slaves. Both rice and slave trading, however, dried out in the 1660s, as the VOC’s conquest of Makassar opened up the

archipelago as a steady source of slaves and rice, leading to a sudden demise of the Arakanese polity. In the archipelago too the VOC shaped political formations. The Conquest of Makassar created the largest migration in the region, of the Makassarese and Bugis people. This diaspora, especially of the Bugis, became the most important merchant intermediaries for the slave trade, not only for the VOC but also for other polities well into the nineteenth century. Smaller polities became intricately tied to the VOC's enormous appetite for slaves. The VOC set up two permanent settlements—one in Solor in 1646 and the other in Kupang in 1653—in the Timor region of the southeastern archipelago. This region had over one hundred princedoms that were continuously engaged in internecine warfare. With the VOC's presence in the region, headhunting, the common outcome of these conflicts, was complemented by the sale of war captives to the VOC settlement. In one of the VOC campaigns against rebels on Rote Island in 1682, the VOC was accompanied by a few Timorese allies. At the end of the campaign, with the help of these allies, the VOC gained 197 men, women, and children as slaves. The VOC in Kupang also created relationships of debt with Timorese elites. If these elites defaulted on their loan payments the VOC officials took away, as compensation, Timorese villagers living within the jurisdictions of these elites. By the beginning of the eighteenth century, slavery and slave trading was a major factor structuring all kinds of polities and inter-state interactions in the Indian Ocean world.

The EIC entered the fray of IOW commerce in slaves tipping the movement of captives primarily from the West of the IOW to the East. Slaves were particularly necessary for the EIC settlements in the Indonesian archipelago. In order to carve out its niche in the pepper trade, the EIC set up its earliest settlements in Asia in Bantam in the Indonesian archipelago, in 1603. Toward the end of the same century, the EIC lost its Bantam factory after the Sultan of Bantam, with the assistance of the VOC, expelled the English. The EIC then set up the new settlement of Bencoolen/Bengkulu with Fort York and then Fort Malborough on the island of Sumatra. In all these settlements, the EIC faced chronic shortages of docile cheap workers, for the local Malays demanded high wages and inflexible work hours. The company sought to remedy this by bringing in slaves from their Indian settlements or by arranging slave voyages from Bombay and Madras to East and West Africa. The Mughal empire made slave trading difficult in the 1680s by which time the EIC also found East African or "Coffree" slaves—alluding to the non-Islamic and non-Christian origins of the slaves—far more industrious than their Indian counterparts. Even though Asian slaves from India and the Indonesian archipelago trickled into Bencoolen, Madagascar, Mozambique, Comoros islands and the Cape Verde became the primary sources of bondpeople for the EIC. Between 1622 and 1772 the EIC in the IOW directly carried out, or planned to, 70 slave voyages on company-owned or licensed ships. These slave voyages were astonishingly "efficient," given the long distances the ships traversed. Of the eleven voyages that the EIC managed between 1735 and 1765, the mortality rate was capped at 3.7 percent. This

figure is jaw-dropping when compared to the 18 percent average mortality on British slavers, for the same years, in the Atlantic. Slaves did not only do menial jobs on the island; for all forms of artisanal work the EIC used slaves. From 1714 onwards the EIC sent a small number of “coffree” slaves to Madras to train them in the crafts of masonry, bookbinding, smithery, and carpentry. In procuring and training their enslaved workforce, the EIC thus built a network of slave movements from the West to the East, even connecting the Indian Ocean with Atlantic slave ports.

The French East India Company was a late entrant to the Indian Ocean world but became one of the largest slave traders. The *Compagnie des Indes* consolidated slave labor-based sugar plantations on Reunion Island in 1663 and Mauritius in 1721. Sugar plantations required a constant supply of slaves making the French, equal if not greater, slave traders than the Dutch. In 1735 Mauritius and Reunion islands housed some 7221 slaves. This number grew to 13,599 by 1807–1808. One estimate suggests that around 243,000 slaves from all over the Indian Ocean littoral went to the Mascarenes islands between 1670 and 1810. Much like the EIC the French had sourced slaves from the Atlantic and the Indian Ocean ports centering the Mascarenes. Slaves came from Ouidah and Goree on the West African coast, the Horn of Africa, the Persian Gulf, India, Indonesia, and even China. The majority, though, came from Madagascar, especially after 1767. In this year, the sugar islands came under the direct rule of the French crown putting an end to the French company’s monopoly, and leading to an explosion in slave trading. Two years later French private merchants garnered the privilege of selling slaves in the islands and this privilege was extended to all European and North American merchants by 1787. Thus, 69 percent of all slaves brought to these islands, were acquired after 1767, most from Madagascar. The slave trade reoriented the economy of Madagascar by the mid-eighteenth century, when the African island became heavily dependent on slave and rice trading to the Macarenes as its fiscal base. Of the French free traders facilitating the trade via Madagascar and the IOW, many came from ports of France while others were locally born. While French merchants adopted all previous trends of IOW slave trading, their major contribution was widening the practice of slave labor based commercial agriculture in the Indian Ocean.

Household slavery made all European settlements by the late eighteenth century slaveholding outposts. Care work—both sexual and non-sexual—made up a substantial part of the work necessary for the maintenance of settlements where mostly single men from Europe traveled to Asian lands as part of company service. Keeping domestic slaves was a long-standing practice amongst mercantile communities residing in the Indian Ocean littoral. In fact, Asian merchants residing in the company settlements too kept enslaved men and women for household work. For generations, observers from Europe derided and sometimes outright condemned the lavish lives of European company officials particularly their train of personal slaves and servants, as symbols of “oriental decadence” devoid of Christian values. Yet there were

important differences between European and Asian forms of domestic slavery. Enslaved men and women of most Europeans rarely or never expected to be part of their masters' families, unlike the slaves of most Asian merchants and elites. Such familial practices ensured that enslaved people and their children, even when freed, formed an underclass of workers serving the needs of European officials. Irrespective of their value as workers, or as components that added panache to retinues of European officials, the very presence of these slaves generated local-level complex networks of slave trading. In settlements that were not nodes of long-distance commerce in slaves, many of these slaves were locally sourced captive men and women. The sale of these slaves also put private merchants belonging to different European companies/settlements in touch. As needs for such slaves, though small, were continuous, the enslaved moved in multiple directions connecting numerous settlements in the IOW.

Slaves of all kinds persevered to end their condition of bondage. Flight was the most common act of insubordination. Never an individual act, flight required careful planning, and years of accumulated knowledge, and interpersonal relationships amongst slaves, freed people, and local populations. In places where European powers jostled with other competing powers, acts of desertion displayed slaves' knowledge of the legal limits of their masters' powers. By running away, slaves repeatedly exposed the vulnerability of European sovereignty on foreign lands. Flight also jeopardized profits. In sugar islands of the Mascarenes, between the 1770s and 1830s, annually 5–11.5 percent of slaves absented themselves from work for over a month causing considerable monetary damage to their masters. Shipboard insurrections were not uncommon. At least 35 known cases of slave ship revolts took place on Dutch, French, and English ships between the 1750s and 1790s. Within the Dutch empire certain slave ethnicities, such as the Makassarese, Bugis, and Balinese, were feared for their propensity to revolt. The fear was so intense that VOC authorities passed ordinances restricting the import of male slaves from the Eastern Indonesian archipelago, in 1757 and 1767, in Batavia and the Cape Colony, respectively. There are also evidences of maroon community formation in the Cape, and the Mascarenes islands. A group of runaways created a community in Hangklip on the coast of False Bay of the Cape Colony which survived the entire eighteenth century. Reunion, in the Mascarenes, was known for its strong maroon communities, from time to time terrorizing the plantation owners. Most of the maroons were Malagasy slaves. "Longing for Madagascar" spurred quite a few of these maroons to undertake the often-fatal journey back to Madagascar. Many European accounts recall these daring acts of reversing sail even though none was sadly a story of victory.

Slavery and slave resistance generated multiple identities in the IOW. European colonial authorities created slave identities in their assiduous efforts to document the enslaved population in the settlements. The VOC accordingly added to the names of their slaves toponyms such as van Bengale, or van Boegies indicating the ethnic identity of the slaves. However, such classification was inaccurate, for the toponyms were based on the places of sale,

and not the cultural background of the captives, as slaves changed hands multiple times before arriving at the place where VOC officials laid hands on them. The imperial classification was always tied up with surveillance. Fear of revolt amongst subjugated populations reflexively shaped categories of identity. Desire to revolt was equated as a trait present amongst certain slave ethnicities as mentioned above. In the eyes of colonial officials, this trait was a pathology; hence, the “disease of the Malagasies” of yearning to return to their native island, or the “deranged” behavior amongst the Bugis, Makassarese, and Balinese of “running amok.” Freed or manumitted slaves also added to identities in the settlements. In Batavia ex-slaves formed the group of *mardijkers*. The term had its origins in Bugis law texts separating free people (*meherdika*), and the enslaved (*ata*). In Batavia, *mardijkers* formed a section of the subject population with roots in slavery, yet enjoying marginal privileges such as joining the VOC military, wearing European-style clothes and hat. These privileges were fenced; *mardijkers* could not wear shoes marking the ostensible difference between them and the European/Eurasian ruling class in Batavia. Experiences of both slave trading and slavery sedimented in the Portuguese or Free Christian community all over the IOW. Freebooting Portuguese slave traders who kidnapped local working people such as boatmen as well as manumitted slaves who had entered the fold of Roman Catholicism through the Augustinian or other churches were part of this community. Certain freed or runaway slave communities grew around the Portuguese settlements on the West coast of India. These ex-slaves adopted the name of Sidis, reminiscent of the elite military slave diaspora in the IOW of the Zanjis and Habashis before the coming of the Europeans.⁶

SLAVERIES AND EMPIRES IN THE AGE OF ABOLITION

The high politics of abolitionism in the British empire followed on the heels of an intensified wave of slave resistance after the 1750s. The Somerset case of 1772 made the recapture of slaves on English soil illegal. Two years later, in Bengal, the EIC passed a regulation restricting the sale of only those slaves for whom the masters had drawn up written deeds. Further legislation of 1789 prohibited export of slaves from Bengal. The following decade witnessed in England the rise of anti-slavery advocacy and activism. This agitation culminated in the English Parliament’s passing of the Slave Trade Act of 1807, which not only forbade England or English merchants’ involvement in the slave trade but also encouraged the British state to patrol the high seas in order to prevent other nations from engaging in the slave trade. The law unleashed a form of diplomacy wherein abolition framed many of Britain’s engagements with other foreign nations, both European and non-European. The evangelical humanitarian motive for such diplomatic politics of abolition went hand in glove with imperial aims. Establishing imperial superiority of Britain, eliminating its competitors, and financial incentives guided many of these negotiations. Within its own empire, it took almost forty more years

until 1843 to abolish slavery. The years between 1774 and 1843 were not just a period of gradual progressive abolition. Laws such as Regulation X of 1811 of the EIC state in India contradicted the Parliamentary law of 1807 as it allowed the EIC ships to import slaves from elsewhere to Calcutta. Such paradoxes in the politics of abolition and the practice of slavery in the nineteenth century were many.

Perhaps the biggest paradox was the expansion of IOW slavery on an unprecedented scale in the age of abolition. The involvement of non-European polities in slavery and slave trading in the nineteenth century was key to this explosion. Throughout the eighteenth century, Asian merchants had indirectly played an important role in European-led slavery and slave trading. Gujarati merchants, for example, collaborated with Portuguese and French merchants, sending slaves from Mozambique and Madagascar to Western India and the Mascarenes throughout the eighteenth century, primarily as financiers. Yet, from the late eighteenth century, indigenous polities turned to large-scale use of slave labor both in the archipelago as well as in the western Indian Ocean. The Sulu sultanate in the South China Sea region is a good example. By the early eighteenth century the Sulu sultanate had formed trade relations with Qing China with its precious commodities such as birds' nests, pearls, and trepang. When the EIC entered this Sino-Sulu trade its primary motive was to reverse the silver flow from the coffers of imperial China. For long the EIC had been unable to bring any commodity other than silver bullion in order to pay for the tea that they bought in bulk in China for the European market. In order to tip this balance of trade in its own favor, the EIC had introduced Indian peasant-grown opium into the Chinese market in the 1770. The company saw a second opportunity in the commodities of Sino-Sulu trade. The Sulu nobility quickly realized that to supply the EIC's enormous demand for luxury goods they needed to utilize captive Filipino labor. In exchange for the luxury commodities from Jolo, capital of the Sulu sultanate, the EIC brought in opium and firearms, which further galvanized slave trading within the Sulu zone. Between 200,000 and 300,000 slaves were sold in the markets of Jolo, between 1770 and 1870. As the Sulu sultanate became integrated in the global commodity chain driven by the British opium trade, other regions in the archipelago too produced for the market using evermore enslaved laborers. On the East African coast, the Persian Gulf and the Arabian Peninsula, massive plantation complexes emerged, growing commodities such as cloves, coconuts, grain, copra, oil, sugar, dates, and pearls. The number of East Africans sold into slavery grew from 400,000 in the eighteenth century to 1,618,000 in the nineteenth century. These economies thrived under the nose of the British abolitionist patrols, declining only as a result of the competitive impulse of the global market. Thus, slave labor-based date production in the Arabian Peninsula catered to the cravings of North Americans from the 1860s. This industry declined as the US started producing dates in California commercially in the 1920s. The IOW slave trade in the seventeenth and much of the eighteenth century transformed several Asian economies into slave-sending regions. By

the nineteenth century the relationship between Asian economies and the slave labor had changed—many Asian states now built their economies on the backs of slaves to ensure their participation in an all-engulfing global market system.

The years of French revolutionary and Napoleonic wars bolstered British imperial abolitionist efforts throughout European colonies in the IOW with some success. When war broke out between Revolutionary France and Britain, and when Napoleon subsequently overran major parts of Europe, both the EIC state and the British crown seized during this era of political crisis opportunities to expand their empire in Asia. Abolition accompanied these imperial acquisitions. The EIC government in India seized French as well as Dutch territories, in 1793 and 1795 respectively, and ended their slave trade in India. Soon after, between 1795 and 1806, the occupying British government prohibited slave trading in Dutch possessions in the Indian Ocean as they fell one by one to British forces. British occupation of French Mascarenes and Dutch Batavia also started the process of abolition in these slave-majority islands, between 1811 and 1816. In the Mascarenes as soon as the British abolished the slave trade in 1811, illegal trade in slaves flourished. In Mauritius, which remained under British control, it was only after 1818 that authorities consciously clamped down on illegal trade. However, in Reunion, which France got back as a result of the Treaty of Paris, which it signed with Britain in 1814, the French government made no effort to stop the clandestine trade. French Reunionaisse and Mauritian merchants participated in the trade which only declined by the 1830s. In their efforts to abolish the slave trade in the Mascarenes, the British honed their skills in abolitionist naval patrol which they would then use in the Atlantic along the West African coast from 1819. In the Indonesian archipelago, Stamford Raffles, the first Lt. Governor of British occupied Dutch East Indies, decreed the abolition of slavery in 1813. This law consternated Dutch public opinion in the metropole even after the reinstatement of Dutch rule in 1816. Yet, the Batavian government was resistant to such measures. Slave trading was fully abolished in 1818, but it was only in 1864 that the Dutch government ruled to abolish all forms of slavery in its possessions, including slavery practiced in indigenous societies. In the 1870s they extended their abolitionist efforts to all places within the Eastern Indian Ocean and South China sea region.

In some places, European imperial abolition enabled slave-holding societies to replace slavery with other forms of captive labor. The Merina empire in Madagascar saw a massive change in its social structure as a result of British abolitionist efforts to end the Mascarenes slave trade. Since Madagascar was the main supplier of slaves to the Mascarenes, the British authorities approached Radama I, Merina ruler, signing two treaties in 1817 and 1820 to close several slave ports in Madagascar. These treaties put a great deal of pressure on the royal purse, as the capititation tax on slaves was a steady source of income. Loss of revenue pushed the most powerful indigenous empire in Madagascar to take a path of economic autarky. From mid-1820s Merina empire looked inwards to control more lands on the island and use

resources available there to build up an economy independent from slave exports. Toward these ends, the Merina rulers utilized the corvee service-labor system, *fanompoana*, to levy work hours from skilled and unskilled free persons within Madagascar. The Merina empire used *fanompoana* in all institutions, from the military to new industries such as leather and armament. From the mid-1820s, the Merina emperor had set up these industries with the help of European missionaries, adventurers and skilled workers. From the industrial shop floor to the construction sites of these new factories the state utilized compulsory *fanompoana* labor. While most Eastern and Western parts of the IOW had transitioned to full-scale slave economies, the Merina empire under the pressures of British abolitionism took a different path of replacing slavery with corvee labor.

In certain places abolition transformed institutions often associated with slavery, such as family. In much of Asia, slavery was integral to family formation, and female slave dependents were intrinsic to ideas of family structure. Manumission, especially after the female slaves bore their master's children, was generally an accepted norm in households of Muslim slaveholders, who shared their patrilineity with all children irrespective of the mother's status. British colonial administrative and judicial fiat in India distinguished between "legitimate" and "illegitimate" genealogies within families based on slave birth. The marriage ritual that any woman had undergone to become part of the male household—temporary marriages to slave-women (*muta'a* or *suria*) were always present in polygamous Muslim male-headed families—became a marker of social rank. Conversely, as the colonial judiciary propped up despotic control of male household heads over female members of the family and "lawful guardianship" of masters and mistresses over minors, it enabled family as an euphemism for slave holding and slave trading. Any ostensible proof of familiarity—"father"/"mother" and "husband"/"wife"—was enough for colonial courts to condone the master's claim over their slaves, even if there were ample proof that such familial members were bought. The use of family as an anti-abolitionist measure in colonial India created troubles for British abolitionist patrols in the Arabian sea. As British residencies dotted the Persian Gulf making inroads into the region's political relations, clandestine trading in female slaves from the Indian subcontinent and neighboring Arab countries flourished under the garb of marriage. British officials complained that traffickers married women only to divorce them on arrival to the Gulf states and then sell them into slavery. Though slavery was always part of familial relations in the Indian subcontinent and the Gulf region, it was only under abolitionist patrol that marriage became a cover/mechanism for slave trading. The compatibility of marriage and slavery within the institution of family was thus inverted under the scrutiny of abolitionist law.

Imperial goals compromised British abolitionist intentions after the 1820s. Abolitionism in India was always selective. Even when abolition was made part of the Indian Penal Code of 1860, there was no bureaucratic consensus

on who was a slave. There was the constant reluctance of the British government to transform servile social relations in India, as it feared such change would adversely affect state revenue extraction, the whole *raison d'être* of British imperialism in India. Political stability in the region was of paramount interest to the British crown as was the need to eliminate recalcitrant indigenous elites. On the one hand, in order to build stable, subservient allies the British state refused to call certain relationships "slavery," thus saving the Crown both the financial and political costs of liberating workers. On the other hand, the crown clamped down on slavery within certain indigenous courts, breaking down the familial power networks of indigenous elites, so that they could never raise their heads under the financial, political, and psychological pressures of colonial governance. Such calculations were present in the British abolitionist efforts in the Arabian sea. Between 1822 and 1873, the British crown concluded a number of treaties with the sultanates of Oman, Muscat, and Zanzibar to staunch the flow of slaves into the Gulf region. Yet, these treaties were poorly safeguarded. By 1873 there were only two British naval ships patrolling the length and breadth of the Western Indian Ocean. With diminishing resources for abolitionist vigilance, the Admiralty office distributed its Circular No. 33 in July 1875, ordering ship captains of naval patrols to only rescue runaway slaves who were in life-threatening situations.⁷ In the Gulf region, the primary goal of the British state was stability and control of the routes leading to Britain's prized possession, India. Hence the British patrol refrained from disturbing the economic order in the region. After Zanzibar became a British protectorate in 1890, the abolitionist ardor of the British empire was further dampened.

Insincere commitments to abolition were made worse with British patronizing, racist, and exploitative attitudes toward freed slaves. British patrols often dropped off liberated Africans at the Christian mission stations that had grown around the coasts of Eastern Africa and Western Indian Ocean islands. These Africans received new names from their saviors. The missionaries also inculcated the virtues of work discipline amongst the new arrivals by making them work in plantations growing cloves, vanilla, and cacao. The profits from these plantations subsidized the missions. These circumstances warranted the liberated Africans at the mission stations the Swahili epithet *watumwa ba wangereza* (slaves of the British).⁸ The expression was hardly an excess of unreasonable indignation if one considers the memoirs of the British naval ship captains which described enslaved Africans as meriting merely the compassion reserved for dogs and sheep. The situation was a little better in Bombay where the freed Africans could hope to join the Sidi community, historically formed by African runaway slaves of the Portuguese empire. Even while the community head worked as a labor contractor for British steamship companies, feeding the steamships with cheap Sidi labor, the liberated Africans could expect a social network of people with similar lineage. Nevertheless, even for the Sidis, the opportunities beyond a life of labor for a colonial wage were practically closed off.

Slavery in the Arabian sea region, which flourished especially in monarchical polities with Muslim rulers as a result of a plethora of reasons, including a weak British abolitionist patrol, had fired debates regarding legitimacy and reform of slavery in Islam by the late nineteenth century. Scholars and statesmen with allegiance to a wide variety of Islamic theology and jurisprudence participated in these discussions. Bu' Saidi, the sultan of Oman, justified the 1822 treaty he had concluded with British naval officer, Fairfax Moresby, to confiscate slaves on ships a few miles away from the coast of East Africa, as a measure to prohibit the sale of Africans "to Christians of all nations."⁹ As British imperial assault on the sovereignty of many Asian and African countries coincided with the implementation of abolition, indigenous responses occupied a broad spectrum, at one end of which was the preservation of all forms of social relations including slavery and at the other end was absolute abolition and reform, sometimes with British imperial assistance. In Oman Bu- Saidi sultan's successor Sultan Bargrash did not abolish slavery; following the advice of the Ibadi ulama, he declared that the Koran permitted slavery. The next sultan Hamud bin Muhammad was a British appointee of the recently-formed British protectorate of Oman. The new sultan overturned Bargrash's injunctions and abolished all forms of slavery at the behest of his British masters. He even set a personal example of freeing all his slaves, which evinced a range of social reactions. Some masters refused to take the compensation money offered by the British and many slaves feared a lack of social mobility if offered emancipation by law designed by an alien authority (the British empire) rather than manumitted by their own masters. Ibadi ulama of Oman remained lukewarm to abolition up until the 1960s. Muslim intellectuals, who had witnessed the violent end of the Mughal empire in the hands of the British war machine in India, also participated in this debate. Reformers and modernists such as Syed Ahmad Khan and Muhamad Iqbal denounced slavery as un-Islamic and incompatible with the life of the Prophet. Iqbal went so far as to say that individualism was inherent to Islam, and hence slavery as an institution only existed in name in Islam.¹⁰ In opposition to such views, Maulana Said Ahmad Akbarabadi, a scholar attached to the Deoband madrasa in North India, argued that there existed no concept of abolition in Islam. These debates were ultimately commentaries on the relevance of slavery in a colonial world order dominated by Europeans and whether in its elimination or continuance, there was a hope of transforming the hegemony of this order.

As soon as the first cracks in IOW slave trading and enslavement had appeared, new systems of forced movement of people, as laborers, emerged. In 1789, the year the EIC state prohibited the export of slaves from Bengal, it permitted a free trader to transport twenty convicted robbers with life sentences to utilize their labor. A year later, the EIC transported seven prisoners to Penang, and by the first decade of the nineteenth century, the EIC had sent 3000 Indian convicts to its old and new settlements of Bencoolen, and Penang and settlements the EIC had wrested from the VOC, Amboina. These outposts were always in need of labor; by the end of

the eighteenth century, the EIC had replaced the enslaved workforce with convicts. The Indian convicts considered themselves workers, or *company ke naukar* (servants of the company).¹¹ Between 1789 and 1939, the British empire in the IOW transported 108,000 Indian, Burmese, Malay, and Chinese convicts to various penal settlements. Other European empires too moved their convicts to various penal settlements. In fact, the exchange of convicts between empires became a new form of inter-imperial relations in the nineteenth century. Eighteen years after British-held Mauritius received convicts from India in 1816 it became the site for the first experiments in indentured servitude. Seventy-five privately-recruited Indian workers reached the island as contract laborers in 1834, a year after Britain had abolished slavery in all its colonial possessions outside India. In the next four years, the island received twenty-four thousand such Indian migrant workers. The Mauritius experiment was the canary in the mine, as the next nine decades witnessed over 2 million Asians, Africans and Melanesians move as indentured workers across the globe to various plantations in predominantly European colonies. Apart from convicts and indentured servants, the Mascarenes islands especially Reunion also received freed African labor. Under the *engage* system of the French empire, French traders moved 34,000 *engages*, or African apprentices, to Reunion and 50,000 from all over the French Indian Ocean empire.

As slavery surged in the age of abolition, imperial abolition itself created forms of unfree labor in a bid to replace slavery in a few places where it declined. The numbers for these forced migrations are not complete, but even by considering the few known fragments—1.5–2.1 million sold into slavery in the Western Indian Ocean between 1820 and 1880; 2 million indentured servants moved around the world between 1834 and 1920; 108,000 convicts moved within the British empire in the IOW—one can put the nineteenth century into perspective. These mobilizations reveal in stark clarity abolitionism as a largely humanitarian shield for imperial competition and largesse. The age of empire, industry, and abolition might have given birth to the ideals of liberty and rights-bearing individuals but for many peoples in the IOW, it was an age of unprecedented unfreedom.

NOTES

1. Ashin Das Gupta, "Indian Ocean and the Western Indian Ocean: The Early Seventeenth Century," *Modern Asian Studies*, 19, no. 3 (1985): 482.
2. Richard Eaton, "The Rise and the Fall of Military Slavery in the Deccan, 1450–1650," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, eds. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Eaton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 127.
3. Teotonio R De Souza, "Manumission of slaves in Goa during 1682 and 1760 as found in Codex 860," *The African Diaspora in Asia*, eds. Kiran Kamal Prasad and Jean-Pierre Angenot (Bangalore: Jana Jagriti Prakashana), 172.
4. Alicia F. Schrikker and Kate J. Ekama, "Through the Lens of Slavery: Dutch Sri Lanka in the Eighteenth Century," *Sri Lanka at the Crossroads of History*, eds. Zoltan Biedermann and Alan Strathern (London: UCL Press, 2017), 178–93.

5. Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 185.
6. Edward Alpers, "Flight to Freedom: Escape from Slavery among Bonded Africans in the Indian Ocean World, 1750–1862," *Slavery and Abolition* 24, no. 2 (2003): 60; Matthias van Rossum, "'Amok!': Mutinies and Slaves on Dutch East Indiamen in the 1780s," *International Review of Social History*, 58 (2013): 109–30. Manilata Choudhury, "The Mardijkers of Batavia: Construction of a Colonial Identity, 1619–1650," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress*, 75 (2014): 901–910.
7. Matthew Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and African Diaspora in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press), 143.
8. *Ibid.*, 175.
9. William Gervase Clarence-Smith, "Islamic Abolitionism in the Western Indian Ocean from c 1800," *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*, eds. Robert Harms, Bernard Freamon and David Blight (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013), 81–97.
10. Muhammad Iqbal, "Islam as a Moral and Political Ideal," in *Modernist Islam, 1840–1940: A Sourcebook*, ed. Charles Kurzman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 307.
11. Anand Yang, *Empire of Convicts: Indian Penal Labor in Colonial Southeast Asia* (Oakland: University of California Press), 96.

FURTHER READINGS

- Chakraborty, Titas. "The Household Workers of the East India Company Ports of Pre-Colonial Bengal." *International Review of Social History* 64, no. S27 (2019): 71–93.
- Chakraborty, Titas. "Slave Trading and Slave Resistance in the Indian Ocean World: The Case of early eighteenth century Bengal." *Slavery and Abolition* 40, no. 4 (2019): 706–36.
- Chakraborty, Titas, and Matthias van Rossum. "Slave Trade and Slavery in Asia—New Perspectives." *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 1 (2020): 1–14.
- Chatterjee, Indrani, and Richard Eaton, eds. *Slavery and South Asian History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Lovejoy, Paul E. *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.
- Machado, Pedro. "A Forgotten Corner of the Indian Ocean: Gujarati Merchants, Portuguese India and the Mozambique Slave-Trade, c.1730–1830." *Slavery and Abolition*, 24, no. 2 (2003): 17–32.
- Reid, Anthony, ed. *Slavery, Bondage and Dependence in South East Asia*. Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1983.
- Richard, Allen. *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850*. Athens: Ohio University Press, 2014.
- Schrikker, Alicia, and NIRA Wickramasinghe, eds. *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean*. Leiden: Leiden University Press, 2020.
- Subrahmanyam, Sanjay. "Slaves and Tyrants: Dutch Tribulations in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U." *Journal of Early Modern History*, 1, no. 3(1997): 201–253.

Vink, Markus. "The World's Oldest Trade": Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century." *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 131–77.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Maritime Passages in the Indian Ocean Slave Trade

Pedro Machado

INTRODUCTION

Enslavement, in all its manifestations, was an experience that slaves and unfree peoples endured as part of the process of entering an altered social condition. Whether through kidnap, capture in war, debt or the transactional mechanisms of commercial sale, individuals often underwent protracted experiences as they began their lives as unfree peoples or entered a period of further enslavement. While the moment of capture or bondage signaled the beginning of a new unfree state and social position, the experience of enslavement did not necessarily end at that moment; rather, it initiated a process whose trajectories could be expansive and involve multiple stages (and geographies) that shaped the contours of an unfree existence. In the Indian Ocean, slave and unfree experiences were defined by several factors, from the process of enslavement, gender and age, to how social structures operated and the particularities of the social and labor conditions under which individuals toiled. These experiences could also be shaped by the ways in which slaves were used as forms of conspicuous consumption in contexts in which wealth in people and not land was paramount, and where individuals could be incorporated as members into the lowest levels of their masters' houses over a period of time.

An indelible part of the slave experience, enslavement was oftentimes violently disorienting and began the moment an individual was separated from

P. Machado (✉)
Indiana University, Bloomington, IN, USA
e-mail: pmachado@indiana.edu

their home environment. This could be many hundreds if not thousands of miles from the destinations to which they were transported, whether overland or as was commonly the case, by sea. Maritime crossings in particular have assumed a paradigmatic place in understandings of the slave experience and as an extension of the narrative of how a slave and unfree person was acquired and adjusted (or was made to adjust) to bondage—the process of enslavement. Associated almost exclusively with the “Middle Passage” of Atlantic slave histories whose iconographic significance for African diasporic communities across the ocean has been central to highlighting the brutalizing trauma of violent displacement, a slave’s journey is seen to begin at the coast as they forcibly boarded the ships that would take them from Africa west to the Americas. A rich body of scholarship, drawing on the numerous autobiographical and “slave narrative” accounts portraying the perspective of the enslaved—and that highlight the wrenching horror of the Middle Passage—has thus been able to provide many details about transportation and the lives of movement that the voyage across the Atlantic represented for millions.¹

Yet, the Middle Passage was only one among many “passages” and journeys that slaves forcibly undertook from the moment they were snatched from their homes located far in the African interior.² Rather than see the experience of displacement and dislocation as beginning at the coast, it is important to recognize that it may have begun many days and months, and countless miles, before the ocean ever came into sight for a slave or they arrived at the coast. Indeed, as occurred in East and Southeast Africa, it could take years from the time of capture until a slave was embarked onto a ship (if they were embarked at all), a length of time during which they might acquire a new language or in the case of young slaves forget their natal language, and an overdetermined focus on the Middle Passage as an exclusively maritime experience occludes the complexity of the forced movements of the enslaved and unfree.

This was as true in the slaving worlds of the Atlantic as it was in the Indian Ocean. In this chapter, while recognizing the influence of the Middle Passage as a conceptual, analytical and narrative framework in shaping understandings of the brutalities of Atlantic slaving, I will explore the range of enslavement experiences of African and Asian slaves in the unfree worlds of the Indian Ocean, as they were removed from the familiar surroundings of “home” and trafficked, exchanged, transported along land and sea to faraway destinations. I note at the outset, however, that slavery in the Indian Ocean was not necessarily defined by long-distance trafficking, nor did it always involve capture, kidnap or the economic logic of commercialized exchange. Unfreedom and its associational contours shaped belonging, dependency and the social hierarchies of many communities around the rim and interiors of the Indian Ocean where slavery—even when it involved debt as a mechanism for enslavement—was characterized by highly localized relationships articulated between and among community members who were known to one another.³

Nonetheless, it was the case that many thousands of slaves and unfree peoples were made to journey over great distances and into new lands in

response to the encroachments of economic and political forces over which they exercised little if any control, and that were inflected often by political and commercial contexts that were changing rapidly in response to heightened labor demands to meet expanding consumer tastes for a range of goods. Local systems of bondage, where individuals might only journey short distances by land or sea (or a combination of the two) as part of their routes into slavery, could overlap with long-distance circuits of highly commercialized trafficking organized and run by both European and local interests.

If not always in as much detail as scholars would like, the slaveries of the Indian Ocean in the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries nonetheless offer several glimpses into the processes of enslavement and forced movement that marked the existences of slave and unfree individuals as they were taken from interiors to coasts, placed on ships and transported across the water to destinations that were not necessarily their final points of arrival.⁴ Onward journeys awaited many, while slaves were also subjected to being exchanged multiple times in serving many masters across different locales. These were centuries of profound change to the sources, routes and numbers of people who became enslaved for work in an array of capacities throughout the Indian Ocean. The focus in this chapter, for reasons of length but also because of the availability of sources, will be East and Southeast Africa, as well as South Asia and insular Southeast Asia, areas where local and Euro-American slaving interests both competed with one another and intersected in ways that reflected the complementarity in the expropriation of these region's peoples to serve a range of productive capacities.

ROUTES INTO SLAVERY

Enslavement did not necessarily begin with an act of violence, such as capture in warfare or kidnapping. Countless examples exist from around the rim and islands of the Indian Ocean of individuals entering into slavery or unfree status voluntarily, in response to crises created for instance by droughts and famine (the so-called "famine-slave cycle") where, as a survival strategy, families sold members into debt servitude ostensibly for short periods until the debt could be paid and the person redeemed.⁵ However, as is well documented, in many—and perhaps most instances—families who were unable to repay the debt would "lose" the individual to a perpetual state of unfreedom as they were transformed into enslaved laborers. At other times, a person could be sold permanently, which was what happened to a 10-year-old girl ("China") who was sold by her mother to a VOC (Dutch East India Company) employee at the company's trading post at Nagapattinam on India's Coromandel coast as a survival strategy in circumstances of extreme poverty.⁶ Together with pawnship, debt could also result in enslavement in East Africa in the eighteenth and especially nineteenth centuries in the context of a globally inflected commercial efflorescence and heightened labor demands for such products as ivory, pearls and cloves. Debts among elites, as occurred in the mid-eighteenth

century with transactions involving local rulers and Europeans in Southeast Asia, could also be the cause of re-enslavement. In the 1750s, a Dutch burgher in Kupang in Timor (eastern Indonesia) was owed slaves by the raja of Amabi and, after deeming that the latter had been slow with their delivery, traveled to the village of the raja's brother-in-law where he seized twelve villagers as liquidation of the debt. They were subsequently shipped to Batavia for sale.⁷ The functioning of debt as a powerful mechanism for the production of unfreedom among individuals endured even through attempts by the British to reconstitute dependent labor ties in Bihar in northeastern India into "free" labor where, after the abolition of slavery in 1843, enslaved agricultural laborers (Kamias) were transformed into bonded laborers.⁸

Yet, overwhelmingly, the process through which most individuals entered into slavery in the Indian Ocean involved some degree of violence amid forcible removal from a home environment. This could result from raids that were part of warring strategies among states, as happened throughout the history of South and Southeast Asia, and was present too in much of eastern and southeastern Africa. In Islam, the capture of infidels in *jihad* (holy struggle or war) was a recognized form of slave acquisition in the service also of extending the faith. A slave raid orchestrated by the Pangeran Dipati of Jambi on the east coast of Sumatra against Ujang Salangh on the Malaysian Peninsula in 1669, for instance, was justified on the grounds that they were "heathens" and thus susceptible to capture. Warfare and its associated raiding expeditions were endemic in Southeast Asia, particularly after the collapse of the powerful sultanate of Makassar in South Sulawesi between 1667 and 1669.⁹ Peoples of the region's stateless societies and microstates, unable to defend themselves effectively against the stronger societies of the cities and rice-growing lowlands, were vulnerable to attacks and enslavement, with the slave trade network revolving around the dual axes of Makassar and Bali. Apart from operating as independent slave exporters, the kingdoms of Bali also reexported slaves from eastern Indonesia and as far as New Guinea. Several thousands of those captured in warfare were shipped for sale at Batavia, the center of VOC interests in the region, where they fulfilled a wide variety of labor needs in the Dutch colony that sustained high levels of demand for slaves among private merchants and Company officials alike. Indigenous warfare operated as a conduit indirectly supplying Dutch imperial labor needs in Southeast Asia in building the infrastructure of empire and providing the human capital for its trade and commerce.¹⁰

Local and regional warfare was, however, not only practiced by indigenous forces, with Europeans engaged in widespread armed conflicts with numerous societies and states. These violent encounters could result in the enslavement of individuals or groups of people, at times through the establishment under duress of particular arrangements with the vanquished. The Dutch case is illustrative once more. Following the defeat of "rebellious" peoples in the decades between the 1650s and mid-1670s, Dutch officials often forced leaders at gunpoint to conclude slave-cause agreements or treaties whereby

fixed numbers of slaves (along with other commodities) had to be supplied to them as *boete ofte amende* (fine or tribute). These constituted an important source of captive labor for the VOC and its burghers, with the Company and its officials justifying warfare as a strategy of imperial imposition.¹¹

Elsewhere, frequent warfare could produce large supplies of captives. For much of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, for instance, the major confederations and kingdoms of the Sakalava, Merina and Tsitambala in Madagascar, the large island that lay across the Mozambique Channel with wide-ranging historic connections both to the Swahili coast, the Cape, the western Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia as well as the Atlantic, waged regular campaigns against one another that resulted in the enslavement of significant numbers of individuals across many parts of the island.¹² Captive individuals were sold to European slavers in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and well into the nineteenth, by Dutch, English and French slavers, among others. Fueled by the sale of firearms and gunpowder, and strategic demands, European trading Companies successfully acquired sizeable cargoes of captives in Madagascar. Whether in the 1660s or 1670s, when internecine warfare along the western coast of Madagascar between the kings of St Augustin's Bay and Boina in 1671 resulted in high numbers of captives being available for sale or in the decades between the 1740s and 1760s when intensive warring between the Sakalava and Betsimaraka led to the enslavement of many, the scale of conflagrations on the island created a robust war market of the captured who were shipped to such places as the Cape and Mauritius.¹³

In later periods, amid a cycle of violence and widespread warfare related to an expansion of slave trading, communities in eastern and southeastern Africa suffered similar fates. From the third quarter of the nineteenth century, in particular, these areas witnessed high levels of violence as thousands of individuals were displaced by and caught up in wars and attacks between groups of neighboring peoples. While older notions of slaves as clients and dependents had characterized slavery in earlier periods, and whereas the possibility existed for captives to be ransomed back or even incorporated into the conquering society, increasingly new demands for slaves as laborers grew from this time to dominate the nature of social and political relations.¹⁴

Labor demands of plantation economies along the Swahili coast for clove, coconut and other labor-intensive production, connected to the expansion of the Omani state under the Busaidi dynasty that had come to power in the 1740s and extended its rule over the Swahili coast by the late 1820s, spurred high demands for slave labor. By the time the court transferred its capital from Muscat to Zanzibar in 1840 under the direction of Sayyid Said ibn Sultan, many elements of a burgeoning plantation economy were in place and would develop rapidly over the following decades on oceanic islands and the African mainland. Coupled with the labor demands of Omani date production that would effectively establish a global market for dates in the nineteenth century (American consumption was a critical factor in this regard and already by the 1850s ships from Salem and elsewhere along the east coast were trading in

large volumes of dates); and the efflorescence of Gulf pearling connected to regional and especially Euro-American consumer tastes that forcibly drew in high numbers of captive Africans to labor predominantly as divers at pearl banks in Bahrain and elsewhere, slave trading became a dominant feature of social and economic life.¹⁵ Consequently, hundreds of thousands of Africans became enslaved in areas that today comprise southern Tanzania, Malawi and Mozambique.

Young children in particular were at risk of enslavement from warfare and attacks, as happened to a Nyasa boy from the southern region around today's Lake Malawi. He was seized with his mother and sisters by Ngoni raiders of the paramount chief Mpezeni and taken back to his country. From there, the boy was sold to a Yao slave trader—among the most notorious nineteenth-century African slave traders of the area in what is today northern Mozambique—in the first of several transactions that would see him eventually sold onto an “Arab from Muscat” with the intent of shipping him to Oman.¹⁶ Children, some as young as 6 years of age, were easy targets in warfare and became enslaved in significant numbers in response to the labor needs of the date plantation and pearling economies of the nineteenth century mentioned earlier.

Relatedly, raiding as either a focus or byproduct of warfare or as a strategy for acquiring captives for sale, was commonly practiced to enslave individuals throughout the lands and waterways of the Indian Ocean. In the estuaries of the Arakan-Bengal coasts, slave raids in the decades between the 1620s and early 1660s involved Magh pirates working in concert with Portuguese traders operating beyond the jurisdiction of the Estado da India, and supported by the Taung-ngu rulers of Arakan.¹⁷ Rulers from western Madagascar launched a number of raids in the early nineteenth century in the waters off north-east Mozambique that enslaved many thousands of people to meet labor demands. Raiders were drawn from within the Sakalava empire whose leaders, by using violence or the threat of violence and a politics of incorporation and allegiance among various groups, had expanded their control over the west coast and northwest of Madagascar in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.¹⁸ Having become closely connected to the growing slave trade in the Mozambique Channel from the mid-eighteenth century, with ports under their control serving as shipment centers of slave exports carried by European, Arab and other regional merchants to markets throughout the western Indian Ocean, Sakalava sought slaves for their own labor needs as Madagascar emerged as another market for servile labor where previously it had been only a source of slaves for export.

In the Sulu sultanate of the southern Philippines, extensive slave raiding by Balangingi pirates associated with its prolific slave-trading rulers, led to the large-scale enslavement of thousands of regional sea peoples such as the Bajau who were found throughout the waters of Southeast Asia. Along with others such as the Bugis, Taosug *datus* (princes) organized regional slaving expeditions that generated 200,000–300,000 imports into the sultanate between

the final quarter of the eighteenth century and the 1870s. With the development and growing importance of Chinese trade in the South China Sea over the course of the eighteenth century, connected particularly to the intensified extraction of marine resources that ranged from pearls and mother-of-pearl to *trepang* (sea cucumber) and turtle-shell, slave raiding saw an upsurge in the “Sulu zone” as the Bajau and others became subject to sustained maritime raids in the waters and along the coasts of northwestern Southeast Asia. The slave market of Jolo emerged as a key site to which thousands of captives were transported in these years, with the Taosug organizing large slaving voyages that enslaved up to 20,000 sea people per year to labor in the procurement of marine products.¹⁹

In other areas, for instance, those to the east of Bali, slave-raiding itineraries were incorporated into trading routes as the two were pursued simultaneously. Poorly monitored by the Dutch at Kupang and the Portuguese in Lifau and Dili, the Timor area represented an attractive arena for pirates and raiders. As occurred elsewhere, victims of raids were often fishermen, and the fate that befell one group who sailed out from the island of Leti to the east of Timor in 1787–1788 demonstrates the ruthlessness of and the swiftness with which raiders could enslave vulnerable individuals aboard unarmed vessels. Although the fishermen had spotted a pirate vessel closing in on their boat after they had been out at sea for several hours fishing, they were quickly caught and the vessel sunk by the raiders who had come from east of Seram. The Letinese fishermen were taken on board the pirate vessel after which it proceeded in its raiding activity to the island of Moa and other nearby places in its people-collecting ventures.²⁰

As these examples suggest, raiding was a common way in which individuals could become enslaved, and its corollary—kidnapping—removed thousands from their homes and places of residence. Indeed, the two activities were mutually reinforcing and practically indistinguishable from one another. In the highly commercialized world of slave trading that had developed throughout the Indonesian archipelago in the nineteenth century, where slave labor was a central component in the production of commodities as the region became deeply enmeshed in and oriented toward a rapidly expanding global economy shaped in part by the demands of the Chinese market—for a range of marine products among other goods—and the interests of European trading companies, the kidnapping of individuals assumed remarkable proportions by mid-century.²¹ Between 1820 and 1850, it may have resulted in the annual enslavement of between 8000 and 9000 individuals, some of whom were taken from *kampongs* (villages) while the majority appear to have been fishermen kidnapped at sea.

In some cases, as happened to a sailor born in North Sulawesi named Kalunea, an individual could be abducted as soon as they landed at an island, so widespread were abductions. In this particular instance, Kalunea appears to have been taken expressly for the slave market of Sulu, likely Jolo. Excluding Java and Madura, as many as 806,000 slaves may have been present in the

archipelago in the 1850s, with slave exports and imports from places such as Bali, Kalimantan, Lombok, Sulawesi and Sumatra maintaining a robust commerce in captives.²² In certain areas like Central Sulawesi, slave trading was widespread and extensively carried out by the end of the century. Kidnapping slaves became not only integral to slave acquisition but was also firmly entrenched in broader commercial circuits and networks, particularly in the eastern reaches of Indonesia where British and Dutch naval attempts at its suppression were not as successful as in the western part of the archipelago.

Kidnapping could occur, however, in the absence of piratical or other raiding, and often involved unsuspecting young children. Ari, a slave prisoner at the Cape castle in 1706, for instance, related how “during his childhood years [in the area] between Surat and Persia, when he was playing on the beach, he was carried off by the Dutch and eventually sold as a slave.”²³ The particular vulnerability of children is further evidenced in Zanzibar, where by the late 1830s and early 1840s young boys were being snatched from around the island. According to British officials, ships from Trucial Oman that would sail regularly to the East African island for trade would “steal” slaves while at the same time also acquiring captives through purchase. A few decades later, slavers from Sur—located at the entrance of the Gulf of Oman—were brazen enough to carry kidnapped and gagged children in large baskets through the streets of Zanzibar in daylight to awaiting vessels.²⁴ Children were also taken in India around this time; a young girl relating her story to a British agent in Muscat in 1841 about how when she was playing with two friends in the street in Yādḡīr in present-day Karnāṭaka, two “Arabs” approached the girls with promises of food and money. After agreeing to go with them, the “eight or nine years [sic] old” girls were separated before being thrown into a world of slavery that involved journeys of great distances and multiple sales, a not uncommon occurrence for the enslaved. Within the space of approximately 18 months, the young girl was sold 6 times as she was trafficked from Hyderabad to Bombay, then Mukalla in Yemen, Sur and Masirah in Oman and finally to Muscat where she recounted her story of enslavement and sale.²⁵

By the same token, adults could also be subject to kidnapping in the absence of raiding. While they may not have been as persuadable as the girls from Yādḡīr, they could nonetheless be enticed with “sweetmeats” or delicacies. This seems to have occurred with some frequency in Zanzibar where in the mid-1840s even already enslaved individuals could be seized after they had been hired to transport goods from the market by the very individuals who had engaged their services, or be kidnapped after they had gone to merchants’ homes under false pretenses where they were detained before being shipped away from the East African coast.²⁶

LONG DAYS’ JOURNEY INTO THE NIGHT

If an individual could become enslaved in a variety of ways across the Indian Ocean—as the result for instance of debt, or as a function of hereditary slavery, legal verdicts or pawns—a great number became captives through the kinds

of violent acts described above. The moment of seizure or abduction was often followed by further violence as a person faced the beginnings of a process of displacement that could transport them far away from their home or the place where they had been seized.

I should note, however, that this was not necessarily always the case, as is clear in the slave-raiding histories of Southeast Asia where individuals could end up being sold relatively close to where they had been kidnapped. This is evident from the experiences of the Letinese fishermen mentioned earlier who, after their vessel was sunk and they were seized, sailed the relatively short distance on their captors' vessel as it continued to chart a raiding itinerary that took in a nearby island and the *negeri* (settlement) Batumatang among others before making its way across the Savu Sea to Alor where the raiders attempted to sell and barter the captives for goods.²⁷ The Bajau and other sea peoples raided and abducted by pirates working under the auspices of the Sulu Sultanate from the late eighteenth century, equally, were in most cases not transported far away from where they had been taken. Their point or place of capture was coastal or on the water itself, with their journey into enslavement being at the same time a sojourn on the water where individuals experienced both removal from home or residence and the sea passage to their destination which in many cases was the slave market of Jolo.²⁸ This traversing of the water, even when distances were not great, could take months and entail much hardship compounded by the dangers from inclement weather that could either steer a ship way off course and thus prolong its journey or, in the event of a severe storm, cause its loss and the death of those aboard.

Even if distances between capture and onward transportation were relatively short, this is not to suggest that the enslaved in Southeast Asian waters did not enter very different social, linguistic or cultural environments to which they had to adapt, given the number of heterogeneous groups present in Southeast Asian waters. Rather, it is to recognize that displacement as a product of enslavement need not be a function of distance. This was true also in African settings, where in early nineteenth-century northern Mozambique, Makua slaves were captured and traded a short distance from Mozambique Island, a slaving entrepôt to which enslaved individuals from throughout the Portuguese colony were taken to be sold to slave ships.²⁹ Further north, in the late 1880s, after being employed by a Swahili trader to deliver a letter to a house at Pangani, an individual named Muhandu was forcibly detained there before being transported by boat with other slaves over the short distance to Pemba (a three-day passage) to labor on its plantations.³⁰

Yet distance could and often did matter as a defining feature of displacement. This is perhaps most evident in eastern Africa in the nineteenth century, where enslavement often involved protracted overland journeys across vast distances from the place of capture or kidnap to the coast from where slaves often faced further onward journeys across the ocean to destinations in Oman and elsewhere in southern Arabia, as well as to Gulf ports. As discussed earlier, widespread slaving had developed through the eighteenth century to meet

French demand for the plantation economy of the Mascarene islands, and more broadly intensified in the nineteenth as a result of heightened labor needs to support the dramatic expansion of the ivory, clove, date and pearl trades that was reflective of East Africa's enmeshment in a burgeoning global economy, pushing slave trading in the region to new heights.³¹ Patterns of enslavement and slave ownership for the enhancement of social standing or to meet reproductive purposes, among other functions, had been established for centuries in eastern Africa but underwent a great surge in the nineteenth that both elaborated local slaving networks and brought new ones into existence.

Although variously mediated by translation, and collected in different ways through a variety of anti-slaving and abolitionist efforts of British and other European officials, the availability of personal accounts by African captives offer a rich window into the experiences of displacement caused by enslavement.³² Many of the accounts, while brief, contain invaluable information and relate to the slave trade that shipped between 250,000 and 500,000 Africans to Arabia. They were collected by vice-admiralty courts established at Zanzibar and elsewhere to adjudicate cases of vessels that British antislavery patrols had captured in their efforts to end slave trading in the western Indian Ocean, as well as from accounts from runaway slaves seeking protection from the British navy, and consular records from both East Africa and Arabia. The testimonies and narratives that enslaved individuals provided give us a vivid picture of how the next phase in the enslavement process—transportation or journeying from point of capture or sale—unfolded during a high point in the trafficking of East Africans to the western Indian Ocean.³³ They are worth exploring in some detail, though I provide only a partial exploration of these sources because of space constraints.

Following capture far inland in southeastern Africa—in areas that included Lake Nyasa—a slave faced a journey of many weeks or months to a coastal export center (such as Kilwa) from which they would often endure further journeys on land before making the passage to Zanzibar or Pemba where they were sold and either remained or in many instances were taken by sea to destinations in the western Indian Ocean.³⁴ The majority, it must be stressed, were not transported away from the East African coast but remained there to labor in local clove, coconut and other plantations or to work in various capacities in the burgeoning globally oriented economy.³⁵ Captives were often sold in sizeable groups after falling victim to large-scale raids or otherwise acquired (e.g., as the result of debt or criminal activity), with transactions arranged for slave cargoes between leaders of commercial centers and slave dealers. Once an agreed-upon number had been secured, slaves embarked for the coast in large caravans—some with over 300 slaves—that included porters carrying other trade cargoes from the interior, such as ivory. In one early nineteenth-century description of the Mozambique slave trade, in which all captives—like exports more generally—were required under Portuguese law to pass through the customs house at the colonial capital of Mozambique Island before they were exported (thereby extending the journeys of slaves who had to be brought

to the capital from all points along the coast),³⁶ caravans with as many as 500 slaves traveled by night to the coast from deep in the interior, burdened further by the weight of carrying numerous elephant tusks for merchants at the coast. As a result of the physical strenuousness of this labor, and the lack of adequate food and harsh treatment, up to 50 percent of the captives could die on the journey.³⁷

Slaves were bound together and made to endure passages to the coast that at times traversed perilous and physically treacherous terrain. Food supplies were not always sufficiently available or offered, and slaves were provided with only a single meal and water once a day, with the dangers of starvation an ever-present reality. Where and when they could, they scavenged for roots and plants in an attempt to survive. Testimonies speak of violence inflicted upon slaves, such as beatings and assaults that were commonplace, and the killing of individuals appeared also to take place not infrequently. Compounding these dangers was the possibility that a caravan could be attacked by raiders and its captives stolen to endure yet further arduous and life-threatening experiences that characterized the enslavement process in southeastern and eastern Africa.³⁸

Once slaves arrived at the coast from the African interior, the next phase in the enslavement process often involved being held in barracoons or storehouses, as happened at Mozambique Island and elsewhere on the East African coast. By the time they reached these confinement structures, though, several will have died en route with several more perishing while awaiting sale on the coast and in the barracoons. In 1819, of the almost 10,000 slaves who had arrived on the beaches opposite Mozambique Island, 12 percent died before they could be sold; and due to the effects of exhaustion and disease, an equal number died in the holding pens.³⁹

For those who survived, if the possibility existed that they could be sold relatively soon after arriving at the coast, they could though also spend considerable time awaiting shipment to their next destination(s). Sometimes, this waiting period was a product of how active a particular port was in the export trade, with slaving vessels queuing up behind one another as they took on sizeable consignments of captives. The large French vessel, *Licorne*, had to drop anchor behind two Portuguese and three French ships off Mozambique Island in 1787 before it could begin embarking its own cargo of African captives, a process that took several days.⁴⁰

Not all captives were held in barracoons, however, for merchants sometimes acquired small numbers (e.g. 15 or 20 slaves) at different locations along the coast and shipped them from such places as Kilwa to Pangani and onto Pemba where they would either remain or be sold again to other buyers and transported to Zanzibar. It is a feature of the region's nineteenth-century slaving activity that enslavement involved captives being exchanged multiple times before they reached their final destination on the coast or mainland, or were embarked on a vessel for the long-distance crossing of the waters of the western Indian Ocean as they experienced yet another passage as part of the lengthy enslavement process.

ON THE WATER

Once slaves either arrived at the coast or were taken at the water's edge, or had been captured at sea, in many instances they faced onward sea passages to other—but not necessarily—final destinations. Conditions at sea could and often were horrific, as slaves experienced physical brutalities and trauma associated with crossings into the unknown. Testimonies gathered by the Dutch in the 1850s from individuals who had been captured by pirates in the Indonesian archipelago and later “liberated” by them attest to the hardships endured by the enslaved.⁴¹ As noted earlier, while raids for captives targeted villages with some frequency at least until this period, most were taken at sea. They were held in chains, provided with little food and given nothing else but seawater to drink. Compounding the misery of these conditions was the uncertainty of where or when they would be sold—as the rations of pirate crews themselves became limited, they exchanged captives for food whenever and wherever they could to avoid starvation. This survival strategy for captors of exchanging bodies for food was prevalent too in the Timor region. If the sea passage experience of the enslavement process could be brief for some who were sold soon after capture, for many their time at sea could extend into months before they arrived at their next or final destination, with cramped onboard conditions and poor treatment being responsible for death rates of up to 25 percent on voyages.

To a similar degree but at the other end of the Indian Ocean, nineteenth-century evidence of African slave experience at sea highlights the equally, and in many instances perhaps worse, treatment of captives. Personal accounts collected under the auspices of British anti-slavery efforts, as mentioned previously, speak to the terrifying effects of transportation and reflect the vulnerabilities of slaves once they were on the water. These sources offer among the richest testimonies of this stage of the enslavement process, and are therefore invaluable in underscoring shared dimensions of the slave experience in the Indian Ocean.

It was not uncommon for slaves to change hands multiple times on the East African coast before arriving at Zanzibar, for instance, where some might remain or be sold or kidnapped and taken to other destinations. While the slave trade that was carried out in dhows in most cases involved only small numbers of enslaved Africans on any one vessel (there were often other slaves on board, for example, domestic slaves of the owner or captain of the vessel), there was great fear of the seaborne passage, whether it involved the relatively short distances to this island-entrepôt or longer ones across the Arabian Sea. As expressed in one account from the mid-1860s, slaves “began to tremble all over and to cry out in a strange manner. ‘Oh! They said, we are lost. We are going to Zanzibar where there are white men who eat the Blacks.’”⁴² Arab slavers, as related by another captive, reinforced this notion as a self-serving tactic to instill dread of capture by British anti-slavery naval forces: “Europeans are coming! They have sighted us. Their boat is a long way off. They do not

want us Arabs, certainly not! But they are after you slaves and they will eat you and they will grind your bones and make sweetmeats of them.”⁴³

The widespread fear that “whites intend to eat them” had deep-seated roots and had emerged from the heavy European involvement in slave trading that had grown to a significant degree from the mid-to-late eighteenth century (earlier in the century VOC members at the Cape had sent expeditions to Madagascar for slaves and even established a short-lived factory at Delagoa Bay on the Mozambique coast for this purpose but their lack of success saw the Company turn to South and Southeast Asian slaves for their labor needs),⁴⁴ prominently involving French and Portuguese slavers, as well as Brazilian merchants from the early decades of the following century. Their vessels were specifically outfitted to transport slaves, even when they took on other cargoes such as cloth or ivory.⁴⁵ A description from around 1809, describing life in the hold of a slave ship transporting captives from Mozambique to Île de France (Mauritius), spoke to their desperate onboard conditions: individuals endured “sea sickness, the little air that circulates in the place where they spend the night, the stinking odors emanating from the hold; the buckets in which they leave their excrement and that they only change every four days...all of this adds to the horror of their situation.”⁴⁶

Similar experiences characterized the sea passages for slaves transported on dhows, especially in (the relatively few) instances when these carried a large consignment of captives. This is confirmed not only by accounts and reports written by British officials and naval officers—inflected as they were by abolitionist sentiment—but also in the words of the slaves themselves. The *Times of India*, for instance, published an account in 1872 that detailed the capture of a slave dhow near Ras al-Had at the southeastern tip of the Arabian Peninsula: it noted that slaves were so “crowded on deck, and in the hold below” that “it seemed, but for the aspect of misery, a very nest of ants.” There were a number of children on board along with other “wretched beings in the most loathsome stage of small-pox and scrofula of every description. A more disgusting and degrading spectacle of humanity could hardly be seen, whilst the foulness of the dhow, was such that the sailors could hardly endure it.”⁴⁷ For female slaves, there was the added danger and brutality of rape, as experienced on the vessel *Patriote* that in 1790 left 14 slaves at the Cape on its voyage from Mozambique to the Caribbean.

The individual voices of liberated Africans, though recorded also in the same abolitionist context as those of the British, offer further perspective and insight into the atrocious conditions of ocean crossings. A young girl, describing the seaborne passage from Kilwa on the East African coast to Zanzibar in 1865, highlighted how “closely packed” slaves were, to the extent that “I could not turn, not even breathe.” The days at sea were marked by heat and thirst “that became insufferable, and a great sickness made my suffering even worse.” Lengthy days and nights resulted in “[H]unger, thirst, seasickness,” while the “sudden transition from great heat to insupportable cold, the impossibility of laying down one’s head for a moment because of lack of

space” underscored the atrocious conditions that she and others endured in their transit at sea.⁴⁸

Lack of food leading to starvation was common, as described by a freed slave who had come from near Mozambique Island and been caught up in the Mozambique Channel traffic to the Comoros and northwest Madagascar: “We were ten days on board before we were captured [by a British naval patrol]...We were packed closely in tiers one above the other. Those of us who died, died of starvation: they gave us hardly any food and but little water.”⁴⁹ Even when supplies may have been adequate during the first few days of a voyage, its length could cause these to dwindle to such a degree that there was almost nothing left to eat. A Bisa who had been enslaved in what is today northwest Zambia in the 1870s when he was a young boy and taken overland to Mikindani to the south of Kilwa before being embarked for Muscat, recounted how “[A]t first we had food twice a day, in the morning and in the evening. The men had two platefuls and the women two and for our relish we very often had fish...But because the journey was so long the food began to run short and so were hungry, and also water was short and they began to mix it with salt water.”⁵⁰ Although various factors could prolong a voyage, British anti-slaving activity had the effect of adding to time at sea because vessels sought to evade patrols—as inadequate in number as these were—by sailing on open water away from the coast (the same Bisa slave mentions that, after traveling all night, he “found that we were in the midst of the sea and out of sight of land.”) or disembarking slaves at ports that were not necessarily under British surveillance.

This is confirmed, for example, in the late 1880s by the testimony of a male slave named Yusuf and a woman slave called Rasiki who, as runaways from the Omani port town of Sur that at this time was the principal importation site of slaves into the southern Arabian Peninsula, had walked twelve miles to Ras Al-Hadd to seek the protection of the HMS *Osprey* anchored off the coast of Oman. In testimony recorded by the ship captain, “Jusef” talked about how “we...kept right out to sea, and did not sight any land till we arrived at Ras al Hadd, we were landed at Shehr [Ras Sherh] close to Khor Joramah [Jarama] in the dhow’s boats, walked to Sur and were sold there...” For her part, Rasiki spoke about how she had sailed on a dhow from Malindi carrying 20 slaves which “first anchored at Msena, where I was kept there 2 days then put on a camel and brought to Sur” to be sold.⁵¹

These kinds of evasive tactics extended the misery for enslaved individuals, yet even when they were “liberated” by the British, their experience of unfreedom did not necessarily come to an end as many were forced into extended periods of apprenticeship whose terms in many cases amounted to forms of bonded labor. A growing literature is detailing the further voyages endured by slaves that British vessels captured at sea in the Indian Ocean as individuals were shipped onto ports of the empire such as Cape Town or Bombay where the racialized hierarchies of rule saw them labor under conditions that were never truly “free.”⁵² But even before liberated Africans reached

these ports, they could continue to suffer horribly on board captured ships. The case of the *Progresso*, a slaver that had left Angoche on the Mozambique coast in 1843 with just under 450 slaves, is illuminating in this regard. After the prize crew of the HMS *Cleopatra* took control of the vessel and found its slaves in a starved state, transferring fifty to its decks, the *Progresso* remained heavily overloaded as it was escorted to Simonstown (Cape colony) where the British maintained a naval base. Progress along the coast was slow, partly the result of the *Progresso*'s canvas being in tatters and due to inclement weather, with the voyage taking over a month and a half. Having already been embarked at Angoche weakened by malnutrition and dysentery (along with other ailments), the slaves began to die in high numbers as the ship made its way to Simonstown. By the time the ship dropped anchor, 177 slaves had died, while a further 63 perished after landing, resulting in an overall mortality rate of 54 percent on a vessel that had been manned by a prize crew of the Royal Navy.⁵³ The sea passage, then, a central element of the process of enslavement in the Indian Ocean (as it was elsewhere), never ceased to be or have the potential of being a brutalizing and fatal experience.

CONCLUSION

No singular experience can capture the dynamics of enslavement in the Indian Ocean. Whether in East Africa, on the waters of the Arabian Sea, or in Southeast Asia and the Indonesian archipelago, slaves underwent a wide array of experiences from capture, to transport and sale. Certainly, there were some commonalities across the ocean between African and Asian slaves, something that I have sought to highlight in this essay. However, there is a need to remain attentive to the disparate experiences of the enslaved as well as the contingencies of particular spatial and temporal contexts that could shape these in particular ways. Enslavement was complex, multi-sited, fraught with dangers of various kinds, and endured for varying periods of time. Becoming a slave and unfree person in the Indian Ocean involved many stages and this essay has highlighted some of their dynamics as individuals entered slavery and endured its most egregious abuses.

NOTES

1. These are discussed and located in a broader framework by Pier Larson, "Horrid Journeying: Narratives of Enslavement and the Global African Diaspora," *Journal of World History* 19, no. 4 (2008): 431–64.
2. We are reminded of this by Edward A. Alpers, "The Other Middle Passage: The African Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean," in *Many Middle Passages: Forced Migration and the Making of the Modern World*, eds. Emma Christopher, Cassandra Pybus and Markus Rediker (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), 20–38.
3. I provide an overview of these dynamics in Machado, "Slavery and Histories of Unfreedom in the Indian Ocean," in *Indian Ocean Current: Six Artistic*

- Narratives*, ed. Prasannan Parthasarathi (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2020), 29–38.
4. There has been growing interest recently in recovering slave's lived experiences in the Indian Ocean, as seen for example in Mathias van Rossum, et al., *Testimonies of Enslavement: Sources on Slavery from the Indian Ocean World* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020).
 5. Markus Vink, "The World's Oldest Trade: Dutch Slavery and Slave Trade in the Indian Ocean in the Seventeenth Century," *Journal of World History* 14, no. 2 (2003): 131–77.
 6. Nigel Worden, "Indian Ocean Slaves in Cape Town, 1695–1807," *Journal of Southern African Studies* 42, no. 3 (2016): 398.
 7. Hans Hägerdal, "Slaves and Slave Trade in the Timor Area: Between Indigenous Structures and External Impact," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 20.
 8. Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993).
 9. Vink, "World's Oldest Trade," 143; 150.
 10. *Idem*.
 11. *Idem*.
 12. Pedro Machado, *Ocean of Trade: South Asian Merchants, Africa and the Indian Ocean, c. 1750–1850* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Pier Larson, *History and Memory in the Age of Enslavement: Becoming Merina in Highland Madagascar, 1770–1822* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2000); *idem*, *Ocean of Letters: Language and Creolization in an Indian Ocean Diaspora* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009).
 13. *Idem*, 157; Michael Charles Reidy, "VOC Slave Trading Strategies on the Madagascar to Cape Slave Route, 1676–1781," *HumaNetten* 44 (2021): 14–55.
 14. Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977); Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spice and Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (Oxford: James Currey, 1987); Jonathon Glassman, "The Bondsman's New Clothes: The Contradictory Consciousness of Slave Rebellions on the Swahili Coasts," *Journal of African History* 32 (1991): 277–312.
 15. Matthew S. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master: Globalization and Slavery in Arabia in the Age of Empire* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015).
 16. *Idem*.
 17. Vink, "World's Oldest Trade"; Sanjay Subrahmanyam, "Slaves and Tyrants: Dutch Tribulations in Seventeenth-Century Mrauk-U," *Journal of Early Modern History* 1, no. 3 (1997): 735–62.
 18. Edward A. Alpers, "Madagascar and Mozambique in the Nineteenth Century: The Era of the Sakalava Raids (1800–1820)," *Omalasy Anio* 5–6 (1977): 37–53; Machado, *Ocean of Trade*.
 19. James Francis Warren, *The Sulu Zone, 1768–1898*, 2nd edition (Singapore: NUS Press, 2007).
 20. Hägerdal, "Slaves and Slave Trade in the Timor Area."
 21. On the ecological and other effects of Chinese demand for sea products, see *inter alia*, Eric Tagliacozzo, "A Sino-Southeast Asian Circuit: Ethnohistories of the Marine Goods Trade," in *Chinese Circulations: Capital, Commodities,*

- and Networks in Southeast Asia*, ed. Eric Tagliacozzo and Wen-Chin Chang (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2011); idem, "A Necklace of Fins: Marine Goods Trading in Maritime Southeast Asia, 1780–1860," *International Journal of Asian Studies* 1, no. 1 (2004): 23–48; Pedro Machado, "Shell Routes: Exploring Burma's Pearling Histories," in *Pearls, People and Power: Pearling and Indian Ocean Worlds*, ed. Pedro Machado, Steve Mullins and Joseph Christensen (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2020).
22. Ulbe Bosma, "Commodification and Slavery in the Nineteenth-Century Indonesian Archipelago," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 109–24.
 23. Nigel Worden and Gerald Groenewald, *Trials of Slavery: Selected Documents Concerning Slaves from the Criminal Records of the Council of Justice at the Cape of Good Hope, 1705–1794*, second series, Vol. 36 (Cape Town: Van Riebeeck Society, 2005), 8.
 24. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*.
 25. *British Parliamentary Papers, Slave Trade*, XXV, Class A, 401, quoted in Hideaki Suzuki, "Tracing Their 'Middle' Passages: Slave Accounts from the Nineteenth-Century Western Indian Ocean," in *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade*, eds. Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene and Martin A. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 314–15.
 26. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*; Thomas F. McDow, *Buying Time: Debt and Mobility in the Western Indian Ocean* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2018).
 27. Hägerdal, "Slaves and Slave Trade in the Timor Area."
 28. Warren, *The Sulu Zone*.
 29. Machado, *Ocean of Trade*.
 30. Edward A. Alpers and Matthew S. Hopper, "Speaking for Themselves? Understanding African Freed Slave Testimonies from the Western Indian Ocean, 1850s–1930s," *Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 1 (2017): 60–88.
 31. For an overview of European slave trading in the Indian Ocean, see Richard B. Allen, *European Slave Trading in the Indian Ocean, 1500–1850* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2014).
 32. These exist in different forms, from the testimonies collected by the Universities Mission to Central Africa (including an autobiographical account written by a former slave) and British Admiralty Records, to Consular records from East Africa and Arabia. British offices who had served aboard vessels of the Anti-Slave Trade Patrol also published accounts describing the slave trade and the conditions of captives but written often in language serving abolitionist efforts and without first-hand accounts by Africans themselves. For discussion of these sources, see Alpers and Hopper, "Speaking for Themselves?"
 33. Alpers, "The Other Middle Passage;" Alpers and Hopper, "Speaking for Themselves?" See also Alpers, "The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century Zanzibar," in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, eds. Claire C. Robertson and Martin Klein (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 185–201.
 34. McDow, *Buying Time*.
 35. Larson, "Horrid Journeying;" Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices & Ivory*; Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1983).

36. Machado, *Ocean of Trade*.
37. Harries, "Middle Passages of the Southwest Indian Ocean."
38. Hopper, *Slaves of One Master*.
39. Harries, "Middle Passages of the Southwest Indian Ocean."
40. Idem.
41. These were published in the journal, *Tijdschrift voor Indische Taal-, Land- en Volkenkunde*, "Berigten omtrent den Zeeroof in den Nederlandsch—Indischen Archipel, 1858," as recently discussed by Bosma, "Commodification and Slavery."
42. Alpers, "The Story of Swema," 212.
43. Petro Kilekwa, *Slave Boy to Priest: The Autobiography of Padre Petro Kilekwa*, trans. from Chinyanja by K.H. Nixon Smith (London: Universities' Mission to Central Africa, 1937), 10, quoted in Alpers, "Indian Ocean Middle Passages."
44. Trade journals of the VOC detailing this trade have been published, offering several insights into its dynamics, for which see, for example, James C. Armstrong and Piet Westra, *Slave Trade with Madagascar: The Journals of the Cape Slaver Leijdsman, 1715* (Cape Town: Africana Publishers, 2006); and for a slightly later period, Robert Ross, "The Dutch on the Swahili Coast, 1776–1778: Two Slaving Journals, Part 1," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19, no. 2 (1986): 306–60; Idem, "The Dutch on the Swahili Coast, 1776–1778: Two Slaving Journals, Part 2," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19, no. 3 (1986): 479–506.
45. Machado, *Ocean of Trade*.
46. E. Colin, "Notice sur Mozambique," in *Annales des voyages, de la géographie et de l'histoire*, 9 (1809), ed. Malte-Brun, 324, quoted in Harries, "Middle Passages of the Southwest Indian Ocean."
47. Captain G.L. Sullivan, *Dhow Chasing in Zanzibar Waters and on the Eastern Coast of Africa: Narrative of Five Years' Experience in the Suppression of the Slave Trade* (London: Dawns of Pall Mall, 1967 [1873]), Appendix, "The Slave Trade on the East Coast of Africa," 429–30, quoted in Edward A. Alpers, "Indian Ocean Middle Passages: The Dhow Slave Trade," *ZIFF Journal* 2 (2005): 15–21.
48. Alpers, "The Story of Swema," 212.
49. J.F. Elton, the British Consul at Mozambique in the 1870s, was able to record a number of slave depositions at Durban that captured slave experience of the oceanic crossings. See Elton, *Travels and Researches among the Lakes and Mountains of Eastern and Central Africa* (London: Frank Cass & Co., 1968 [1879]), as cited in Alpers, "Indian Ocean Middle Passages."
50. Kilekwa, *Slave Boy to Priest*, 15, cited in Alpers, "Indian Ocean Middle Passages."
51. Both of these are discussed in Alpers and Hopper, "Speaking for Themselves?"
52. Much of this work is Atlantic focused but for exceptions see, for instance, Stephan Karghoo and Satyendra Peerthum, "'An Unfortunate but Proud People': The Experience of the Liberated Africans in British Mauritius, c. 1811–1839," Truth and Justice Commission, International Conference (*Slave Trade, Slavery and Transition to Indenture in Mauritius and the Mascarenes, 1715–1848*, April 2011); Christopher Saunders, "Liberated Africans in Cape Colony in the First Half of the Nineteenth Century," *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 18 (1985): 223–39; Matthew S. Hopper, "Liberated Africans

in the Indian Ocean World,” in *Liberated Africans and the Abolition of the Slave Trade, 1807–1896*, eds. Richard Anderson and Henry B. Lovejoy (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2020), 271–94. This volume of essays represents the newest scholarship on ‘liberated’ Africans and aims in part to bring research and scholarship on these individuals that has tended to be produced in discrete fields—for instance by Caribbean specialists or scholars of the Indian Ocean—into dialogue with one another. See also the website, liberatedafrica.org.

53. Details of this case appear in F.L. Barnard, *A Three Years’ Cruise in the Mozambique Channel* (New York, 1971 [1848]), 40, 43–44; 222; P.G. Hill, *Fifty Days on Board a Slave-Vessel in the Mozambique Channel, in April and May, 1843* (London: John Murray, 1844), as cited in Harries, “Middle Passages of the Southwest Indian Ocean.”

FURTHER READINGS

- Boyer-Rossol, Klara. “Makua Life Histories: Testimonies on Slavery and the Slave Trade in Nineteenth-Century Madagascar.” In *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade*, edited by Alice Bellagamba, Sandra E. Greene and Martin A. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 466–80.
- Chakraborty, Titas, and Matthias van Rossum. “Slave Trade and Slavery in Asia—New Perspectives.” *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 1 (2020): 1–14.
- Debien, G. “Le journal de traite de la Licorne au Mozambique, 1787–1788.” In *Etudes africaines offertes à Henri Brunschwig*, edited by R. Estival and Fernand Braudel, 91–116. Paris: EHESS, 1982.
- Hägerdal, Hans. “The Slaves of Timor: Life and Death on the Fringes of an Early Colonial Society.” *Itinerario* 34, no. 2 (2010): 19–44.
- Harries, Patrick. “The Hobgoblins of the Middle Passage: The Cape of Good Hope and the Transatlantic Slave Trade.” In *The End of Slavery in Africa and the Americas: A Comparative Approach*, edited by Ulrike Schmieder, Katja Füllberg-Stolberg, and Michael Zeuske, 27–50. Berlin: Transactions Publishers, 2011.
- Larson, Pier. “African Slave Trades in Global Perspective.” *The Oxford Handbook of African History*, edited by John Parker and Richard Reid. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013.
- Raben, Remco. “Cities and the Slave Trade in Early Modern Southeast Asia.” In *Linking Destinies: Trade, Towns and Kin in Asian History*, edited by Peter Boomgaard, Dick Kooiman, and Henk Schulte Nordholt, 119–39. Leiden: KITLV Press, 2008.
- Schrikker, Alicia, and Nira Wickramasinghe, eds. *Being a Slave: Histories and Legacies of European Slavery in the Indian Ocean*. Leiden University Press, 2020.
- Seijas, Tatiana. *Asian Slaves in Colonial Mexico: From Chinos to Indians*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014.
- Ward, Kerry. “Slavery in Southeast Asia, 1420–1804.” In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 3: AD 1420–AD 1804*, edited by David Eltis et al. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011.
- Wickramasinghe, Nira. *Slave in a Palanquin: Colonial Servitude and Resistance in Sri Lanka*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2020.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





The Rise of Atlantic Slavery in the Americas

Michael Zeuske 

INTRODUCTION

The history of slavery in the early modern and modern Americas was characterized by three major epochs. Each of these epochs influenced the others, and, especially with the beginning of European colonization, they even partially overlapped and merged into one another. The first period consisted of the cooption and expansion of “pre-Columbian” indigenous slaveries by European colonizers in the different societies of the Americas. The second witnessed the introduction, establishment, and development of Atlantic slavery, which gave rise to a massive slave trade from West Africa to the Americas but also included the adoption and further development of many indigenous forms of slavery, as well as forms of frontier slaveries, including missionary settlements. This epoch of colonial Atlantic slavery, which some historians have dubbed “the first slavery,” had taken root by the mid- to late seventeenth century (depending on the region) and lasted more or less until 1800. The third period constituted what historians have called the period of the “second slavery,” a second phase of Atlantic slavery that was characterized by the capitalist expansion of slavery in certain regions (such as the US South, Brazil, and Cuba) and a massive illegal slave trade in an age of formal abolition.

M. Zeuske (✉)

University of Bonn, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS),
Bonn, Germany
e-mail: mzeuske@uni-bonn.de

How did slavery take root in the Americas from the earliest phases of European conquest and how was it characterized? This chapter examines the emergence of slavery in the first two epochs of the early modern Americas. (The third epoch of the “second slavery” is the subject of a separate chapter.) It explores the rise of various slave systems and examines how and why people became enslaved, how their labor was exploited, and how some managed to exit situations of enslavement.

ORIGINS AND ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

Slavery and slaving in the pre-Columbian Americas were ubiquitous and had already a very long history by the time of European conquest. Throughout the western hemisphere before the arrival of Europeans, indigenous populations experienced and employed various forms of enslavement, captive-taking (prisoners of war), manhunts or raids, and even sacrificial slavery.

The early *conquista* and colonial expansion of the Iberians and other Europeans and their allies did not abruptly alter such practices. Indeed, to a certain extent indigenous slavery was co-opted by Europeans almost everywhere, a practice that in many frontier regions continued throughout the entire colonial period in frontier regions and beyond. Indigenous slaves acquired in the *conquista* marches and raids of the Iberians—which began immediately in 1492—were legally categorized as *esclavos de rescate* (rescued slaves) and *esclavos de guerra* (war slaves). Both forms of enslavement came about as a result of violent raids. *Esclavos de rescate* were already slaves of local indigenous communities, but were subsequently taken by the conquistadors (in the ideological understanding of the conquistadors they were “saved,” although they remained enslaved to the Iberians). *Esclavos de guerra*, by contrast, were prisoners of war, enslaved either during wars of conquest or as punishment for rebellions and resistance (including “apostasy”) after the initial conquest of various regions.

At the beginning of the colonial era, the adoption by Europeans of indigenous forms of slavery under new power, property, and social relationships was commonplace and formed the basis of all colonial slaveries in the Americas, as recent research has shown.¹ The main change that occurred with the arrival of Europeans in most regions—at least regarding slavery—was not the sudden introduction of Atlantic slavery as such, but rather the shift in the control of slavery and slaving from indigenous elites and slave traders to Europeans and their descendants. In some places this shift was relatively gradual. Especially in the Greater Antilles and its islands and coasts, in which indigenous people (especially Caribs) had long played an active role as enslavers, control of slaving activities shifted slowly but surely during the early colonial period to Europeans and their descendants.

These early experiments with co-opting and adopting existing forms and networks of indigenous slaveries by Europeans, especially in frontier regions, began to morph into a new, Atlantic-oriented slavery system from about

the mid- to late sixteenth century, however, ushering in new colonial legal concepts (based on Roman law concepts of private property of land and human bodies), new forms of state power, and new types of ideological power. In their attempts to secure new labor for their expanding colonial ambitions, the Iberians no longer dabbled in pre-existing indigenous slave trades and slavery systems but rather greatly expanded their attempts to enslave able-bodied indigenous people in a more systematic fashion, with varying degrees of success. Portuguese Brazil took a major step in this direction in the mid-sixteenth century, for example, when they established sugarcane plantations in Pernambuco and Bahia, where they employed primarily indigenous slave labor (some four-fifths of the enslaved laborers there were indigenous between 1540 and 1570), either purchased from indigenous communities or acquired through raids. Similar developments occurred elsewhere. New large-scale slaving raids spread across the greater Caribbean and in the core territories of indigenous empires and territories. The local populations of the first contact islands and areas bordering the Greater Antilles, as well as along the coasts of northern South America, were subjected to massive slave raids. All along the continental coasts of the circum-Caribbean, indigenous peoples withdrew to the hinterland.

In British and French colonies, including mainland North America, early experiments with indigenous slavery were also commonplace, although beginning at different times in the different colonial regions. There, too, co-option of enslavement practices (especially through captive-taking in wars but also trade) met with only very limited success and failed to meet the labor demands of ever-expanding colonial projects. In British and French colonies, for example, which only began to take root in the seventeenth century, indigenous slavery existed side by side with forms of indentured servitude, whereby European laborers worked in the colonies for a specified period of time (usually without monetary payment). Both African and indigenous slaves were limited in number in the early years of these colonies, where indentured servitude constituted the dominant labor form in these colonies until the mid-seventeenth century.

The failure of indigenous slavery—and, in the case of the British and French, indentured servitude—to fully meet the labor demands of European colonies in specific contexts eventually led to a major shift toward African slaves, however, which either in part or whole or in part came to replace previous forms of slavery and servitude. This transition began around the mid-sixteenth century in the Iberian regions (including Brazil), and roughly between 1650 and 1750 in the British, French, Dutch, Brandenburg, and Swedish colonies. The main reasons had to do with the decimation of indigenous populations through war and disease, and the constant resistance they undertook in the forms of rescue raids and flight in the wilderness. In the case of the British and French, where indentured servants constituted the bulk of plantation workers in the earliest years of plantation agriculture, labor shortages were further compounded by an increasing unwillingness of European

laborers to emigrate under the terms of most indentured contracts. In all of these regions, a massive shift occurred to the importation of enslaved Africans, ushering in the epoch of Atlantic slavery and opening the floodgates to a massive Atlantic slave trade. This new “first slavery” was still supplemented on the peripheries by enslavement of indigenous peoples in raids or wars, but the dominant form of Atlantic slavery became that of Africans and their descendants.

Some statistics from the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade database (www.slavevoyages.org) illustrate this shift. As late as 1584, the number of enslaved Africans purchased in West Africa and bound for the Spanish mainland Americas and Brazil was comfortably less than 1000. By 1600 that number had risen to 20,000 people. By 1700 it was up to 45,000 purchases per year. The same statistic for the Caribbean, where the shift occurred later than in the Iberian-controlled territories, reveals an even greater spike. In 1650 just over 500 Africans were purchased specifically for Caribbean destinations. By 1700 that number was over 22,800; by 1790 some 78,850 Africans were purchased for the Caribbean. In 1655 some 455 Africans were purchased for British mainland North America; in 1698 that number had risen to 1,867; and by 1773 it was 10,346.

Europeans’ eventual turn to West African slave labor markets to fill the growing labor shortage in the Americas was no coincidence, even if it was far from a predetermined development. The employment of specifically African slaves in European colonial projects—especially plantation agriculture—in fact had its origins *before* the conquest of the Americas. In an attempt to get a foothold on the Mediterranean sugar trade, the Iberians had established small sugar plantations on the uninhabited Atlantic islands off the coast of West Africa in the mid-fifteenth century (the Azores, Madeira, Cape Verde, São Tomé, and the Canary Islands—which including enslaving the indigenous people of the Canary Islands). African slaves, procured from nearby West African slave markets, were employed in these relatively small-scale agricultural operations. Slavery and slave trading—including long-distance slave trading to the Mediterranean—in Africa had existed since time immemorial, and slave laborers were easily purchased. This economic model opened up a major market for sugar in Europe, provided Iberians with experience in West African slave trading, and connected plantation-style sugar production to African slave labor, at least for the Iberians.²

The conquest of the Americas overlapped with these experiments on the Atlantic islands, and African slaves were brought to the New World by the Iberians from the very beginning to perform a wide variety of tasks. This early period of Atlantic slavery, roughly until 1650, witnessed the *origins* of African slave labor in the Americas, a period in which African slaves were purchased and commodified—largely paid for by silver and precious metals procured (stolen) from the New World colonies—and forcibly migrated to the Americas in order to help build and develop Atlantic colonial economies, particularly in the Iberian regions. In this period African slaves were but one form of labor

alongside indigenous slaveries and other forms of coerced labor. With major reserves of precious metals in their coffers and a rising labor demand for their colonial enterprises, the Spanish especially could afford to start experimenting with more expensive African slaves in order to fill the gaps left by depopulation throughout their American possessions. As early as the first half of the sixteenth century, Spanish America was regularly importing enslaved Africans to work in silver mines of New Spain/ Mexico, sift for gold, cultivate supplies on truck farms on the margins of cities, and perform all manner of urban labor.

The massive shift to African slave labor that started in the mid- to late sixteenth century in parts of the Iberian regions (especially Brazil) and in the mid-seventeenth century in the other colonies of the Caribbean and mainland, however, constituted a fundamental shift in the history of slavery in the Americas. Large numbers of enslaved Africans now poured into the Americas—a forced migration that would ultimately lead to over 11 million Africans arriving alive by the time the trade fully ended in the second half of the nineteenth century—mainly in order to cultivate and produce colonial commodities for European and increasingly global markets. Atlantic slavery and slaving were now no longer solely in the hands of Iberians but also north-west European powers (especially the Dutch, English, and French, as well as Baltic powers). As the insatiable demand for slave labor grew, the systematization and capital commodification of African bodies now entered an entirely new phase. European colonial powers and settlers openly agreed that African slaves constituted better long-term investments than indigenous slaves and—in the case of the British and the French—indentured servants. The enslavement of indigenous peoples often provoked wars and conflicts throughout the circum-Caribbean; the purchase and employment of enslaved Africans who came from a myriad of different backgrounds and were cut off from their home communities, by contrast, was “safer” in this regard. Enslaved Africans also suffered lower mortality rates and were visible as slaves, making it more difficult for them to undertake successful flight attempts and somewhat easier to recapture when they tried.³

The leading cause of this shift to African slave labor—and indeed the underlying motor of Atlantic slavery in general—was the widespread adoption of sugarcane cultivation, flanked first by tobacco, cocoa, and, after 1760, coffee and indigo (cotton cultivation, especially on mainland North America, began around 1800 in earnest). As stated above, the first Atlantic sugar plantations arose on São Tomé, Madeira, and on the Canary Islands in the Iberian “Empire of the Islands.” It was this model that was transplanted to the Americas, specifically to the Spanish Caribbean and Brazil in the sixteenth century. The Dutch takeover and occupation of northeast Brazil between 1630 and 1654—and especially their subsequent ouster—helped spread both sugarcane cultivation and African slave labor throughout the non-Iberian circum-Caribbean, as the Dutch actively promoted and financed the development of sugarcane plantations on several islands, and supplied them with African slaves. Dutch and Sephardic merchants helped introduce slave-based

sugar plantations on Barbados and Jamaica, for example, as well as in the Wild Coast (Guayanas) and the French Caribbean colonies; they also introduced the first African slaves to the tobacco colonies of English North America (especially the Chesapeake colonies). In Barbados, especially, the model of the modern plantation estate emerged, characterized by columns of slaves from different African “nations” (such as Coromantee, Congos, or Minas) who worked through tasks in competition, and processing cane in modern mills with advanced boiling and drying technologies.

While sugar drove the massive transition to African slave labor in the Americas, African slave labor and “other slaveries” were also adopted in non-sugar regions and for a wide variety of economic activities. Throughout the Americas, from the far north (including Canada) to the far south, indigenous and frontier slavery continued to exist. In the middle colonies like Virginia (the Chesapeake), African slave-based plantation slavery emerged around the lucrative cultivation of tobacco. In the Carolina colonies coastal rice plantations also adopted African slavery. In virtually all regions, both African and indigenous slaves were acquired for urban economies, crafts, maritime activities, farming, domestic work, construction, and even lumberjacking and hunting.

The shift to African slave labor in the plantation regions of the Americas, however, in many respects defined Atlantic slavery; it was these regions that absorbed the lion’s share of enslaved people and whose societies became largely dependent on slave labor. The scale and systematic fashion through which African slaves were procured and forcibly migrated to the western hemisphere not only transformed the Americas but also had massive effects on West African coastal communities. Initially—well into the seventeenth century—the demand for African slaves in the Americas could be met by the African slave markets along the coast—especially the Senegambia and Angola—where Iberian and Dutch merchants were already active. The origins of the African slaves sold to European traders varied, but most were from coastal regions or their immediate hinterlands, and most had entered slavery as prisoners of war; some were sentenced to slavery for certain crimes. The increasingly insatiable American demand for slaves by the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, however, changed the scope and organization of the trade for Europeans and Africans. Coastal slave markets aimed at European traders were established all along the West African coast, from the Senegambia to Angola. The transatlantic slave trade developed into one of the largest economic enterprises of the early modern world.

Although most slaves continued to be procured from regions relatively close to the coast—with Loanda and Angolan ports constituting important exceptions, where slaves were brought from well into the interior—the scope of enslavement throughout West Africa grew dramatically. Before the transatlantic slave trade took off in earnest, most African slaves were acquired mainly as by-products of warfare. With the advent of the transatlantic slave trade an increasing amount of violence and coercion were now being committed, at

least in part, for the sole purpose of acquiring slaves. No longer mere by-products of violence, slavery now became one of the main justifications for various acts of violence and coercion, as well as state formation, all along the West African coast. Kidnapping became rampant, especially along the frontiers between various kingdoms. Enslavement as a punishment for crime increased. The decision to engage in warfare was now influenced by the certainty that it would produce valuable slaves for export overseas.

In the end millions of African slaves—by 1800 the number of enslaved Africans who had been forced to embark upon voyages across the Atlantic had surpassed 7 million (with over 1.1 million dying en route)—acquired through a wide variety of means, were marched to the coast, sold to European traders, chained and packed into the holds of ships, and forced to endure the tortuous “Middle Passage” as their valuable bodies were transferred to the heart of the Americas to live out their lives in Atlantic slavery. For enslaved people from Africa, enslavement entailed first the horrors and violence of enslavement in Africa and of transport into Atlantic slavery, followed by transports in the Americas. Conditions on board of the slave ships were appalling and terrifying. Mortality rates were high, although they did decrease over time, from around 20 percent in the seventeenth century to around 9 percent by the early nineteenth century.⁴ Although mortality rates were affected by shipwrecks and sometimes even shipboard rebellions, the main culprit appears to have been disease. Mortality rates in fact varied substantially per voyage, with outbreaks of disease (or contaminated foodstuffs and water supplies) sometimes terribly affecting the human “cargo” packed into the ships. As much as a quarter of shipboard mortality indeed occurred while the ships were still cruising the coasts of West Africa in search of more slaves to fill their cargoes, before they even set out to sea. A single visit to a coastal community with a malaria outbreak or contaminated water could wipe out dozens of those chained on board. Slave traders adopted various measures over the years to try and reduce mortality rates and thereby increase their profit margins. They built faster ships and that could make the crossing in less time and were better ventilated, for example. They also improved their methods of health control (even employing slave ship doctors) or of storing food and water for the journey. Still, high death rates plagued the trade to the very end of its existence.

Enslaved Africans arrived in the Americas after a tortuous journey that usually lasted anywhere from one to three months, depending on the wind and the destination. By then most had been on board the ships much longer, since the initial cruising and piecemeal purchase of small groups of slaves along the African coast itself usually took several months, sometimes even half a year. Upon arrival in the Americas the enslaved were finally disembarked, transported often over long distances, and sold to colonial slaveholders, who put them to work at a wide variety of tasks.

HOW PEOPLE LIVED AND WORKED AS “SLAVES”

What did these slavery regimes mean for the enslaved? No form of slavery, no regime of slavery, was in any way “good” for the enslaved. But there were differences in the experiences of enslaved people according to a variety of local circumstances, and one might distinguish between some of the “better” and “worse” versions. For some of those who experienced the earliest phases of frontier slavery in the so-called *hato* (or *hacienda*; *estancia*) economies of Spanish America, for example (which included indigenous and small numbers of specialized enslaved Africans), daily life was far different from life on the later plantations. The *hato* slavery economies were especially common in the Pacific areas of Central America, in the *llanos* of Northern South America, the *pampas* of Río de la Plata/ Southern Brazil and North of New Spain/ Mexico. These slaves were essentially employed as surrogate settlers and put to developing frontier regions in relative autonomy. They ran their own farms on the *hatos/estancias* (tobacco, sugar, wood, leather, and food); sometimes even directed the work of other enslaved and dependent people; consumed decent amounts of protein and ate beef and fresh fish; married and developed communities. They even defended the *hatos (estancias)* against colonial indigenous resistance. Other forms of frontier slavery were also less regimented than later plantation slavery systems.

Such cases formed exceptions to the rule, however. Plantation slavery—slavery for the production of colonial commercial agriculture, especially sugar—was a completely different experience for the enslaved, and was in virtually all respects a specifically harsh and extreme economic slavery regime. The plantation regime varied from region to region but shared certain characteristics throughout the Americas. Most striking was the demographic profile of the plantation regions of the Americas—specifically, the relatively high proportion of enslaved people in them. Unlike indigenous, frontier, or urban slaveries, the plantation regions constituted a world in which slavery was not simply one of many parallel (unfree) labor forms—slavery was *the* main labor form. Enslaved people transported to the plantation regions entered a world in which they were far from alone. Dense populations of black slaves formed either a majority or a very large minority of the total population, ranging in extremes from the sugar islands (in Jamaica black slaves formed over 90 percent of the population by the 1770s, for example) to the relatively small tobacco plantations of Chesapeake colonies (where slaves constituted between one-third and slightly less than one-half of the population by the second half of the eighteenth century). The largest plantations were set up to reflect the racial hierarchy that dominated labor relations, with a central “big house” for the slaveholder’s family, and at some distance rows of modest huts (that looked like villages) where the enslaved people lived.⁵

Work patterns were systematized to ensure maximum profit. Most plantation work forces were organized by gangs of enslaved people marching through the fields at throughout most of the year. They worked under the

supervision of one or more white overseers or black “drivers” (the latter of whom were usually slaves themselves), who inflicted physical punishments (especially whippings) if the work did not meet specific standards. In most regions, work under the gang system lasted from sunup to sundown, six days a week. Only in some regions (such as the rice plantations of the Carolinas; on tobacco plantations) or during certain parts of the year did enslaved people work by the “task,” being assigned a certain task to be completed by the end of the day. The division of labor on most plantations was also heavily influenced by gendered notions of work. Women were overwhelmingly relegated to the most unskilled tasks, such as hoeing. The more skilled positions such as ploughing and processing reserved for men.

On virtually all estates, some enslaved people were put to non-agricultural work, especially household work but also as waggoners, boatmen, carpenters, and all manner of skilled and artisanal tasks. House slavery and handicraft slavery is often said to have been less harsh than the experiences of field laborers. That is also only true to a very limited extent. The lives of enslaved people who worked and lived in direct contact with their owners could be hell. And in many plantation regions, enslaved people were even employed by the state in non-productive capacities. In the process of increased defense efforts and the expansion of Havana into a fortress and naval base between 1763 and 1790, for example, the state became the largest slave owner in Cuba. Royal slaves were employed in shipbuilding, as longshoremen in the harbor, in the construction of fortifications, and in military capacities.⁶

Work dominated the lives of the enslaved, but every slavery regime also had its cultural dimensions. Especially on the plantations, where most enslaved people ended up, for example, slave populations in the slave huts, barracks (*barracones*) or villages could lead relatively quasi-autonomous lives outside of working hours, especially at night. The larger the plantation, the more likely cultural elements from Africa (such as music, drums, food, dances, medicine, and resistance religions) were to survive and be infused into daily life. Families and communities were created; rituals were performed; and cultural and social bonds were continually created and reinforced. In most plantation regions, negative population growth ensured a continued dependence on the transatlantic slave trade, meaning regular “fresh” arrivals of West Africans and the continual “reafricanization” of the slave population. Mainland North America constituted a striking exception to this rule. There, the slave population “creolized” relatively early—by the second half of the eighteenth century a majority of the slave population had been born in America, spoke English as a mother tongue, and had no direct memories of Africa or African cultures. As enslaved people in most parts of North America also constituted an absolute minority of the total population—with the sole exception of the Carolina rice plantations—daily life there also entailed far more contact with local white populations than their counterparts in most of the Caribbean.

EXITS FROM SLAVERY

In indigenous slavery there was no formal abolition or emancipation in the legal European sense. There were individual rituals of either killing captured men or taking them into families and clans as replacements for their own fallen warriors. Women and children were also often accepted into the social and kinship structures of the enslavers—though most of them were only accepted as full members in the next generations. The most common method of exiting indigenous slavery, therefore, was running away, or “marronage,” a term adapted from what the Iberian conquerors dubbed *cimarrón* (maroon). The word is probably taken from Aruak, the language of the indigenous in the Greater Antilles. Its meaning was initially possibly “lost arrow.”⁷ When the Europeans came to the Caribbean, it was used in the sense of escaped enslaved people for all forms of slavery. The concepts of *maroon* (English), *marron* (French), and *marron* (Dutch) developed from *cimarrón*.

Although flight and marronage as a method of escaping slavery predated the European arrival in the Americas, and remained especially prevalent during the initial phase of indigenous slavery—it indeed helped convince Europeans that African slaves were a better investment long-term—the flight of enslaved Africans and their descendants is usually approached as a separate topic in the historical literature. Most historians distinguish between three basic forms of slave flight during the “first slavery”: short-term absenteeism; more permanent marronage and slave flight across colonial borders; and so-called “maritime marronage,” by which enslaved people fled by water to different islands or coasts of the circum-Caribbean.⁸ To these a fourth can be added, that has only recently begun to be explored in depth by historians: urban flight, by which enslaved people fled to colonial towns (especially port towns) and attempted to remain at large in neighborhoods where free black or colored populations lived. The four strategies of flight were quite different in their goals and outcomes. Short-term absenteeism—whereby individual enslaved people escaped to nearby wilderness areas or towns, or remained hidden with friends or family for a number of days or even weeks—was not employed to *permanently* exit slavery. The life stories of recaptured runaways show that absenteeism (also often called “truancy”) was very common, especially among young men and women, throughout the Caribbean. Regular short-term absenteeism served as a safety valve for enslaved people: removal from the workplace constituted a relief from plantation work, an outlet for swelled emotions, a tool for negotiations, and a way to visit family and friends. Most went back to their owners of their own accord.

Maroons, by contrast, sought to permanently escape bondage and create communities that were largely independent from slaveholding society. Marronage came in several main forms, each with its own space and its own spiritual and historical cultures. The basis of marronage in the plantation zones was collective and usually armed flight of entire groups of enslaved people and their subsequent settlement in wilderness areas near to plantations—especially

mountainous and jungle areas—beyond the immediate control of their owners or military might of the state. Maroon communities also sprang up in poorly defined and often contested frontier regions between colonial states, such as in northern New Spain; between the frontiers of the Guayanas (Suriname, Essequibo, Demerara, Cayenne, and their hinterlands); on Trinidad; in northern Florida; and between Saint-Domingue and Santo Domingo. Maroon settlements were called different things in the historical sources, depending on the colonial system: *palenques*, *quilombos*, *cumbes*, maroon settlements, *rochelas*. Most functioned as independent communities with their own power structures. There were even autonomous areas of maroons that a kind of colonial state structure (such as the Quilombo de Palmares in seventeenth-century Brazil; the maroon settlements in the jungles of Suriname; or the settlements in the so-called *Oriente*, the extreme east of Cuba). Some succeeded in fighting off colonial attempts at recapture and even winning a measure of recognition from colonial states. Several *quilombos* in Brazil, as well as maroon settlements in Jamaica (such as for example Nanny Town and Trelawny Town) and in the Guyanas (especially Suriname) became tolerated peasant subsistence societies—tacitly, but also formally institutionalized by colonial powers.⁹

Maritime marronage has been relatively little studied, although it was common throughout the circum-Caribbean. Maritime maroons fled by water to the islands and coasts of other colonial powers. Puerto Rico, for example, was for a long time an important destination for maritime *marronage* in the Caribbean because of Spanish promises of freedom (under certain conditions) for escaped slaves from rival empires, especially the English. In the first half of the nineteenth century, after the Haitian Revolution and subsequent abolition of slavery by various colonial powers, maritime marronage was especially employed by enslaved people trying to reach “free soil.” Indeed, all refugees from slavery who crossed into free soil territories or sought asylum with their masters’ enemies in wartime situations—including those who fled by land—used the political landscape to attempt to legally exit bondage. This was one of the main ways in which the Spanish Empire used the resistance of the enslaved against competing colonizers, especially in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries: they offered asylum (usually under various conditions, such as conversion to Catholicism, depending on the context) to runaways from neighboring colonies. Such policies were directed mainly at runaways from the British, Dutch, and French plantation societies. In so doing, they turned places like Spanish Florida, Puerto Rico, and the Venezuelan coast into important destinations for refugees from slavery in the wide region.

In recent years urban slave flight has begun to receive more attention from scholars. These were permanent freedom seekers who sought refuge in towns and cities (especially port towns and cities) by immersing themselves in the large neighborhoods of colored populations and among the marginalized urban population groups. Throughout the Americas, urban runaways were the subject of constant concern among local authorities from very early on. In the large agglomerations of enslaved and free colored and black populations that

settled in certain quarters, living conditions were often dire and dominated by the activities of smugglers, thieves, and the unemployed. To these neighborhoods runaway house slaves and refugee slaves from the rural hinterlands directed their course, helping to develop a small universe of marginalized, refugee and desperately poor communities within urban centers. For very few there was regular work. But they lived in very dynamic slavery societies. Subcultures and countercultures formed in the port cities, the members of which also lived from illegal activities, gambling, theft and stolen goods, illegal renting, prostitution, theft, murder, and crime.

Legal exits from slavery in the period of the “first slavery” were achieved by some through a limited number of avenues. The main path to freedom was manumission, which entailed a formalized individual release from slavery by an enslaved person’s owner. Manumission was usually affected through the slaveholder’s will—in other words, slaveholders sometimes released one, some, or all of their enslaved people upon their death. Sometimes enslaved people were manumitted as rewards for “meritous services”—such as military service in various wars with either indigenous populations or colonial rivals. The exact nature and legal mechanisms that determined the conditions of manumission varied throughout the Americas, and some colonies were stricter than others in their conditions than others—in some regions it was a relatively straightforward matter while in others, such as the British colony of Virginia in the eighteenth century for example, special approval was needed from the governor. But manumission as at least possible—if rare—throughout the Americas. The Spanish colonies stood out in their adoption of manumission schemes based on formalized self-purchase arrangements, an arrangement usually referred to as *coartación*. Under this arrangement, enslaved people entered into a oral formal contract with their owners whereby a price was set for the self-purchase of the enslaved person’s freedom. The enslaved person then attempted to pay this sum in installments, usually through paid extra work and various other activities. When the price had been paid in full, the enslaved person was released from slavery. This could last up to ten years or more.¹⁰

Other than manumission and self-purchase schemes, the only other “legal” methods of exiting slavery in the period of the “first slavery” came with formal abolition in some regions at the tail end of the period, in the late-eighteenth century and turn of the nineteenth century. These came about as a result of the political turmoil and ideologically charged revolutions that broke out across the Atlantic world in the Age of Revolutions. The northern states of the United States all adopted mostly gradual emancipation policies at the state level in the period 1777–1804, for example. The Haitian Revolution brought about formal abolition policies in the period 1791–1803. So too did some movements of Spanish American *Independencia* wars (like the Hidalgo rebellion in New Spain/Mexico). Abolition in most other parts of the Atlantic world would occur later in the nineteenth century (in the British colonies in 1833; the French colonies in 1848; most of the Latin American republics in

the 1850s, the US South and Dutch colonies in the 1860s; and Cuba and Brazil only in the 1880s).

From the perspective of the enslaved, formal release from slavery only referred to a cessation in their masters' ownership of their bodies. It did *not* necessarily entail a release from asymmetrical dependencies upon their owners, the state, or other powerful people and institutions, certainly not in the period of the first slavery. Whether they exited slavery through flight, manumission, or sweeping legislation, former slaves often remained trapped in situations of dependency and poverty, undergirded by powerful structural forces and limitations related to the racism and racial hierarchies that defined the colonial societies of the Americas. Some freedpeople indeed remained working for their previous owners; others became indebted to more powerful elites; while others gravitated to the shadows of marginalized communities that were characterized by extreme exploitation.

CONCLUSION

By the time the third epoch of slavery arose in the nineteenth-century Americas—the so-called “second slavery” (subject of a separate chapter in this volume)—various forms of slavery had already been employed, developed, and institutionalized by European colonial powers for hundreds of years. From the earliest days of conquest, colonizers utilized systems of slavery in order to help conquer and develop the territories of the New World. Initially, they co-opted and further developed pre-existing as well as co-existing systems of indigenous slaveries, which themselves had been common practice since time immemorial. As their territorial claims became larger, however, they eventually turned to massive importation of enslaved Africans—acquired through a vast and highly developed transatlantic slave trade—to meet many of their labor needs. An entire plantation system based on sugar and other plantation commodities such as tobacco, rice and cocoa arose in the regions of the circum-Caribbean, stretching from the southern parts of North America through the Caribbean and into the northern parts of South America. Elsewhere, enslaved Africans were also present, performing all manner of work, from mining to construction to unloading ships in port towns across the region. Formal release from slavery was possible but rare and dependent on the whims of slaveholders and local authorities, leaving flight and marronage as the most common forms of exiting slavery.

NOTES

1. Andrés Reséndez, *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016).
2. Herbert Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 13–15; Toby Green, *The Rise of the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade in Western Africa, 1300–1589* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

3. Alex Borucki, "Trans-imperial History in the Making of the Slave Trade to Venezuela, 1526–1811," *Itinerario* 36, no. 2 (2012): 29–54.
4. This is according to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD) database (<https://slavevoyages.org>), which contains the most definitive compilation of historical data for transatlantic slaving voyages.
5. David Brion Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of New World Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 103–23.
6. Trevor Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650-1820* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
7. Jean-Pierre Tardieu, "Cimarrón-Maroon-Marron: An Epistemological Note," *Outre-Mers: Revue d'Histoire* 94, no. 350/351 (2006): 237–47.
8. Viola Franziska Müller, "Runaway Slaves in the Antebellum Baltimore: An Urban Form of Marronage?" *International Review of Social History* 65 (2020): 169–95.
9. Alvin O. Thompson, *Flight to Freedom: African Runaways and Maroons in the Americas* (Kingston, Jamaica: University of the West Indies Press, 2006); Richard Price, ed., *Maroon Societies: Rebel Slave Communities in the Americas* (3d ed. Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1996); Jane G. Landers, "Maroon Women in Spanish America," in *Beyond Bondage: Free Women of Color in the Slave Societies of the Americas*, eds. David Barry Gaspar and Darcele C. Hine (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2004), 3–18.
10. Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009); Marc Kleijwegt, ed., *The Faces of Freedom: The Manumission and Emancipation of Slaves in Old World and New World Slaver* (Leiden and Boston: Brill, 2006); Claudia Varella and Manuel Barcia, *Wage-Earning Slaves. Coartación in Nineteenth-Century Cuba* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2020).

FURTHER READINGS

- Bergad, Laird W. *The Comparative Histories of Slavery in Brazil, Cuba, and the United States*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.
- Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Eltis, David. *The Rise of African Slavery in the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000.
- Eltis, David, Frank Lewis, and Kenneth Sokoloff, eds., *Slavery in the Development of the Americas*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.
- Morgan, Jennifer L. *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004.
- Rediker, Marcus. *The Slave Ship. A Human History*. New York: Viking, 2007.
- Reséndez, Andrés. *The Other Slavery: The Uncovered Story of Indian Enslavement in America*. Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2016.
- Smallwood, Stephanie E. *Saltwater Slavery: A Middle Passage from Africa to American Diaspora*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007.
- Zeuske, Michael. *Amistad: A Hidden Network of Slavers and Merchants*. Princeton: Markus Wiener, 2014.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Plantation Slavery in the British Caribbean

Trevor Burnard 

INTRODUCTION

A large number of people—planters; merchants in the West Indies, Africa and Britain; and ordinary white people working in the West Indies or in Britain—were invested in the success of the remarkable plantation societies established by Englishmen in the seventeenth-century eastern Caribbean and perfected in the western Caribbean by the mid-eighteenth century. These plantations were the marvels of the age. They were factories in the fields, based on a form of exploitative labor relations that drove enslaved laborers close to death but which resulted in the production of highly desirable crops, notably sugar, that were greatly desired in Britain and which brought fortunate owners vast wealth. They presaged a future age of industrialization while being a kind of culmination of the capitalist agriculture that had been a feature of English rural life since the early seventeenth century—West Indies planters were the ultimate in rapacious “improving” landlords. Their efforts, and even more so the efforts of the hundreds of enslaved Africans whom they forced to work without pay in appalling conditions, made British America valuable when it had not been so before. As Barbara Solow notes, “It was slavery that made the empty lands of the western hemisphere valuable producers of commodities and valuable markets for Europe and North America. What moved in the Atlantic in these centuries was predominantly slaves, the output of slaves, the inputs

T. Burnard (✉)
University of Hull, Hull, UK
e-mail: t.g.burnard@hull.ac.uk

of slave societies, and the goods and services purchased with the earnings on slave products.”¹

Yet these marvels were far from being marvelous. Indeed, they represented less the height of civilization and more its nadir. The plantation system of the eighteenth-century British Caribbean was brutal even for an age very used to brutality. The majority of the inhabitants of plantation societies like Jamaica, Barbados, Antigua, and Grenada suffered miserable and shortened lives. They worked in the killing fields of sugar plantations where they worked harder than any other group of people in the eighteenth century and for less rewards. While their owners became some of the richest people in the British Empire, enslaved people were reduced to the lowest standards of living of any group so far studied for the eighteenth century. They were starved, brutalized, and traumatized. The men were whipped frequently and harshly for any indiscretion and the women were sexually violated by white managers. Mid-eighteenth-century Jamaica, to take one West Indian colony as an example, may have been, as historian Charles Leslie wrote in 1739 “a Constant mine, whence Britain grows prodigious riches,” but that wealth accrued to vicious tyrants whom Leslie thought excessively cruel. He claimed that “No Country excels them in a barbarous Treatment of Slaves, or in the cruel Methods they put them to death.”²

An informed critic in 1746 declared that Jamaican slaves were the worst-treated slaves of any colony and that nowhere else were slaves so completely at the mercy and caprice of their masters. The violence of the plantation system and the tensions that were aroused by living as oppressed people in a society of constant tension amounting to warfare was made manifest in the relatively rare but violent and ruthlessly repressed slave revolts that punctuated life in the Caribbean. As had been predicted by the critic writing in 1746, enslaved people in various parts of Jamaica exploded into rebellion in April and May of 1760 in what has become known as Tacky’s revolt—a massive slave revolt, intended to “extirpate” whites from the island and transform the island into an African principality. Whites acted with extreme ferocity to the people who had dared defy them. An eyewitness account of what happened to one rebel who was captured describes how “the Rebel, who was caught by our negroes yesterday, was taken to prison today, and they held a trial over him and burned him alive. He was found guilty of murdering 2 children two days before.”³

This chapter examines the eighteenth-century British Caribbean plantation system as both a remarkable wealth-generating machine and as a monstrous invention. It might have produced sugar so as to satisfy Europe’s sweet tooth but it was a malign institution for the workers enmeshed in it. It may have led to some improvement in the material conditions of Europeans living in Europe and made the islands seem like the jewels in Britain’s imperial crown but it did so at the expense of the majority of the inhabitants of these islands. The violence of the systems and the contradictions it spurred had lasting consequences for the inhabitants of the British Caribbean, mostly the descendants of enslaved people, as seen in the continuing impoverishment of its people

and even more in the lasting trauma that slavery inflicted. Indeed, Frederick Hickling has posited that European colonialism engendered schizophrenia in the descendants of the enslaved, often manifested in “difficulties in managing their own impulses and in managing interpersonal relationships,” contributing to a range of societal problems affecting West Indians as individuals. “Psychopathology in formerly colonised and oppressed people,” he asserted, “can take a form that reflects continuing problems with their identity arising out of the ambivalence and anomie fostered in their collective and personal history.” Such a statement supports a historical truism, that slavery is at the essence of British Caribbean history and that the ubiquitousness of slavery in the region meant, as the sociologist Frank Tannebaum famously declared, “Nothing escaped the influence of slavery: nothing and no one.”⁴

RISE OF THE PLANTATION SYSTEM

Slavery has a long history in the Caribbean, going back before Columbus to the Tainos and Caribs, both of whom were slave owning people, even if their form of slavery, which was for social and ritualistic purposes with little economic value attached to it, was very different from the slavery that was developed in the Caribbean following in the wake of the Columbian encounter from 1492. Slavery accompanied colonization directly and was quickly associated with race—first, with indigenous people, and then, when that form of slavery proved ineffective, with people of African descent. Slavery only became truly world-significant, however, once it had been adopted and adapted by the English and French in the mid-seventeenth-century Lesser Antilles and determined as essential in developing tropical agricultural enterprises devoted to producing sugar—a crop well known in Europe from cultivation in the medieval Mediterranean and in the Canary Islands.

Until the late nineteenth century, the essential characteristics of Caribbean slavery, started by the Spanish but made more effective and brutal by the English in the tiny island of Barbados, were settled, with the region being largely dependent on the institution of the plantation as its principal form of organizing society. It coincided with the Caribbean becoming, for the only time in its history, a place of world importance. As Abbé Raynal, the eighteenth-century French philosopher, declared about the plantations of the Greater Antilles, “the labors of the colonists settled in these long-scorned islands are the sole basis of the African trade, extend the fisheries and cultivation of North America, provide advantageous outlets for the manufacture of Asia, double perhaps triple the activity of the whole of Europe. They can be regarded as the principal cause of the rapid movement which stirs the universe.”⁵ It was a center of modernity and of modernization, not least in how it shaped and changed the peoples who came together, often in conflict, from different cultural backgrounds. The anthropologist, Sidney Mintz, saw the Caribbean as a place of precocious modernity, as could be seen in its embrace of creolization, which he described as a tremendous creative act. It

led to a hybrid culture within developing and new patterns of globalization.⁶ It made the people of the Caribbean distinctive. The modernization came out of the sugar plantation, which the Trinidadian writer, C.L.R. James considered “the most civilizing as well as the most demoralizing influence in West Indian development.” It modernized the planter but it modernized even more the enslaved population who, James contended, “from the start lived a life that was in essence a modern life. That is their history – as far as I am able to consider, a unique history.”⁷

Sugar, introduced by the Spaniards to the Caribbean in the early sixteenth century, was a modern crop and induced a modern set of responses. It started off as a food item that was very expensive and a sign of luxury that could be indulged in only by the very rich, such as Elizabeth I of England (1536–1603), whose addiction to marzipan ruined her teeth and who showed how much Europeans desired sweet things. The massive production of sugar on British Caribbean slave plantations quickly reduced the price of sugar so that it became an everyday item of consumption. That reduction in prices in itself caused difficulties for the enslaved workers who grew it. A long-run fall in sugar prices in the second half of the eighteenth century accompanied by a sharp and ever-increasing rise in slave prices made labor costs much greater just as production needed to be increased. It meant that plantations had to become more efficient, which is exactly what happened. The average productivity of a slave working in sugar as measured by pounds of sugar per worker doubled between 1750 and 1810 in the British Caribbean. That efficiency came in many ways but mostly came out of the skins of the enslaved, who were driven harder than before in order to produce more than before. We can see the results of such hard-driving, and the ways in which sugar production and hence Caribbean slavery was tied to modernizing tendencies in agricultural production, in a sharp decline in enslaved reproduction rates. These rates can be taken as a proxy for how hard enslaved people were worked and especially for how that work fell unevenly among genders, with women increasingly doing the hardest work in growing and harvesting sugar cane. In both Barbados and Jamaica in the years between 1751 and 1775, the rates of natural decrease in the enslaved population increased markedly—from 2.8 percent per annum in Barbados between 1726 and 1750 to 4.8 percent per annum between 1751 and 1776 and from 2.5 percent per annum to 3.4 percent per annum in the same periods in Jamaica. If we combine these figures with those of the newly established sugar islands of the Windwards, acquired by Britain in 1763 after the end of the Seven Years’ War, where natural decrease was an astounding 11.3 percent per annum, we can see that the direct consequences of making sugar a staple in ordinary peoples’ lives in Europe was the increasing oppression of sugar workers. No other crop produced by Europeans was produced under conditions of such stress and strenuousness, with the demands on workers increasing over time.⁸

The problem with sugar, however, was a problem with labor. Neither indigenous nor European labor, for a variety of reasons, was suitable for sugar

cultivation on the scale needed to be profitable. The response was to turn to African labor, relatively easily got from West Africa, where there were sellers of humans eager to make a profit from their own country people's misery. Few voices were raised against the use of enslaved Africans to make sugar. Bartolomé de las Casas, for example, famous for his denunciation of sixteenth-century Spanish genocides and enslavement of indigenous Caribbean people, had no problem with African slave labor. He argued in 1516 that Spain should import black (and indeed white) slave labor to lessen the burden on the indigenous. Africans became increasingly available in the English Caribbean from the mid-seventeenth century with the development of the Royal African Company (which lasted less than fifty years from its incorporation in 1662 before being replaced by private traders, who proved better at providing the West Indies with the quantities of enslaved labor they thirsted for). Africans were less susceptible to the diseases that afflicted Europeans. They arrived in the islands disoriented and denuded of any rights, allowing planters to treat them in any way that they wished.

The key moment in the development of the plantation system that came to maturity in the eighteenth-century British Caribbean occurred in Barbados between the 1640s and the 1660s. In this period, rich planters in Barbados borrowed money from London merchants to establish sugar mills and to import thousands of enslaved Africans. They did this so enthusiastically that Barbados went from being an island where the majority of the population was white to one where the majority of the population was black. The move made the people who made the move to the large integrated plantation in Barbados very rich. The large integrated plantation was a new development. It was a modern agricultural estate with dozens to hundreds of slaves in which all aspects of the production of tropical goods for European markets was performed within the same physical space. It provided economies of scale through the size of the enslaved population that allowed for great profits. Barbados was ideally suited for this change. The shift occurred during an export boom when prices for sugar were very high and the prices of African captives relatively low. Land was relatively easy to develop in a small, flat, island, even though cutting down the hardwood forest was very hard work. It meant that by the 1670s Barbados was as settled as southern England with Governor Jonathan Atkins declaring that "there was not a foot of land in Barbados that is not employed even to the very seaside."⁹

Sugar made white Barbadians rich. Through the "sweet negotiations of sugar," Richard Ligon argued in 1657, Barbadians had "in a short time ... [grown] very considerable," both in "Reputation and Wealth."¹⁰ By 1680, Barbados was the richest, most highly developed, most populous, and most congested colony in English America, with a thriving sugar industry and 50,000 inhabitants, including 30,000 slaves. Its socio-political model of organization—highly exploitative and materialistic, an economy concentrated around slavery and sugar, with a highly stratified social structure, great disparities in wealth and styles of living, and with a ratio of numerous blacks to

few whites—proved highly adaptable, moving eventually throughout English America, to the Carolinas and to Jamaica and the Leeward Islands. By the early eighteenth century, everywhere in the British Caribbean was similar to what had been established in Barbados by 1680.

This move, however, was slower than might be expected, given how successful the large integrated plantation system was as in generating wealth for owners. Despite having a white population that was 50,000 in the 1770s and thus just 2 percent of the total white population in British America, the British West Indies produced under a third of the total wealth of British America in 1774. Average wealth was £1000 per white person, over ten times as much as the average wealth of white people in other parts of British America and in England and Wales. What this meant at an individual level can be seen in the wealth of the richest people in Jamaica who were much wealthier than people even in the richest colony of British America, South Carolina. The total wealth of the ten richest men dying in Jamaica in 1774 was £246,872 compared to £101,308 for South Carolina.¹¹

It was not until at least the 1690s and really until the 1720s when Jamaica became dominated by the large integrated plantation system and took over from Barbados the title of the wealthiest British colony in the Caribbean. Sugar was a demanding crop that required good management, a strong dose of luck, and large investments of money. All of these were hard to achieve, especially in the demanding early days of plantation agriculture. The most difficult thing about sugar planting was that it involved the disciplining of African slaves, many of whom had been warriors in Africa, were very often rebellious and willing to use violence, and who showed themselves to be the enemies of the people who were trying to manage them. As Henry Drax argued in his 1670s Barbadian slave-management manual, “Many Negroes will be apt to Lurk and Meech from their Work, without great care be taken to prevent it.” Punishment, Drax, argued had to be immediate and exemplary: “If att any time you take Notice of a fault that you design to punish let itt bee Emeditately Executed Espetially on Negroes. Many of them being of the houmer for awoyding punishments when threatened.”¹²

Many white people preferred to do other things if they could than to undertake such unpleasant disciplining. And other options existed, such as being a small farmer, engaging in privateering, working in commerce in the pirate’s town of Port Royal, or turning to work on the ocean. Over time, however, land became more expensive and poorer whites began to be excluded from many opportunities except from working on plantations. In addition, many ordinary whites had been soldiers or had worked in the Atlantic slave trade and were used to violence being exerted against them and violence being used by them toward others. They were prepared to accept the bargain that wealthy plantation owners offered them: giving up the chance for landed independence in return for working for high wages that gave ordinary whites the opportunity to themselves become slave owners. Plantations worked because white men were increasingly prepared to use violence against the enslaved people

they controlled and were well rewarded for doing this. Solving the problem of managing enslaved labor enabled the large integrated plantation to become the standard form of organization everywhere in the eighteenth-century British Caribbean.

THE ATLANTIC SLAVE TRADE

Most enslaved people entered slavery in the British Caribbean through the Atlantic slave trade. Indeed, without the slave trade the enslaved population would have decreased to nothing, as rates of natural population decrease remained very high throughout the eighteenth century. The slave trade, which brought 2,000,400 enslaved people to the British Caribbean in the eighteenth century, of whom 119,766 were immediately shipped to Spanish America or British North America, was the lifeblood of an enslaved population, which was just 591,000 in 1800. The levels of people arriving in the slave trade increased before the American Revolution, from 12,723 per annum in the 1740s to 34,833 in the first half of the 1770s, before falling away almost completely during the American Revolution and then re-establishing itself in the 1790s at an average of 21,039 arrivals per annum. The enslaved population was thus largely made up of arrivals from Africa. The percentage of new enslaved populations each decade that were comprised of births increased gradually over time, from 16.4 percent in the 1700s to 29.1 percent in the 1760s and to 31.4 percent in the 1790s. Nevertheless, the majority of eighteenth-century West Indian enslaved people were not born into slavery but were brought there through the horrors of the Middle Passage.

For such an important trade, we have few eyewitness accounts from the perspective of those who endured its horrors about how the slave trade operated and what it felt like to be trapped in it. The most famous account in English is by Olaudah Equiano, and he may not have actually been an African transported across the Atlantic but may have based his account on what he heard from others. In his 1789 autobiography, Equiano claimed that he had been born as an Igbo in present-day Nigeria or Benin in 1745 and then been captured and taken to Barbados around 1756. Equiano describes poignantly the fear that enveloped him as he was forced aboard a slave vessel where he was surrounded by strange white men. These white men acted with “brutal cruelty” and themselves were treated brutally. He noted how a white sailor was “flogged so unmercifully ... that he died in consequence of it.” Equiano was so despondent and terrified that he prayed “for the last friend, Death, to relieve me.” On arrival in Barbados, Equiano worried that these tormentors would kill the captives and that they “should be eaten by these ugly men.” But the slave trade was not intended to be a death trap (though perhaps 10–15 percent of captives died en route from Africa to the Caribbean) but to provide laborers for the real killing fields, which were West Indian sugar plantations. Equiano described how he and his fellow captives were washed, made

to jump, and then taken ashore to a merchant's yard where "we were all pent up together like so many sheep in a fold, without regard to sex or age."¹³

The imagery Equiano used, of people being treated like animals, is important. One reason why enslavers could treat the enslaved so badly is because they did not see them as being people akin to themselves. The "horrible comparison" of Africans being bestial and not fully human was made all the time. In the seventeenth century, the English writer, Richard Ligon, noted of slave sales in Barbados right at the beginning of the English experiment with slavery that planters bought slaves much as "Horses in a Market; the strongest, youthfullest, and most beautiful, yield the greatest prices." When listing their property, slave owners treated "Negroes and livestock" as one category, often giving similar names to each category, so that an enslaved man named, possibly for comical effect, as Caesar, might find himself in charge of looking after a horse of a similar name. Africans were not quite the same as animals and Europeans accepted that they were similar to themselves as being part of God's creation, with biblical orthodoxy being that all humans came from the single creation of Adam and Eve. Europeans considered Africans to be inferior forms of humans. White West Indians came very close to considering Africans to be a different species that they were entitled to have no feelings for. The characterization of Africans in the earliest slave code, that of Barbados in 1661, as "an heathenish, brutish and an uncertaine dangerous kinde of people" showed the prevailing belief that these were people separate from Europeans and able to be treated in ways that would not be possible for Europeans as they were people of a "barbarous, wild and savage nature" which "wholly unqualified [them] to be governed by the Laws, customs and Practices of our nation."¹⁴ In the eighteenth century, the Jamaican historian, Edward Long, speculated that Africans were a different species, somewhere intermediate between the Great Apes and Europeans. He argued that orangutans were attracted to Africans as a way of bettering themselves in the same way that Africans, he thought, were oriented to seeing Europeans as desirable mates.¹⁵

Violence did not end when the voyage to the Caribbean ended. Captives were transformed into slaves through a process of sale that dehumanized those involved. As ships neared port, captives were prepared for sale through being primed and polished so that they might get the best prices. William Butterworth described on the *Hudibras* that arrived in Grenada in 1787 captives were rubbed with palm oil to make their skin gleam and "those whose age or grief had rendered grey hairs were selected, when, with a blocking brush, the silvery grey hairs were made to assume a jetty hue."¹⁶ Occasionally, enslaved people were sold by means of a "scramble," when buyers rushed a ship grabbing hold of desired captives "with the ferocity of brutes." More often, however, showing how valuable enslaved people were (averaging in the 1770s £50 apiece, which was equivalent to a good salary for an ordinary white man), enslaved people were sold to merchants and then moved to a merchant's yard where they were sold in small lots to individual planters.

This sorting process meant that enslaved people tended to be sold in groups of mixed ethnicities or as individuals, diluting the ethnic identities of plantations. Planters expressed a preference for enslaved people from the Gold Coast, commonly called the Koromantee, and it does seem that in Jamaica the influence of Koromantee slaves was extremely strong, as shipments from the Gold Coast were predominant in the second quarter of the eighteenth century when the large plantation system was becoming fully formed. The nature of the slave trade to the island, however, meant that the slave population of Jamaica (and other West Indian islands) was remarkably ethnically heterogeneous. Buyers may have wanted to buy slaves from the Gold Coast but demand was so high that they took whatever enslaved people they could. The African population was very mixed, as Hans Sloane, the doctor and fellow of the Royal Society, found when he visited a sugar plantation in the middle of the island and watched a dozen Africans make music that was variously from the Angola, Papaw, and Koromantee regions of Africa.

JAMAICA CIRCA 1756

If we want to see the plantation system of the British Caribbean at its height, we can look at Jamaica circa 1756, on the eve of the Seven Years' War. We have a mass of material from around that year which can be used to flesh out the social and economic characteristics of this plantation society at the height of its importance. We also have the diaries of a small-time overseer, Thomas Thistlewood, working on a sugar estate in the southwestern frontier of the island. These diaries provide vivid testimony into how plantations worked and the almost constant war that existed between masters and enslaved people. By 1756, the large integrated plantation described above was fully in place as the dominant part of a diverse economy, alongside a flourishing trade in British manufactured goods and in slaves that existed between Kingston and Spanish America.

By 1756, Jamaica was the jewel in the imperial crown with the richest and wealthiest planter ruling elite in British America, men who at the top end left estates of over £100,000 which was a level of wealth that only the richest aristocrats and London merchants had in Britain. Dr. Patrick Browne, writing in that year, declared Jamaica "not only the richest, but the most considerable colony at this town under the government of *Great Britain*."¹⁷ Some of the greatest fortunes were made virtually from scratch. Thomas Thistlewood gossiped that "old Philip Haughton died worth 400 thousand pounds currency had 70 thousand Sterling in the bank at home yet about 20 years' worth about 10 thousand currency." Total wealth was £10,338,236 in 1754 for a population of no more than 10,000 whites and 120,000 slaves, with the value of the latter amounting for about 40 percent of that wealth. Most of the whites were migrants from southern England and, increasingly, Scotland. Blacks were probably about evenly divided between native born slaves and African-born slaves, with about 60 percent working in sugar cultivation.

A fierce political dispute between Governor Charles Knowles and the Jamaica Assembly provides some very useful data on social and economic patterns in the island, including a singular record for any eighteenth-century British colony, a 1754 record of landowners. Knowles commissioned this survey because he felt that a few “mighty-men” resident in Britain held “vast Tracts of Land” under uncertain title. There were certainly some absentee “powerful princes” with vast landholdings, such as the London merchant and imperial politician, William Beckford (1708–1770) who owned over 20,000 of the 1,684,198 acres patented in Jamaica. Nevertheless, absentees were not as prominent as Knowles thought. Over 90 percent of land was owned by resident Jamaicans, generally male (nine in ten people) and almost all white. Three broad patterns existed. In the frontier regions of newly developing sugar monocultural areas of the northwest and the far east, there were both high mean and median levels of landownership. In the older settled parishes around Kingston and St. Jago de la Vega, mean and median levels of landownership were lower and more landowners were female. The third kind of landownership was not noted in the list, which was the substantial urban holdings in Kingston, where private real estate was valued at a conservative £500,000 with further money in public buildings. The richest landlords in Kingston made substantial sums from their real estate. The Pereira family, for example, made over £2000 per annum from 39 urban rentals. Rural property could be very valuable and increasingly valuable over time, which encouraged engrossment of what was termed “ruinate” land. Sugar estates were land-hungry. Edward Long estimated that a sugar plantation with 300 slaves producing 300 hogsheads of sugar per annum for net profits of other £5000 would require 900 acres of land, of which 88 would be woodland, and 200 acres in sugar cane.¹⁸

One particularly valuable document from this period comes from the parish of St. Andrews, an old settled parish near Kingston that was partly a prime sugar producer and partly the center of a developing coffee industry. It was a place where leading Kingston merchants, such as Edward Manning (d. 1756) and Zachary Bayly (d. 1769), invested their mercantile profits into gardens and sugar estates. Manning owned 610 slaves, a proportion of whom were employed in estates in St. Andrew, while Bayly owned 2010 slaves, most of whom were in the northern parishes of St. Ann and St. Mary but some of whom worked in St. Andrew. The census of land use in St. Andrew in 1754 is especially useful in showing both the primacy of sugar and also the diversity of crops in the parish.

The parish contained 68,877 acres, of which 24,703 were undeveloped, 19,000 were in woodland, 13,000 in pasturage, 3443 in sugar, 804 in coffee, 398 in ginger, and 76 devoted to cotton production. A further 7332 acres were devoted to provisions. There were 155 proprietors, 147 of whom were men. The most valuable properties were 24 sugar estates, on which 45 percent of the parish’s 7947 enslaved people worked. Sugar was easily the most profitable commodity produced, worth £51,159 of total plantation revenue of

£67,135. Sugar and rum accounted for 87 percent of plantation revenues with coffee worth £6419 or 10 percent of total revenues.

The other area of wealth in Jamaica in 1756 was in trade with Spanish America, although this was in decline from the 1740s and about to collapse as the Seven Years' War started. It was the second biggest trade in the dynamic town of Kingston, next to the Atlantic slave trade, which resulted in about £120,000 per annum passing through the hands of Kingston merchants. A French observer commented that "the greatest wealth of Jamaican wealth was Spanish trade to areas like Portobello, even in times of war."¹⁹ Such a statement was overstated but trade was large, especially in the years between 1713 and 1739, when Britain held the *asiento*, or the right to supply Spanish America with slaves. Spanish trade brought Spanish bullion—over £500,000 per annum in the 1730s. Unlike other British American colonies, where specie was in short supply, Jamaica had enough hard cash to give it considerable advantages in commercial trade and in the Atlantic slave trade.

All this wealth, however, was maintained only through a vicious slave system in which the people who produced wealth were systematically exploited and abused. Edward Long tried in his 1774 *History of Jamaica* to argue that Jamaican planters were humane and enlightened. The truth was quite different as can be seen in the unvarnished testimony of Thomas Thistlewood, who in 1756 had been a slave overseer on a sugar estate for nearly six years and who managed his enslaved charges with a mixture of suasion and extreme brutality. The latter was more evident than the former in 1756, a year of drought and harsh conditions in Westmoreland, where more enslaved people escaped, usually only briefly, from Thistlewood's control than in any other year he was employed at Egypt estate. Thistlewood responded to what he saw as enslaved recalcitrance with fury. He whipped his slaves regularly, with most male slaves being whipped at least once in that year and several being whipped more frequently.²⁰

He also devised an unusually disgusting and degrading method of punishment, "Derby's dose," which he employed in January and May toward Derby and in July toward a slave called Port Royal and a female slave, Phillis, and again in August and October, making seven slaves in total having experienced this treatment. Derby's dose involved defecation. For Port Royal in July 1756, Thistlewood "made Hector shit in his mouth, immediately put in a gag whilst his mouth was full & made him wear it 4 or 5 hours." The punishment is usually regarded as a sign of Thistlewood's sadism, which it was, but it also occurred for another reason. The slaves forced to endure such punishment had been caught eating sugar cane, mainly out of hunger, as provisions were extremely low in this year and the provision grounds slaves worked did not produce enough to provide enough food for slaves to do the work they were required to do. Thistlewood was trying to prevent his slaves from destroying the crop which provided him with his salary.

What Thistlewood's diaries for 1756 reveal was how little protection enslaved people had from white overseers with almost total freedom to treat

enslaved people as they wanted. White managers were frightened by the disparities in population, which meant that they were always hugely outnumbered and thus could be attacked at any moment, as had happened to Thistlewood in 1752, when a runaway called Congo Sam had attacked him. His enslaved charges had left Thistlewood alone to deal with the attack. Moreover, white managers felt compelled to produce large crops that could provide owners with substantial incomes and therefore prioritized the production of sugar and other commodities over looking after enslaved people. Thomas Thistlewood acted capriciously. He seemed to do so for a purpose, which was to keep enslaved people disoriented and dependent on the person who oppressed them. Thistlewood not only whipped his enslaved charges frequently and sadistically; he preyed on enslaved women sexually, having sexual relations with 22 women on a plantation with 29 adult women, almost all of which relations we can categorize as rapes, or at least coerced sex.

Managing a sugar estate was hard work and required a hard man. Thistlewood was at his most sadistic in the 1750s when he worked at Egypt sugar estate and it was in these years that he faced the most concerted opposition from enslaved people. The period between 1754 and 1756, when crops failed and when slaves could not support themselves saw Thistlewood at his fiercest. He whipped slaves so much that on 24 March 1759 he wrote, "My pocket Whip is broke and wore out." Thistlewood did provide help to his slaves in protecting them from other enslaved people intent on stealing their property. He played one enslaved person off another by giving them small privileges such as money and time off, and allowed some short-term freedoms to do their business off the estate. Thistlewood may have tried sometimes to follow the recommendations made by wealthy planter, Richard Beckford, in 1754, in a manual of slave management that Thistlewood copied into his diary, in which Beckford advised that it was in "the Interest of every Master to treat his Slaves with Justice and Benevolence that their lives may be render'd as cosy as their Condition will permit." The realities of slave management in difficult times, as in 1756, however, meant that physical coercion was crucial. Planters and enslaved people lived on a knife edge of their cold war breaking into actual conflict. Thistlewood followed up his copying of Beckford's recommendation to be merciful with a chilling poem about a slave rebellion in which enslaved people with "a Sense of Injury" who hated their punishments and who had "a general Rancour and hatred of ye person that inflicts it" were always liable, as happened in 1760 in a major slave rebellion adjacent to Thistlewood's estate, to erupt in a "bacchanalian Frenzy" of "Blood and Vengeance."

VIOLENCE

The viability of the British West Indian plantation system was maintained by violence, manifest in the quotidian horrors that enslaved people had to endure. That violence was always prevalent but was especially obvious in the plantation system in its foundational or frontier stages, when the work of establishing

plantations was particularly hard; when the ratio of white managers to enslaved laborers, the majority of whom had entered the plantation system direct from Africa, was low; and when restraints on planter behavior from the state were virtually nil. The violence in the plantation system was pervasive and structural. It is easy to stress the psychotic aspects of master–slave relationships. There is obviously some truth in the relentless anecdotes of planter cruelty, where sadists like Thomas Thistlewood flourished. These punishments were intended not just to hurt but to demean. Orlando Patterson, the eminent Jamaica-born sociologist, has written about the eighteenth-century history of his homeland, declaring it “uniquely catastrophic,” full of out-of-control whites operating with “near genocidal cruelty.” He stresses that the horrors of enslaved life were made worse by the chaos of white life, with white Jamaicans “screwing themselves stupid ... smoking too much ... drinking too much.”²¹

But violence was not just an expression of sadism and a sign of how frightened planters were, and a predictable result of what happens when humans are allowed to exercise absolute tyranny over other people. It was also a means of cowering enslaved people and forcing them into obedience. The utility of violence as a means of managing recalcitrant enslaved people is seen most clearly in the violence meted out to enslaved people who challenged directly the system they were trapped in.

An example of violence being used as a deliberate tool of slave management can be seen in an extraordinary letter written by Caesar, a “key” or privileged slave who was a driver on the Rozelle estate in Clarendon in Jamaica. The letter was written in 1780, a year of great deprivation in Jamaica, when the island was assailed by a devastating hurricane on top of near-famine as a result of disruptions to provisions from North America as a result of the American Revolution. Caesar dictated his letter through an anonymous scribe and addressed his concerns to his owner, Sir Charles Ferguson, who was an absentee owner living in Ayrshire, Scotland. Even more extraordinarily, he later turned up at the doorstep of Ferguson to make a complaint direct to the owner. In his letter of 1780, Caesar told Ferguson of “the falling out” that had happened between the overseer and him. Caesar related how he had taken it upon himself to “push” enslaved laborers to work harder as he thought they were “idling away their times.” It was the wrong decision to make because the slaves were under the control of a white carpenter who strongly resented Caesar taking on authority at his expense. The carpenter complained to the overseer and, according to Caesar, all hell erupted. The overseer, “without speaking a Word took and screwed my two Thumbs together and put me in the Stocks, after giving me two hundred lashes.”

Worse was to come. The overseer confiscated Caesar’s provision grounds so that he had no means of feeding “my wife Child Mother or Sister.” He hit Caesar so hard “that I spit blood for three days.” He put him in the stocks, gave him another 200 lashes, and then gave his wife and children 300 lashes each for giving him food. The most severe punishment in Caesar’s opinion was that he “Ordered me to the field being a thing I was never brought up

to.” The overseer then “ordered the Negroes to eat my Hogs and fowls Goats etc. which I thought very hard” and burned his house to the ground. As a result of this unrelenting abuse, seemingly designed to teach a black man that he could not countermand what white men ordered, Caesar ran away. His letter pleaded for mercy. He also noted that the overseer had stolen Caesar’s property and had refused to pay him £135 sterling for horses and plantains. Caesar was clearly an enslaved man of means, the owner of wine glasses and silver knives. This fact is in itself surprising but not atypical—most slaves lived on the edge of destitution but a few privileged enslaved people were able to amass wealth for themselves. But such capacity for making money did not protect Caesar from violence. It probably had the reverse effect, encouraging white supervisors to put him in his place. His owner took no notice of his plea for mercy, filing the letter as “Letter& Acct. From Caesar a runaway Negro of Rozell 1780.”²²

ESCAPING SLAVERY AND SLAVE RESISTANCE

It was very hard for enslaved people to escape slavery in the eighteenth-century British Caribbean. One method of escape was through running away and forming Maroon communities. That was impossible in Barbados, where the flatness of the island militated against enslaved people setting up communities that whites could not access and destroy and where the Barbadian militia were quite effective in keeping enslaved people under control. It was easier in Jamaica, where from the conquest of the island in 1655 by the English, runaway enslaved people had formed communities practicing marronage in the dense and mountainous interior of the island. Maroons were formidable foes. The imperial government threw vast resources into a never-ending war to try and crush them, with the war becoming especially violent and intense during the 1730s. The Maroons resisted white incursion very successfully. Their repulsion of white efforts to subdue them led the Jamaican government to sue for peace. In 1739 the Maroons and the British signed a treaty which gave Maroons autonomy in return for Maroons acting as an internal police force against runaway enslaved people. This alliance, which lasted until the Second Maroon War of 1795–1796, worked for both sides, though not for enslaved people. It formed the basis of internal security for half a century.

A second way of escaping slavery was through being granted freedom through a legal process of manumission. Unlike the Spanish and Portuguese, the British were reluctant to use manumission, being very unwilling to establish an intermediate group in society between free white people and enslaved black people. Manumission rates were minimal in the region until the second quarter of the eighteenth century. But a free colored class did grow, mostly based on the desire of white men to give favors to their black mistresses and mixed-race children. The great majority of people manumitted were women and children, although occasionally an enslaved domestic man might be freed for conspicuous “good” service. A few privileged enslaved men also saved

enough money to secure their and their families' purchase, though the cost of such manumission was generally beyond most enslaved people. Manumission brought freedom but that freedom was generally circumscribed, as no West Indian community was prepared to accept black equality with even the lowest ranks of white society, such as people in the military. Over time, indeed, freedom became more restrictive, especially as the free people of color community started to be more than just a collection of children of white men and became a community that had a strong sense of its own identity and which married within itself. Whites were seldom prepared to allow free people of color to have the legal rights of white people, meaning that they had little legal protection from being harmed by whites in property matters. They were required to carry documents of freedom with them and had few political rights, except the ability to sometimes serve in the British army and navy. That such service might be considered a form of social mobility shows just how dreadful the conditions of enslavement in the Caribbean were. Life in the army or navy was notoriously hard, even for white people. By the end of eighteenth century, however, substantial communities of free people of color had begun to emerge. We should not overestimate their numbers. In 1786, free people of color made up just 1.3 percent of the population of Barbados and 4.9 percent of free people. In Jamaica in 1800, free people of color accounted for 2.2 percent of the population who were of African descent but 19 percent of the free population.

The final way that enslaved people sought their freedom was through slave rebellion. Such rebellions never succeeded in the eighteenth-century British Caribbean. White military power was too great and maintaining the secrecy necessary for a successful rebellion was very difficult. The great majority of slave rebellions recorded were in fact conspiracies that never came to fruition or which were foiled before implementation. The difficulty of rebelling against planter authority was so great that some islands, like Barbados, had no slave rebellion in the eighteenth century. Antigua had just one slave conspiracy that nearly became a rebellion, in 1736.

But some slave rebellions did occur, despite the handicaps that were faced by enslaved conspirators. Two are especially important. In 1760–1761, an island-wide conspiracy in Jamaica led by an African-born slave, Wager or Apongo, named after his lieutenant, Tacky, came close to destroying Britain's wealthiest colony. It occurred during the Seven Years' War, which the enslaved rebels might have thought a time of weakness in the imperial system. It was not such a weak time, as it meant the British regulars could combine with Maroons to put down the revolt, which they did with difficulty and with maximum force. It was a massive shock to the Jamaican slave system, causing £100,000 in damages, with the deaths of 60 whites, 60 free people of color, and 500 slaves killed in battle or executed in gruesome fashion. It shook white society in Jamaica to its core. The excesses of punishment that resulted from the rebellion shocked Britons who could not believe their country people could

be so barbaric. It may have proved an impetus to an embryonic abolitionist movement.

Thirty-five years later, another slave rebellion occurred, in Grenada, where francophone forces, including many slaves, rebelled under free colored planter, Julien Fedon, against anglophone whites. The result was prolonged war, the devastation of the flourishing Grenadian economy to such an extent that it never really recovered, and the deaths of many thousands of people, most of whom were slaves. The revolt had its own local causes but it was also connected to a wind of change that was on the verge of transforming the Caribbean as a result of the Haitian Revolution (1791–1804). Fedon’s revolt showed that the enslaved were not prepared to always put up with their sad lot.²³ When opportunity arose, they were determined to strike for freedom. That freedom was not achieved immediately—it took another generation for emancipation to occur in the British Caribbean. But that it occurred at all shows that by the end of the eighteenth century the seemingly impregnable plantation system was starting to show signs of weakness. That weakness provided some opportunity for enslaved people to contemplate getting away from the plantation’s grip and thus achieving freedom. In the nineteenth century, this seemingly impossible dream of freedom occurred with emancipation, accompanied by the decline of the plantation system and the British Caribbean ceasing to be at the center of the world’s attention, as it had been when riches from sugar had made white planters all powerful at the expense of a mass of exploited and resentful enslaved people, kept in place by relentless coercion.

NOTES

1. Barbara Solow, “Slavery and Colonization,” in *Slavery and the Rise of the Atlantic System*, ed. Barbara Solow (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 21–42.
2. Charles Leslie, *A New and Exact Account of Jamaica* (Edinburgh: R. Fleming, 1740), 41.
3. Francis Treble to Caleb Dickinson, 2 June 1760, Caleb Dickinson Papers, DD/DN/218, Somerset Record Office.
4. Frank Tannenbaum, *Slave and Citizen: The Negro in the Americas* (New York: Vintage, 1946), 117; Frederick W. Hickling, *Owning Our Madness: Facing Reality in Postcolonial Jamaica* (Kingston: Caribbean Institute of Mental Health and Substance Abuse, 2016).
5. Cited in Michael Duffy, *Soldiers, Sugar and Seapower: The British Expeditions to the West Indies and the War with Revolutionary France* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1987), 6.
6. Sidney Mintz, *Three Ancient Cultures: Caribbean Themes and Variations* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).
7. C.L.R. James, *The Black Jacobins: Toussaint L’Ouverture and the San Domingo Revolution* (New York: Vintage Books, 1963), 392.

8. Philip Morgan, "Slavery in the British Caribbean," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery 3: AD 1420–AD 1804*, eds. David Eltis and Stanley L. Engerman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 384.
9. Cited in Trevor Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves: Plantation Societies in British America, 1650–1820* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 25.
10. Richard Ligon, *A True and Exact History of the Island of Barbados* (London: H. Moseley, 1657), 96.
11. Burnard, *Planters, Merchants, and Slaves*, 18–19.
12. Peter Thompson, "Henry Drax's Instructions on the Management of a Seventeenth-Century Barbadian Plantation," *William and Mary Quarterly* 86 (2009): 565–604.
13. Olaudah Equiano, *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African, Written by Himself*, ed. Vincent Carretta (London: Penguin, 1996).
14. Ligon, *A True and Exact History*.
15. Edward Long, *The History of Jamaica ...* 3 vols. (London: T. Lowndes, 1774).
16. William Butterworth, *Three Years' Adventure of a Minor* (Leeds: Edward Baines, 1822), 132–33.
17. Patrick Browne, *The Civil and Natural History of Jamaica* (London: T. Osborne, 1756), 9.
18. Jack P. Greene, *Settler Jamaica in the 1750s: A Social Portrait* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016).
19. Butel-Dumont, Georges-Marie, *Histoire et commerce des Antilles Angloises* (Paris: n.p., 1758), 17.
20. Trevor Burnard, *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).
21. David Scott, "The Paradox of Freedom: An Interview with Orlando Patterson," *Small Axe* 17 (2013): 222, 236.
22. Alex Renton, *Blood Legacy: Reckoning with a Family's Story of Slavery* (Edinburgh: Canongate, 2021), 128–30.
23. Kit Candlin, "The Role of the Enslaved in the 'Fedor Rebellion' of 1795," *Slavery & Abolition* 39 (2018): 685–707.

FURTHER READING

- Brown, Vincent. *Tacky's Revolt: The Story of an Atlantic Slave War*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2020.
- Burnard, Trevor. *Jamaica in the Age of Revolution*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020.
- . *Mastery, Tyranny, and Desire: Thomas Thistlewood and His Slaves in the Anglo-Jamaican World*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Dunn, Richard. *A Tale of Two Plantations: Slave Life and Labor in Jamaica and Virginia*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2014.
- Greene, Jack P. *Settler Jamaica in the 1750s: A Social Portrait*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2016.
- Morgan, Kenneth. *Slavery and the British Empire: From Africa to America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Sheridan, Richard. *Sugar and Slavery: An Economic History of the British West Indies, 1623-1775*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1973.

Turner, Sasha. *Contested Bodies: Pregnancy, Childrearing and Slavery in Jamaica*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania 2017.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Injection: Atlantic Slavery and Commodity Chains

Klaus Weber

INTRODUCTION

Global commodity chains—from Asia to Europe to West Africa—were of crucial importance to the development of plantation slavery in the “New World.” The concept of commodity chains was developed in the 1980s and further elaborated in parallel with the accelerated deregulation of the global economy. Originally conceived for the contemporary era, it helps to understand the world-encompassing flows of raw materials, components, and finished products along with the significant expansion of these flows after the end of the Cold War—and their impact on the working and living conditions of the people involved in them, from production to consumption. It also highlights the connections between places, people, and social and economic practices distant from each other only in geographic terms.¹ The concept can be applied very appropriately to the early modern economy, since that economy in many respects has more in common with the deregulated globalized world of the twenty-first century than with that of the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which was characterized by protectionism, Fordism, and—from 1945—the ideological dichotomies of the Cold War. Early commodity chains illustrate how economic interests, the hierarchies among the involved actors, the factor endowments of certain regions, and the ensuing labor divisions and logistics shaped flows of goods and people, making plantation slavery

K. Weber (✉)

Europa-Universität Viadrina, Frankfurt (Oder), Germany

e-mail: weber@europa-uni.de

and the processing of its produce a profitable business. A thorough understanding of the rise of Atlantic slavery must take into account the global commodity chains that made it possible and kept it going into the Age of Emancipation.

Long-distance trade networks in commodities both within and between Europe, Asia, and Africa had already expanded significantly since the late medieval period, well before European conquest of the Americas, and it was these networks that most profoundly influenced and helped fuel the development of New World plantation slavery. Since the late medieval period, industrious urbanized regions had been largely unhampered in connecting maritime catchment areas with specific rural areas—notably, Northern Italy with regard to the Mediterranean, or the Netherlands with regard to the Baltic Sea region. Cities were able to regulate production, wages, and prices within their confines, as well as the import and export of goods. Rural areas produced staple goods, like grain in Poland or metalware in Sweden and Tyrol, as well as upmarket products like wine in the southwest of France or fine woolens in Flanders, England, and Italy. Italian merchants traded with North Africa (sub-Saharan gold for German metalware, textiles from Italy and Castile, etc.) and with the Levant and Black Sea regions (for raw and finished cotton from India, spices, sugar, silk, porcelain, tea from China, etc.).² Trading diasporas with a variety of ethnoreligious backgrounds (Arab, Jewish, Armenian, Persian, etc.) organized the trade between Europe and southwestern Asia, traversing Ottoman and Persian territories. Arab, Indian, Malay, and Chinese ship-owning merchants connected Persian waters with the hinterlands of the Indian Ocean and the China Seas, and caravan routes (labeled the “Silk Road” only much later) linked regions extending from the Black Sea to the Far East on land. Even before Vasco da Gama’s voyage, producers and merchants in vast areas of the “Old World” thus had more or less precise knowledge about which goods were available where, as well as about prices, qualities, and demand. Among these regions, the Middle East along with much of India and China were more urbanized—and commercially and technologically more advanced—than Western Europe. As a result, they also offered more sophisticated goods. From antiquity until well into the nineteenth century, it was thus a constant pattern in trade for European merchants and consumers to be attracted by Asian products rather than vice versa. Indian cottons represent a typical example for Asian superiority. They were far more attractive in color and more comfortable to wear than most linen cloth, the European staple fabric. In the late seventeenth century, when “modest imitations [made of imported cotton fibers and yarns] [...] were increasingly produced in Europe,” these fashionable items became available to ever larger segments of the population. Contemporaries lamented a “calico craze.”³ European-made high-quality metals, glassware, and woolens were among the few exceptions of commodities in demand in Eastern markets. In general, Europeans could not pay for the desired Asian products with barter goods; instead, they had to use

precious metals, which were hardly mined in Asia. This also explains the European demand for African gold as well as the intensification of European silver mining: They were prerequisites for any trade with the East from antiquity. By the time of the European conquest of the Americas, broad trading networks between Europe, Asia, and Africa were thus already well-established.

The conquest and colonization of tropical and subtropical regions in the New World altered these commodity flows, enabling Europeans to develop plantation agriculture and produce many originally Asian commodities themselves, thereby controlling the entire chain from plantation to finished good. In a sense, they created their own Asia in the Americas. The most prominent of these commodities were cotton, indigo, coffee, and sugar, all originating in the East. The only thing the European colonies lacked was an abundant population to be coerced to toil on the plantations. The plantation owners thus had around 12.5 million enslaved Africans deported across the Atlantic Ocean.⁴ The terms of trade defined by the African sellers of these slaves shaped yet another commodity flow and its associated chains: that of the barter goods they demanded.⁵

This injection essay illuminates the impact of commodity chains on New World slavery by focusing on one of the plantation products bound for Europe—sugar—as well as two of the most important barter commodities destined for Africa: textiles and metalware. It underscores the importance of global trade networks that linked Asia, Europe, Africa, and the Americas in the early modern period.

SUGAR

Sugar production was the single most important motor for European expansion into the Atlantic World. Sugar cane was presumably first used by humans on Papua New Guinea around 8000 years ago. From there, the practice of growing cane and extracting the sweet juice spread to China and India. The process for reducing the juice to crystal sugar was most likely developed around 500 C.E. in the Middle East. For the first time, food could be sweetened without adding another flavor, as was the case with honey, the only available alternative. In medieval Western Europe, only the very elite—kings, the pope, the emperor—could afford a very modest consumption of this substance.⁶

During the Crusades, Europeans learned the technologies for growing and processing sugar cane from prisoners of war as well as via peaceful knowledge exchange with the Arab world. The extremely high market price for sugar attracted investments in plantations and the expensive sugar mills. Beginning in the twelfth century, Venetian merchants and military orders like the Templars established plantations on Cyprus and Crete. Alongside free workers, they also employed unfree laborers—prisoners of war as well as slaves imported into the Mediterranean from Black Sea shores by Venetians and Genoese.⁷ The sugar they made was shipped to Europe and distributed at exorbitant prices.

By the fifteenth century, sugar plantations had spread to Sicily, the Spanish Mediterranean coast, and the Algarve—and after the 1450s, to the Canary Islands and previously uninhabited Madeira. The Portuguese brought African slaves to Madeira to work the sugar plantations, and on the Canaries, Africans were forced to labor alongside smaller numbers of indigenous workers. The subtropical climate allowed for much higher yields than those obtained in the Mediterranean, but it also required huge investments for irrigation systems and field terracing. Much of the necessary capital came from bankers in Genoa, Florence, and Venice who had previously been involved in Mediterranean sugar production, as well as from Germany's fifteenth- and sixteenth-century banking center Augsburg. With larger volumes of sugar pouring into the markets, which now extended as far as Northwestern Europe, prices slowly began to drop from 200 times the price per weight of wheat around 1430 to roughly the 30-fold mark around 1500. Consumption began to trickle down the social strata.⁸

In the late medieval period, the key features of this (early) modern, capital-intensive agroindustry were already in place. First, (sub)tropical regions were colonized for the purpose of growing a cash crop that could not be cultivated in Europe. Second, a non-European population was enslaved and forced to work in distant regions under climatic conditions Europeans preferred to avoid. Third, the regions depended not only on the influx of workers but also on food imports, since cash crop monocultures are more profitable than mixed farming. Fourth, the product was not meant for consumption in the region, but instead for distant markets with the adequate purchasing power. And fifth, rent-seeking capital was a crucial driver in the development of plantation agriculture from the very beginning.

At the low end of the sugar commodity chain, the entire plantation community was built around the requirements of profitable sugar production. The plantation made the community, and this applied even more on distant islands and—from the 1490s—in the Americas. It is most obvious in the use of violence to transport Africans across the Atlantic and subject them to a brutal labor regime. Brutal methods were also employed against European indentured servants taken to the Caribbean from the late sixteenth to the late seventeenth century. The work of both groups—comparably fewer indentured whites and the many enslaved Blacks—enabled the massive expansion of sugar production starting around 1680, when the “Sugar Revolution” transformed the British and French Caribbean islands. Accordingly, the number of captives deported from Africa rose from an average of 9700 per year in 1650–1690 to around 47,600 per year in 1691–1790. The majority were sold to sugar plantations in the Caribbean and Brazil.⁹ In comparison to most other cash crops like tobacco (one of the few originating in the Americas), cotton, or coffee, the slaves working in the sugar sector experienced the harshest labor conditions and more violence, as well as toiling in some of the most insalubrious humid climates; as a result, they had the lowest life expectancy among all workers in the plantation industry.

At the upper end of the chain, sugar transformed social patterns of consumption. Increasing volumes were already being used in Europe before the late seventeenth century, when sugar became popular. Yet in the fifteenth and sixteenth century, it was still a luxury product. Since the 1470s, techniques for creating miniature figures of humans and animals as well as entire depictions of urban landscapes made of sugar had been developed in Italy for festivities of nobles and patricians, who would eat the objects after having marveled at them. From the 1530s, when Antwerp had become an important center for marketing sugar, these “bancquets de confitures et de succades” became common at events hosted by princes and aristocrats in Northwestern Europe as well. Portugal and the Low Countries were among the first regions to see the consumption of sweet pastries, jams, and preserves spreading to the middling and even lower classes. Sugar consumption further expanded with the rise of coffee, tea, and hot chocolate, which became more readily available starting in the late seventeenth century. With each of these stimulants and the sweetener accompanying it, a specific panoply of jugs, cups, bowls, and spoons—preferably made of silver and bone china, or at least of high-quality earthenware—came into use. By the mid-eighteenth century, consumption in England, which then led Europe in sugar use, reached around six kilograms per capita per year; this number would increase to more than ten kilograms by 1800. Over the following decades, preserves became a staple food of the emerging working class, driving up consumption even further.¹⁰

With labor and fuel being expensive in the plantation regions, large quantities of sugar were not refined on site but instead in Europe. Much of this finishing occurred in more easterly seaports like Trieste and Hamburg, where labor was cheaper than in prime sugar-receiving cities like Bordeaux or London. From the mid-eighteenth century, Central Europe absorbed increasing volumes of sugar that had been refined in Amsterdam and, more importantly, Hamburg. Most of it came from the extremely productive French Caribbean.¹¹

Along this commodity chain, profits were made by the plantation owners, by financiers contracted to levy the duties on sugar arriving in European ports, by the crowns and maritime republics that ultimately claimed those duties, by refiners who finished raw sugar in European ports, and by wholesale merchants and retailers who distributed it across Europe. The key profiteers were financiers active in several of these sectors, such as the leading French bankers Samuel Bernard (1651–1739) and Antoine Crozat (1655–1738), who helped to finance the “Sugar Revolution” in the sugar-producing powerhouse Saint-Domingue.¹² National economies as a whole benefitted as well: In the Netherlands, in sample years around 1770 and 1790, sugar and coffee produced by chattel slaves accounted for roughly 16 percent of the total trade value (including imports and exports).¹³ Pre-industrial economic growth rates were low, and additional growth from the entirely new colonial sector therefore had a significant impact.

TEXTILES

Even before the fifteenth-century Portuguese expansion along the African coast, European and Asian commodities had reached sub-Saharan markets via caravan routes. Important export items traded in return were high-value goods like gold, salt, ivory, pepper, precious woods—and enslaved people mostly destined for the Muslim world extending from North Africa to Persia. African merchants and consumers were thus already familiar with a wide range of commodities and qualities, which they subsequently demanded when the Portuguese began to buy African slaves for Madeira, Portugal, and—from the sixteenth century on—increasingly for Brazil and Spanish America. The barter goods traded for slaves did not consist of “defective firearms, cheap liquor, tawdry trinkets, and useless luxuries,” as some narratives would have us believe, but “from start to finish [of] practical cloth and metal goods” as well as many other items. Inventories from the Dutch trading post of El Mina on the Gold Coast illustrate this variety. The number of different items—all sorts of textiles, glass and metalware, tobacco, alcohols, etc.—stored there stood at 92 in 1645, and at roughly 220 by 1728.¹⁴ These decades also saw a massive expansion of the slave trade as well as a relative decline in volume of the above-mentioned African export goods. Textiles made up half of the total value of goods exchanged for captive men, women, and children on the African coasts by Europeans.

The sale of the enslaved was typically controlled by local rulers, who demanded certain amounts of premium goods as market entry fees. Only then were European (later also Brazilian and North American) buyers allowed to begin their bargaining with the African traders. Certain European and Asian goods had long been in use for conspicuous consumption, but also for ritual purposes. Their influx increased with the transatlantic slave trade, and their patterns of consumption soon trickled down the social strata and spread into regions more distant from the coast—similar to the way plantation products were spreading across Europe. Monarchs like the kings of Dahomey as well as minor rulers and the African slave traders had privileged access to these goods, which added to their social power.¹⁵

They were at the upper end of a commodity chain that had to satisfy a buyers' market. Each slaving expedition absorbed a huge advance investment for outfitting the ship, maritime insurance, mariners' wages, and for the largest cost category: the barter goods. Mortality among the slave ship crews was very high, especially while “coasting”—the weeks and months it took to fill the ship's hold with the enslaved. African traders were aware of the time pressure under which slave ship captains operated. The captains were also entrusted with negotiating with the sellers, and they made sure to bring goods that would meet West African preferences and tastes. By the eighteenth century, many captains came equipped with pattern books issued by European textile producers so that African slave traders could order the latest fashion, even if it would arrive only upon a ship's return the following year.¹⁶ The

assortments included textiles from all over Eurasia: linen from Northwestern and Central Europe, woolens from Flanders and Britain, silk from Persia and China, cotton-and-silk fabrics, calicoes from India, and increasingly from the eighteenth century, European counterfeits of Indian cottons. A large share of the textiles shipped to Europe by the English, Dutch, and French East India Companies were in fact destined for African markets via slaving ports such as Liverpool, Middelburg, and Nantes. Another important market for textiles were the plantation economies. The slaves' work wear meted out to them by their owners was usually linen, since its fibers are far more robust than cotton.

One reason for the competitiveness of Indian and Central European fabrics was their quality, another the comparatively low cost of labor. Wages and prices in the Western Hemisphere were generally higher because Spanish American silver was constantly expanding the money supply. The differences in wages and prices between Europe and Asia—as well as within Europe itself—were considerable, giving more easterly regions a competitive edge in labor-intensive segments like textile production. They seized ever larger portions of the market as the volume of the transatlantic slave trade increased during the eighteenth century, with old-established linen regions like Flanders, Normandy, and Brittany stagnating or even falling into decline. Fine linen from the eastern German province of Silesia thus competed on African markets with certain Indian cottons. Labor costs in Silesia were driven further down by a combination of cottage industry and the institution of serfdom, which existed unofficially in Silesia well into the 1840s and which forced peasants to produce certain amounts of linen per year without pay. These were collected by linen merchants established in the provincial towns and sold to Western European slaving ports at cutting-edge prices.¹⁷ In India, too, conditions were adapted in order to increase outputs and curb labor costs. All the port cities controlled by European East India Companies—Madras, Bombay, Pondicherry, etc.—saw protoindustrial textile production spreading in their immediate hinterlands to supply the rapidly expanding European demand. Like other crafts in India, textile making was associated with specific castes, which made it difficult to simply hire more weavers. One solution was that weaver castes would “adopt” members from outside, another was that higher and lower caste weavers were employed on the same looms but at different times—the latter on night shifts and producing coarser fabrics. In the morning, the looms were subjected to a purifying ritual before the higher caste weavers started their day. The textile merchants would wear gloves when touching the bales woven overnight.¹⁸

In many Central European textile regions, the additional income from weaving improved the living conditions of families or allowed young people to marry, since only this previously inexistent income gave them access to a marriage permit. Urban textile merchants sought to control this rural workforce, namely by imposing mobility restrictions, as was the case in Swiss linen regions, for example.¹⁹ It was presumably the Silesian serfs who were at the very low end of this commodity chain: Immobilized in the province, facing

population growth and rising bread prices, they were forced to work ever more in order to survive.²⁰

In any case, it was protoindustrial regions that bore the bulk of population growth in eighteenth-century Central Europe. At the same time, the forced transportation of millions from West Africa and the violence spreading in connection with mass enslavement caused demographic stagnation and even decline in this world region.

METALS

Metal and metal products (including melee weapons and firearms) made up for around 15 percent of all the barter goods for Africa, ranking second behind textiles. Mining and processing of iron and copper were highly developed in Africa, but local ores and the lack of some important alloy materials prevented the production of certain qualities. At least since the medieval period, sub-Saharan Africa therefore imported semi-finished metals for local artisans as well as brassware, knives, sabers, and other wares. Among these, certain standardized items like brass rods also served as currency. West African crafters used a large share of the imported copper alloys to create figurines and other sculpted objects that became famous as the Benin Bronzes.

When the Portuguese began to engage in slave trading (initially on a rather modest scale), the African sellers of slaves demanded the high-quality copper alloys they already knew, especially brass. Rich yields of non-sulfidic ores in the region of Aachen made brass-producing Rhenish merchants like Erasmus Schetz (c. 1476–1550) top suppliers for Africa. From the mid-sixteenth century, the Fugger dynasty also became a major purveyor of metalware. Originating from a linen-weaving village near Augsburg, the Fuggers eventually made their way to banking and then to copper mining all over Central Europe. By 1504, they had their own branch in Lisbon—initially for shipping copper to India, but soon supplying Portuguese slave ships with huge quantities of brassware as well. A 1548 contract with the Portuguese crown lists tens of thousands of saucepans, bowls, barbers' basins, and cauldrons along with 7500 hundredweights of "manillas" (bangle-like brass objects). Large amounts of such items (including iron chains to fetter the enslaved) were produced in Nuremberg and went into the African trade via Flanders.²¹ By the eighteenth century, much of the copper and brass manufacturing for African markets was being done in Swansea, Bristol, Bath, in and around London and some more places in Northwestern Europe. British smelting technology, the use of coke as an energy source, and the rise of its own plantation empire had caused this shift of the industry to Britain. Its bulkiest products were not destined for Africa but instead for sugar plantations all across the "New World": the huge copper kettles for the boiling houses of the sugar mills in which the cane juice was transformed into crystal sugar. They were wear parts that had to be replaced frequently.²²

Another metal item for West Africa consisted of bars of malleable iron, popular with local blacksmiths who used the semi-finished material to forge tools for artisans and agriculture. Some of this so-called “voyage iron” was produced in the Rhineland, but most of it in Sweden, with serf-like conditions for many workers. Like in the case of Silesian linen, the commodity chain of Swedish iron involved coerced labor at both ends—in the initial production of the commodity, and as the object (slaves) it was used to be paid for. Like “Guinea rods” and a certain range of textiles, voyage iron was standardized and also served as a currency. The impact of European iron on African markets was owed to the productivity of the early blast furnaces developed in Europe in the eighteenth century. Their water-driven bellows coupled with a reliable supply of coke or charcoal drove down production costs. Even though African iron manufacturing—typically clustered in savannah woodlands, for example in Mali or northern Togo—was very sophisticated, imported iron was in high demand in the coastal rainforest regions, where it was converted into axes and hoes needed to clear forests and swamps to enable the growing of indigenous rice and the newly introduced American crop of maize. The subsequent nutritional input stabilized a population living under the constant pressure of slave-raiding. “In that sense, voyage iron helped sustain the export of enslaved people,” as Chris Evans and Göran Rydén recently argued—even if some of the imported metal was converted into weapons used to fend off slave raiders.²³

Captives are produced by means of violence, which is one of the reasons why West Africa also imported increasing amounts of firearms. The Portuguese crown did not allow its slave traders to introduce them in Africa so as not to jeopardize the Portuguese hegemony along the Congo and Angola coasts, but the other slave-trading nations did. The figures are contested, but around 1730, West Africa may have absorbed as much as 180,000 guns per year; from 1750 to 1810, the figure probably oscillated between 280,000 and 390,000 per year. Over the entire period from 1730 to 1810, a total of perhaps 18 million firearms would thus have found their way into the region, contributing to the militarization of slave-trading states like Dahomey. Specifically designed for the African demand, they originated from gun manufactures in places like Flanders, Thuringia, Denmark, and most prominently Birmingham.²⁴

INDUSTRIOUS REVOLUTION AND INDUSTRIAL REVOLUTION

Further sidelines of production and trade in Africa emerged from the transatlantic slave trade as well, like the export of gum arabic from the Senegambia coast. These commodity chains have often been overlooked. Gum arabic was of crucial importance for the European calico industry, which needed it for the process of cotton dying.²⁵ Wishing to have larger numbers of slaves available for sale whenever the opportunity came up, major slave traders in coastal West Africa employed them on plantations in order to curb the cost of their maintenance. From the mid-eighteenth century, palm oil became the most important

product from such plantations: It was increasingly in demand as a lubricant for Europe's early industries, as a fuel for lamps, and for making soaps and cosmetics. Over the decades, many African entrepreneurs became more reluctant to sell captives, as they were now needed on local plantations.²⁶ This led to a rise in slave prices on both sides of the Atlantic. The campaign of abolitionists, a surge of larger and smaller slave revolts in the Americas since the 1790s, and this rise in slave prices ultimately led to the abolition of slavery in the Americas.

The commodities studied in this injection essay—especially sugar and fashionable textiles—were objects of conspicuous consumption. Consumer demand for plantation produce like sugar in Europe, and for European and Indian textiles in Africa, and so forth, did in fact fuel the enslavement of people in West Africa and their exploitation in the Americas. While European economic development from the mid-seventeenth century was certainly driven by an increasing desire for new consumer goods (domestic products, but also plantation produce), motivating most strata of early modern society to give up leisure time for longer working hours and thus more purchasing power, this is only one part of the story.²⁷ Many of the new consumer goods that triggered the “Industrious Revolution” of the late seventeenth and eighteenth century only became available because a specific type of forced industriousness had been imposed on millions of enslaved people in the Americas. As Nuala Zahedie recently argued:

Few consumers fully understood their own direct involvement in the American marketplace, and the production of imported luxuries, or recognized their links to enslaved workers in the Caribbean but, in fact, workers on both sides of the Atlantic were inextricably chained together in a complex process of economic and social change.²⁸

Eric Williams' seminal 1944 book on “Capitalism & Slavery” sparked a debate on whether the slave trade and plantation slavery fueled the process of industrialization in Britain.²⁹ Commodity chains illustrate that the impact of this transatlantic economy extended far beyond the eighteenth century's leading slave-trading nation and deep into Continental Europe, even contributing to the imposition of (semi)serfdom on textile, glass, and metalworkers in Silesia, Bohemia, and Sweden. The production of commodities for African markets and supplies for the plantations, along with the influx of plantation products into Europe, did in fact promote population growth and the accumulation of wealth on the European continent. By contrast, the demographic losses caused by slave-raiding as well as the influx of huge volumes of manufactures and their control by slave-trading elites were anything but beneficial for economies and societies in Africa. African export goods like gum arabic or palm oil were raw materials used for the production of higher-value goods in Europe. Eric Williams' assumption that direct profits from the slave trade were essential

for investments in industrialization has long been dismissed, but the slave-labor economy did create markets for European-made products, and African demand fostered technological progress such as in the British brass industry. Joseph Inikori emphasized the crucial importance of such exports for national economies.³⁰ Producing barter goods and supplies for plantations most likely did not yield more profit than the slave trade itself, but it involved far less risk and triggered technical innovation in various sectors of manufacturing, laying the foundations for a sustainable process of industrialization in Europe.

NOTES

1. Andrea Komlosy and Goran Musić, "Chains of Labor: Connecting Global Labor History and the Commodity Chain Paradigm," in *Commodity Chains and Labor Relations*, ed. Andrea Komlosy and Goran Musić (Leiden: Brill, 2021), 1–26.
2. Peter Feldbauer and John Morrissey, "Italiens Kolonialexpansion. Östlicher Mittelmeerraum und die Küsten des Schwarzen Meeres," in *Mediterraner Kolonialismus. Expansion und Kulturaustausch im Mittelmeer*, ed. Peter Feldbauer, Gottfried Liedl and John Morrissey (Essen: Magnus, 2005), 157–73; Nikolas Jasper, "Austausch-, Transfer- und Abgrenzungsprozesse. Der Mittelmeerraum," in *Globalgeschichte: Die Welt 1250–1500*, ed. Thomas Ertl and Michael Limberger (Wien: Mandelbaum, 2006), 138–74, see 152–58.
3. Giorgio Riello, "The Globalization of Cotton Textiles: Indian Cottons, Europe, and the Atlantic World, 1600–1850," in *The Spinning World: A Global History of Cotton Textiles, 1200–1850*, ed. Giorgio Riello and Prasanna Parthasarathi (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 261–87, at 267–73.
4. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>, 11/12/2021.
5. Stanley B. Alpern, "What Africans Got for Their Slaves: A Master List of European Trade Goods," *History in Africa* 22 (1995): 5–43.
6. Sidney Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The Place of Sugar in Modern History* (New York: Viking-Penguin, 1985), 79–87.
7. Hannah Barker, *That Most Precious Merchandise: The Mediterranean Trade in Black Sea Slaves, 1260–1500* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019).
8. Alberto Viera, "Sugar Islands: The Sugar Economy of Madeira and the Canaries, 1450–1650," in *Tropical Babels: Sugar and the Making of the Atlantic World, 1450–1680*, ed. Stuart Schwartz (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 42–84.
9. The total between 1651 and 1690 was around 388,900; of these, around 311,500 survived the voyage. The total between 1691 and 1790 was around 4,765,500, with 4,119,500 surviving. <https://www.slavevoyages.org/voyage/database>, 11/12/2021.
10. Eddy Stols, "The Expansion of the Sugar Market in Western Europe," in *Tropical Babels*, ed. Stuart Schwartz (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 237–88, at 270–75; Mintz, *Sweetness and Power*, 3–8, 128–31.
11. Tamira Combrink, "From French Harbours to German Rivers: European Distribution of Sugar by the Dutch in the Eighteenth Century," in *La diffusion des produits ultra-marins en Europe (XVIe–XVIIIe siècles)*, ed. Marguerite

- Martin and Maud Villeret (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2018), 39–54, at 40–44.
12. Karsten Voss and Klaus Weber, “Their Most Valuable and Most Vulnerable Asset: Slaves on the Early Sugar Plantations of Saint-Domingue (1697–1715),” *Journal of Global Slavery* 5 (2020): 204–37, at 209–14.
 13. Tamira Combrink, “Slave-Based Coffee in the Eighteenth Century and the Role of the Dutch in Global Commodity Chains,” *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 1 (2021): 15–42, at 29.
 14. Alpern, “What Africans Got for Their Slaves,” 6.
 15. Colleen E. Kriger, *Cloth in West African History* (New York: Altamira, 2009), 34–39.
 16. Thomas David, Bouda Etemad, and Janick Marina Schaufelbuehl, *La Suisse et l’esclavage des noirs*, (Lausanne: Éditions Antipodes, 2005), 22.
 17. Anka Steffen, “A Cloth That Binds: New Perspectives on the Eighteenth-Century Prussian Economy,” *Slavery & Abolition* 42, no. 1 (2021): 105–29, at 112.
 18. David Washbrook, “The Textile Industry and the Economy of South India, 1500–1800,” in *How India Clothed the World: The World of South Asian Textiles, 1500–1850*, ed. Giorgio Riello and Tirthankar Roy (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 172–91, at 183.
 19. Susanna Burghartz and Madeleine Herren, *Building Paradise: A Basel Manor House and its Residents in a Global Perspective* (Basel: Merian, 2021), 99–101.
 20. Anka Steffen and Klaus Weber, “Spinning and Weaving for the Slave Trade: Proto-industry in Eighteenth-Century Silesia,” in *Slavery Hinterland: Transatlantic Slavery and Continental Europe, 1680–1850*, ed. Felix Brahm and Eve Rosenhaft (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2016), 87–107.
 21. Marian Malowist, “Portuguese Expansion in Africa and European Economy at the Turn of the 15th Century,” in *Western Europe, Eastern Europe and World Development, 13th–18th Centuries: Collection of Essays of Marian Malowist*, ed. Jean Batou and Henryk Szlajfer (Leiden: Brill, 2009), 373–93.
 22. Chris Evans, *Slave Wales: The Welsh and Atlantic Slavery, 1660–1850* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2010); Nuala Zahedie, “Copper, Colonies and the Market for Inventive Activities,” *The Economic History Review* 66, no. 3 (2013): 805–25.
 23. Chris Evans and Göran Rydén, “‘Voyage Iron’: An Atlantic Slave Trade Currency, Its European Origins, and West African Impact,” *Past & Present* 239, no. 1 (2018): 41–70, at 43.
 24. Joseph E. Inikori, “The Import of Firearms into West Africa, 1750–1807: A Quantitative Analysis,” *The Journal of African History* 18 (1977): 339–68; W. A. Richards, “The Import of Firearms into West Africa in the Eighteenth Century,” *The Journal of African History* 21, no. 1 (1980), 43–59.
 25. Jutta Wimpler, “From Senegal to Augsburg: Gum Arabic and the Central European Textile Industry in the Eighteenth Century,” *Textile History* 50, no. 1 (2019), 4–22.
 26. Angus E. Dalrymple-Smith, *Commercial Transitions and Abolition in West Africa 1630–1860* (Leiden: Brill, 2020).
 27. Jan de Vries, *The Industrious Revolution: Consumer Behavior and the Household Economy, 1650 to the Present* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

28. Nuala Zahedie, "Eric Williams and William Forbes: Copper, Colonial Markets, and Commercial Capitalism," *The Economic History Review* Volume 74, no. 3 (2021), 784–808, at 805.
29. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1944).
30. Joseph E. Inikori, *Africans and the Industrial Revolution in England: A Study in International Trade and Economic Development* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 477–79.

FURTHER READINGS

- Day, John. "The Bullion Famine of the 15th Century." *Past & Present* 79 (1978): 3–54.
- De Zwart, Pim and Jan Luiten van Zanden. *The Origins of Globalization: World Trade in the Making of the Global Economy, 1500–1800*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Elbl, Martin M. "From Venice to the Tuat: Trans-Saharan Copper Trade and Francesco di Marco Datini of Prato." In *Money, Markets and Trade in Late Medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of John H. A. Munro*, edited by Lawrin Armstrong, Ivana Elbl and Martin M. Elbl, 411–59. Leiden: Brill, 2007.
- Grewe, Bernd-Stefan. "Global Commodities and Commodity Chains." In *Global Economic History*, edited by Roy Tirthankar and Giorgio Riello, 215–28. London: Bloomsbury, 2019.
- Häberlein, Mark. *Die Fugger. Geschichte einer Augsburger Familie (1367–1650)*. Stuttgart: Kohlhammer, 2006.
- Kea, Ray A. "Firearms and Warfare on the Gold and Slave Coasts from the Sixteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries." *The Journal of African History* 12, no. 2 (1971): 185–213.
- Kobayashi, Kazuo. *Indian Cotton Textiles in West Africa. African Agency, Consumer Demand and the Making of the Global Economy, 1750–1850*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019.
- Manning, Patrick. "The Slave Trade: The Formal Demography of a Global System." In *The Atlantic Slave Trade: Effects on Economies, Societies, and Peoples in Africa, the Americas, and Europe*, edited by Joseph E. Inikori and Stanley L. Engerman, 118–41. Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.
- Weber, Klaus. "Atlantic Commerce and the Rise of Central European Rural Industry." In *The Sea in History: The Early Modern World/La Mer dans L'histoire*, edited by Christian Buchet and Gérard Le Bouëdec, 66–77. Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2017.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Modern Societies (1800–1900 C.E.)

PREFACE

The fourth part of this handbook loosely spans the nineteenth century—a relatively brief period but an enormously significant century in the history of slavery and slaving practices around the world. Whereas the history of slavery in the early modern world was to a large extent characterized by expansion, the nineteenth century followed a dizzying and revolutionary trajectory that witnessed both the rapid expansion and decline or formal abolition of slavery and related practices around the world. Whereas slavery was legal, tolerated, and largely unquestioned virtually everywhere in the world on the eve of the Atlantic revolutions that broke out in the last quarter of the eighteenth century, by the early twentieth century institutions of slavery and slave trading were legally interdicted throughout the Americas, in much of Asia, in most of Africa, and in most of Europe (where serfdom, too, was definitively abolished). Formal abolition on paper did not automatically result in freedom from extreme dependencies or economic exploitation in practice, nor did it even definitively end practices of slavery, which clandestinely continue in many parts of the world to this day. For the history of global slavery, however, the transformation of slaving practices from universally accepted to almost universally unjustifiable practice during the long nineteenth century constituted a dramatic change of course.


This development was far from linear. In many world regions the modern period began with a bifurcation with respect to slavery: as the first strikes against slavery were taken in some regions, other regions expanded their slaving practices significantly. By the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century in the Americas, for example, the Age of Revolutions had brought about the formal abolition of slavery in parts of mainland North America (the

northern states of the US in the period 1777–1804) and the Caribbean’s most successful slave colony, Haiti (1803), as well as the abolition of the Atlantic slave trade to the US and British colonies. At the same time, slavery began to expand significantly in the southern US, Spanish Caribbean, and Brazil—an expansion that would continue unabated until final abolition (in 1865 in the US; 1886 in the Spanish Caribbean; and 1888 in Brazil). Similarly, the Age of Revolutions in West Africa witnessed the rise of revolutionary jihadist movements that embraced and implemented anti-slavery regulations, primarily aimed at protecting Muslims from enslavement and trafficking. At the same time, however, slavery actually increased throughout the region, due to increased demand for slave labor in the production of various market commodities. Indeed, slavery increased throughout much of Africa during the nineteenth century, transforming in many communities from a largely domestic practice to a central mode of production.

The global spread of abolitionism and European anti-slavery movements—which would ultimately engulf most of the world and even serve as a thinly veiled excuse for European colonization in Africa and Asia—dramatically turned the tides in the history of world slavery. Originating in late-eighteenth-century Atlantic discourses regarding “natural rights,” morality, economic efficiency, and social organization, abolitionism began as a small but vocal movement aimed primarily at restricting and eliminating slavery and the slave trade in the Americas. As the movement grew, it developed transatlantic and even global networks, successfully placed sustained pressure on governments around the world to eradicate slavery and slave trading in law and in practice, and was fused into broader European campaigns to colonize Africa and much of the Indian Ocean world by the turn of the twentieth century.



The Second Slavery in the Americas

Michael Zeuske 

INTRODUCTION

The “second slavery” in the Atlantic world refers to the renewed expansion and the creation of new frontiers of slavery, with modern capitalist characteristics, especially (but not exclusively) in the nineteenth-century slaveholding societies of the US South, Brazil, and the Spanish Caribbean (especially Cuba). It began during the Age of Revolutions and mirrored the piecemeal abolition of the transatlantic slave trade and of slavery itself in other parts of the Americas. The workforce of the second slavery primarily constituted—in the case of Brazil, Cuba, Puerto Rico, and other Caribbean areas—smuggled slaves from Africa (illegally transported in an age wherein the transatlantic slave trade was abolished, a trade that is often referred to as having taken place in the *hidden Atlantic*). In the US, a massive internal slave trade from the “older” colonial slave societies of the Atlantic seaboard to the new cotton regions of the newly settled southern interior fueled the cotton revolution and the second slavery there. In Brazil, too, a thriving internal slave trade supplemented the mass importation of enslaved Africans in the nineteenth century. In some regions, especially in the Caribbean, African slave labor was supplemented by so-called *coolie* migrations of bonded migrant workers from especially southern China, India, and the Pacific regions starting in the 1840s.

M. Zeuske (✉)

University of Bonn, Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies (BCDSS),
Bonn, Germany
e-mail: mzeuske@uni-bonn.de

This chapter examines the era of “second slavery” from roughly 1800 to 1888. It starts with the development of the second slavery in the wake of the Atlantic revolutions, which included the abolition of the transatlantic slave trade starting with the US and Great Britain in 1808. It then discusses the intensification and modernization of plantation agriculture in the main regions of the second slavery, supplemented by the rise of slave trading in the *hidden Atlantic* (the Atlantic after the formal abolition of the Atlantic slave trade) as well as internally within slaveholding societies (especially in the US South and Brazil).

THE SECOND SLAVERY

Individual elements of the second slavery had already emerged before the Age of Revolutions, especially with regard to technological innovations and the capitalist expansion of slave-produced agricultural commodities in the Americas for Atlantic markets (especially sugar but also tobacco, indigo, rice, and by the end of the eighteenth century even cotton). The development of Atlantic slavery gave rise to the modern slave plantation system, whose primary aim was the accumulation of capital from slave-produced commodities and from the racial commodification of enslaved bodies themselves. The sugar revolution in particular was characterized by colonial technological breakthroughs in industrialization and modernization, that allowed the sugar regions to expand and intensify their slave plantation systems into extremely profitable and advanced enterprises.

Before the revolution, Saint-Domingue was the most productive colony in the world. Its wealth was based on almost entirely on the extreme exploitation of masses of slaves on its vast sugar plantations (flanked by coffee, indigo, and some cotton and cocoa plantations). The beginning of the revolution there, which broke out in August 1791, however, toppled its place at the top of the slaveholding regions of the Americas. Only a week after the revolution broke out, about 140 plantations were no longer under the rule of their administrators and overseers. The revolution spread, and the many rebellions and uprisings across the colony were ultimately beyond control. Led by priests of slave religions and *commandeurs*, the insurgents formed war gangs and small armies. The Haitian Revolution was a complicated and bloody affair. The long-term consequences included the abolition of slavery and the destruction of the hitherto dynamic plantation region of the Americas.

The revolution on Saint-Domingue and its virtual destruction as a primary plantation-based producer of agricultural commodities in the Atlantic world coincided with—and to a certain extent helped usher in—a new phase of slavery, one characterized by the opening up and intensification of new frontier regions for capitalist plantation agriculture. This new phase included the decline of some of the “older” plantation zones of the Americas, where slave-based agriculture had reached its limits—from the sugar plantations of

Saint-Domingue to the cocoa plantations in Venezuela and the tobacco plantations of Virginia—but also the renewal and expansion of capitalist plantation agriculture in new breakthrough-regions, especially the Spanish Caribbean (Cuba and Puerto Rico), Brazil, and the southern US. Spaniards in Cuba and Cuban Creoles (who also called themselves or had themselves called “Spaniards”) as well as naturalized elites on the island, for example, successfully transformed previously forested regions into a new plantation economy that revolved mainly around sugar (taking over from Saint-Domingue) but also coffee and tobacco. Cuba also developed with modern cities, port economies, and warehouses, connecting with the broader Atlantic and global economy. This, in turn, revolutionized mobility and communications—especially railroads, shipping and steamer lines, and newspapers—even in the plantation towns of the flat hinterlands—and led to the development of sugar refineries and other technological innovations. The American Revolution also helped kickstart the second slavery in mainland North America, as it ended with US acquisition of vast new territories in the southern interior of mainland North America that proved especially fertile for cotton production (and, in southern Louisiana, sugar production), stimulating a massive expansion of slave-based agriculture in that region. This expansion, too, helped revolutionize transportation and communications, and led to the development and expansion of several new port cities, including New Orleans. In Brazil, the transition was fueled by the opening up of new regions for coffee production and other agricultural commodities. In the south of Brazil, especially in the Vale do Paraíba and in the provinces of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and São Paulo, coffee was produced for world markets. Brazil initially industrialized less quickly, especially in transport; massive industrialization only started around 1860. In all of these regions, however, global market developments created new opportunities for the expansion and reinvigoration of slave-based plantation agriculture, even as slave-based plantation agriculture declined in the older plantation societies of the Americas.¹

The concept of “second slavery” was introduced by Dale Tomich, a historical sociologist, in the 1980s. Tomich initially developed it to conceptualize economic developments on Martinique and to understand the place of the French Caribbean within the international division of labor in the context of Immanuel Wallerstein’s analysis of world capitalism. The concept has since been applied to essentially refer to the modernity of slavery in the southern US, southern Brazil, and the Spanish Caribbean colonies of Cuba and Puerto Rico. It was not limited to these places, however. Second slavery in the nineteenth century also played a role in Martinique and Guadeloupe as well as Suriname, British Guiana, and Trinidad/Tobago, and elsewhere in the Atlantic world and far beyond.

Since its initial conceptualization by Tomich, understandings of the “second slavery” have been expanded by two conceptual dimensions. One is “war capitalism,” propounded especially by Sven Beckert, which is defined as the violent exploitation of the non-West through war, piracy, enslavement, theft of natural

resources, and the physical seizure of markets.² War capitalism defined the second slavery in the nineteenth-century American South, for example, as slaveholders and planters from the “older” slave regions along the Atlantic seaboard pushed into the interior in order to develop cotton, waging war and dispossessing Native American communities in the process. Similar cases of war capitalism also characterized the expansion of slavery into frontier regions in Cuba and, around 1860, in Brazil.

A second conceptual dimension of the second slavery is the reinvigoration and expansion of forced labor migration in an age in which the Atlantic slave trade was legally abolished and its abolition was enforced, mainly by the British, and in which some regions began to abolish slavery altogether. This dimension can be further subdivided into two branches. First, the *hidden Atlantic*, which refers to illegal slave smuggling from Africa (not only West Africa but even East Africa and Madagascar), despite legal bans. (As stated above, the southern US, Cuba, and Brazil also developed massive internal slave trades in order to meet the insatiable labor demands of the new frontier plantation regions—in the southern US this trade forcibly relocated roughly one million African-American slaves across state lines, mainly to the cotton regions of the Deep South.)³ And second, the global forced migration of people from South, East, and Southeast Asia to the circum-Caribbean, mainly to supplement black labor in colonies that abolished slavery but attempted to reinvigorate their plantation economies with different forms of bonded labor rather than slave labor. In particular in the British Caribbean (especially Jamaica, Guyana, and Trinidad), plantation agriculture survived abolition to some extent by the implementation of a quasi-second slavery “without formal slavery,” which included arrangements by which so-called bonded “coolie labor” was brought in from Asia. Similar experiments occurred in the Dutch colonies, Cuba, and elsewhere.

PLANTATIONS, INDUSTRIALIZATION, TECHNOLOGY, AND SECOND SLAVERY

One of the main characteristics of the second slavery was the application of modernized industrial technologies and machines on plantations—especially those dedicated to the production of sugar, cotton, and coffee, as well as, in different ways, tobacco—and in the transportation and sale of these commodities in world markets. Technological development and industrialization in on-site plantation production affected storage and transport on the plantations and along commodity chains, especially in port complexes, massive storage facilities (with its own warehouse revolution), and new methods of transport, also far from plantations. Steamers, railways, and large port warehouses, as well as newspapers and other modern forms of communication, were present in almost every plantation hub.

In the following I present the processing of the plantation commodities of sugar, tobacco, coffee, and cotton, and I evaluate their importance for

technological development, industrialization, and social formation in the large territories of the second slavery.

Sugar

As David Pretel recently argued: “Among the technological histories of tropical commodities, sugarcane stands out as the most salient.”⁴ Sugarcane, along with the tobacco already grown by Native Americans, was the first slave-based cash crop to be produced on a large scale in the Americas. Successful cultivation of sugarcane depended on the cane type, soil, climate, and the rhythm of growth and planting. Its processing and preparation for market was an industrial process. Because the sugar juice spoiled quickly in the harvested cane, and it literally necessitated a rapid and industrial processing, with various machines and specific technologies. After being harvested by enslaved people in the gang system, the sugarcane had to be transported to a central mill as quickly as possible for processing. The sugar mills themselves, especially the cylinders between which the juice was pressed from the cane, were improved in the era of the second slavery, using iron instead of wood, and horizontal instead of vertical presses. From around 1840, the horizontal mills also made it possible to use a wide conveyor belt made of metal rods between two parallel chains for the sugar cane cut into pieces.

The most dangerous injuries occurred during this stage, as overworked and exhausted slaves often got caught between the rotating parts of the sugarcane presses when they were feeding the stalks into it by hand. In addition to the mill house, the boiling house, the separation and refining house (for separating molasses and sugar and for production) belonged to the central part of a sugar plantation. Also often present were a drying house; a building for the production of rum (with distillation equipment); a warehouse for bagasse and fuel; and various workhouses for blacksmiths, wheelwrights, and other related handicrafts. The processing centers of the plantations often resembled factories, and the processing itself very much resembled an industrial endeavor, with modern technologies and apparatuses grinding and squeezing the sugarcane juice; transferring it to the boilers; cooking, skimming off impurities, and crystallizing the sugar crystals; refining; centrifuging (to separate liquid components) and drying (in different collection forms or clay vessels); whitening the best crystals; as well as storing the finished products for transport. From around 1840, the steam engine had established itself as the drive system on the most modern plantations.

Sugar plantation economies adopted new technologies in virtually all related activities. Enslaved people worked according to strict time management, often with bells and clock towers by the mid-nineteenth century. Modern transportation, which included railways and steamer ships, transported plantation commodities to port cities and beyond to global markets. Communications regarding everything from logistics to price fluctuations were vastly improved through the establishment of newspapers in every hub, assisted by telegraphs for rapid information exchange. The organizational facilities in transport hubs, including storage facilities but also banking and credit systems, became highly

organized and modernized in the era of the second slavery. Even “small modernization”—the production of all manner of related equipment (from carts to machetes to crates)—improved in efficiency. Sugar was clearly the engine of the industrial revolution in the tropical and subtropical Americas. As historian Robert Gudmestad has argued, “it was in sugar production, though, that technology had the biggest impact.”⁵

Tobacco

Tobacco, together with sugar, was the early trigger of the colonial export economy, technology, and capitalist development. To this day, tobacco cultivation takes place with little technology and machines, but an exhausting—even extreme—labor process of hoing and digging, and highly developed knowledge and experience. This experience developed and was refined over time, so that by the era of the second slavery it had been perfected and streamlined to a great degree. The very earliest colonial tobacco-growing areas in the Atlantic world were in Barinas on the *llano*-frontier of today’s Venezuela. This tobacco was known as *canasta/knaster* because the tobacco leaves were wrapped into thick “ropes” and exported in rings in baskets (*canastas*). In Barbados, too, tobacco was the “first starter” of slave-based agricultural export production. And, of course, tobacco constituted a primary slave-based cash crop in Virginia and the Chesapeake region, as well as around Salvador da Bahia and western Cuba. European colonists in all of these regions turned to tobacco after acquiring indigenous knowledge about cultivation, care, and irrigation techniques (tobacco can only be grown near water). A successful harvest depended in no small part on experience and intimate knowledge of the plant. The tobacco was dried in special houses (usually constructed with material from palm trees) in complicated processes, fermented, and stored. Mills played a role in processing in the colonies themselves, especially during the heyday of snuff (in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries).

The experience economy of colonial tobacco cultivation required highly specialized slaves. Tobacco plantations could hardly be mechanized. They were, however, dependent on transport infrastructures, harbors, and processing industries for the production of pipe tobacco, snuff tobacco, cigar tobacco, and cigarette tobacco. Despite being a relatively un-industrialized cash crop to cultivate on plantations, therefore—unlike sugar, for example—tobacco did stimulate modernization and technological innovation in its processing for sale on global markets, a process that was accelerated in the era of the second slavery.

Coffee

Nothing in modern history would have been possible without drugs. Without coffee (and tea), for example, there would have been no modern capitalism. Without coffee, tea, and other drugs and stimulants such as tobacco and cola (from kola nuts), which often also grow on plantations, there would have been no accelerated globalization of the “world economy” in the nineteenth century.

Coffee bushes thrive best at an altitude of 500–1500 meters above sea level in the tropics and subtropics, with plenty of heat during the day, but preferably in the shade. The coffee trees bear their first fruits after four to five years. On plantations during the era of the second slavery, slaves harvested the coffee berries by hand. The fresh coffee berries were laid onto large drying terraces of the plantations, paved with flat white stones. There they were washed and then dried at daily intervals for a period of time until the shells could be detached more easily. Drying took place only during the day. At night the coffee was piled up and covered against the night dew. That meant a lot of manual work by the slaves, but in the era of the second slavery this cash crop, too, stimulated and utilized new technologies—more in processing than in transportation. In coffee bean production mill technologies were of particular importance, especially for separating the dried shells from the raw beans. As mentioned above, there were also complicated washing and drying processes, water regimes with complex water tanks and canals, as well as mechanical cleaning, selection, and packaging processes. In the organization of transport, coffee planters could not compete in some areas with the wealthier sugar plantation owners. In some frontier coffee areas of the second slavery, such as the south of Brazil, transport modernization came only after the mid-nineteenth century, near the end of slavery.⁶

Cotton

Initially, the poorer relative of the above-mentioned luxury commodities was cotton. Yet cotton would come to surpass them all in the nineteenth century. Cotton significantly fueled the capitalist development and industrialization of Europe and the US, as well as the westward expansion and development of the US. Without cotton there would have been no modern textile and fashion industry, no underwear, and no global nineteenth century or romantic *biedermaier*. Before the second-slavery variety of efficiently processed short-staple cotton, cotton was a traditional resource commodity and a late starter of colonial and post-colonial industrialization. Cotton plantations in the US South had limited mill technology—for example, to power larger cotton-gins and to move the presses. Slave-based cotton production on southern plantations in the US was kickstarted in the 1790s with the invention of the cotton gin (which made harvesting the short-staple variety profitable), and was directly related to the processing industrialization of textile production in England and to global wartime capitalism (especially as it related to the violent westward expansion of the US South in the era before the Civil War). But it was a more “democratic” slave system than in the other second-slavery areas, in the sense that poorer white settlers were also able to purchase plantations and with limited capital outlay, as—again unlike sugar—cotton cultivation could be undertaken with minimal machinery. The simple cotton gin formed the mechanical basis for the cotton sector of the second slavery in the US South, although it certainly constituted one of the most important machines of the industrial age in general. In comparison to industrial sugar technology, it was a rather simple process. This relatively primitive cash crop, however, had massive

consequences for territorial expansion and its success led to an explosion in the number of plantations in the US South in the era of the second slavery.

As cotton became more successful, however, plantations began to adopt ever more modern technologies to increase efficiency. The production of cotton as a raw material for factories in England—the main market for southern cotton—was an on-site process, and planters were keen to deliver high-quality finished products to English markets. This led to the development of cotton mills, for example, with the newest machines and installations. This changed the industrial architecture of the plantations, at least in the case of the most successful planters, and this in turn led to dramatic growth in plantation size and numbers of enslaved people. Such growth fueled the massive domestic slave trade that supplied the insatiable demand for slave labor in the cotton regions of the US South after the Atlantic slave trade had been banned (in 1808). Between the American Revolution and the US Civil War almost a million slaves from the eastern seaboard (mainly Virginia, Maryland, and the Carolinas) were transported via highly organized and efficient slave traders and slave markets to the most important plantation hubs of the Deep South, especially Natchez and New Orleans. The domestic slave trade constituted what Ira Berlin has dubbed a kind of “second middle passage.”⁷

Transportation modernization was also given a significant boost due to the success of cotton. From the 1830s, steam engine propulsion began to transform the logistics of plantation commodity export. The steamboat revolution on the rivers of the South, especially on the Mississippi, not only helped transport cotton to market but also slaves of the domestic slave trade to the cotton plantations of the South. “The steamboat and the slave plantation system mutually reinforced one another to develop cotton monoculture and transform the riverine ecology.”⁸ Modern ports, ships, and steamers also served the slave trade from outside the southern states, not only in the “hidden Atlantic” of smugglers, but also in the illegal smuggling trade from the Caribbean to the Gulf Coast ports of the cotton South.

CONCLUSION

The rise of the second slavery in the wake of the Atlantic revolutions—a reinvigoration and expansion of slave-based plantation agriculture in frontier regions of the Americas, even as the older colonial plantation regions experienced decline—was largely fueled by the development of major export commodities such as sugar (especially in Cuba but also in other regions such as southern Louisiana), cotton (in the US South), tobacco (in Cuba and the US), and coffee (first in Cuba, and after 1830 especially in Brazil). Each of these commodities was developed against the backdrop of increasingly advanced and modern processing technologies, methods of transportation (of both commodities and the human bodies that cultivated them), communications, and capital financing. In the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, slave-based plantation agriculture entered an age of modernity.

Sugar was by far the most technologically advanced and industrialized cash crop of the second slavery. From the complicated machinery, mills, and boilers employed on the plantations themselves to the highly organized transportation and logistics of sugar-based commodities to world markets, sugar became one of the most successful cash crops of the nineteenth-century Atlantic world. It was also responsible for mass slave imports from Africa in the *hidden* Atlantic smuggling trade. The success of sugar led to the development of a highly modern capitalist society, especially in nineteenth-century Cuba.

The second slavery of cotton was undoubtedly not half as modern and industrialized as sugar in Cuba. But it was the “largest” second slavery (both in terms of spatial expansion and quantities production). Together with the influence that cotton had on the modernization of transportation (especially steamships) it was also the most influential and “most powerful” Atlantic society of the second slavery. As demonstrated in the work of Walter Johnson and Sven Beckert, the second slavery in the cotton regions of the US South were not as global as those of Cuba, but instead remained mainly focused on the British Empire (upon which cotton planters were indeed largely dependent). Culturally, socially and politically, this slavery was the basis of an (almost) independent post-colonial society. Capitalizing on human bodies—both as commodities and as a labor force—that were born and raised in the US and supplied via a massive domestic slave trade, this slavery was far less dependent on the *hidden* Atlantic smuggle of African slaves than Cuba or Brazil in the nineteenth century.

The second slavery of coffee in Brazil was, both spatially and quantitatively, the “second largest” in the era of the second slavery. The great slavery systems in historic Brazil mostly developed near the coast, but they did expand across large territories the provinces (now states) of the Brazilian Empire of Rio de Janeiro, Minas Gerais, and São Paulo. Sugar and coffee modernization were similar from 1760 to around 1830; they were based on mills and complicated management or organization of different work processes of slaves as well as individual professionals. However, the second slavery of coffee remained more traditional from 1820/30 for two related reasons. First, the owners and administrators of the “largest” coffee slavery of the world in southern Brazil and Rio had far more direct access to slaves from Africa, which they acquired through a regular and active trade across the Atlantic. From around 1850 an internal slave trade, similar to that in the US South, prevailed.

The second slavery of tobacco was not an industrial modern cash crop in the nineteenth-century sense, i.e., with machines. However, the tobacco economy did have tremendous influence and helped shape the history of regions such as Barinas (Venezuela), Virginia and the Chesapeake (US), and the frontier slaveries in the province of Pinar del Río in nineteenth-century Cuba. Of all the second-slavery plantation regions, those of tobacco attracted the fewest slaves from Africa—slaves in tobacco were mostly creole (American-born) slaves. In a way, tobacco was a relatively player in the development of the second slavery, but it did constitute a highly important luxury niche commodity in the Atlantic

world and as such it contributed to regional developments in warehousing, shipping, and smuggling.

NOTES

1. Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Dale W. Tomich and Michael Zeuske, eds., "The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World Economy, and Comparative Microhistories, Part I" [special issue], *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 31, no. 2 (2008); Anthony E. Kaye, "The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World," *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (Aug. 2009): 627–50.
2. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton: A Global History* (New York: Penguin, 2014).
3. Michael Zeuske, "Out of the Americas: Slave traders and the Hidden Atlantic in the Nineteenth Century", *Atlantic Studies* 15, no. 1 (2018): 103–35.
4. *The Caribbean and the Atlantic World Economy. Circuits of Trade, Money and Knowledge, 1650–1914*, eds. Adrian Leonard and David Pretel (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015).
5. Robert Gudmestad, "Technology and the World the Slaves Made", in: *History Compass* 4, no. 2 (2006): 373–383, 378; José Ortega, "Machines, Modernity, and Sugar: The Greater Caribbean in a Global Context, 1812–1850," *Journal of Global History* 9, no. 1 (2014): 1–25; Daniel Rood, "Plantation Laboratories. Industrial Experiments in the Cuban Sugar Mill, 1830–860", in: *New Frontiers of Slavery*, ed. Dale Tomich (New York: SUNY Press, 2016), 157–84.
6. Tamira Combrink, "Slave-based coffee in the eighteenth century and the role of the Dutch in global commodity chains", in: *Slavery & Abolition* Vol. 42:1 (2021), pp. 15–42; Rafael Marquese, "African Diaspora, Slavery, and the Paraíba Valley Coffee Plantation Landscape: Nineteenth Century Brazil," *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* XXXI, no. 2 (2008): 195–216.
7. Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2013); Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), ch. 4; Adam Rothman, *Slave Country: American Expansion and the Origins of the Deep South* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005).
8. Dale Tomich, et al., "The Lower Mississippi Valley Cotton Frontier," in: Dale Tomich, et al., *Reconstructing the Landscapes of Slavery: A Visual History of the Plantation in the Nineteenth-century Atlantic World* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 19–38, 35.

FURTHER READINGS

- Ayala, César J. *American Sugar Kingdom: The Plantation Economy of the Spanish Caribbean*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1999.
- Beckert, Sven. *Empire of Cotton: A New History of Global Capitalism*. New York: Penguin, 2014.

- Berbel, Márcia Regina, Rafael de Bivar Marquese, and Tâmis Parron. *Slavery and Politics: Brazil and Cuba, 1790–1850*, translated by Leonardo Marques. Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2016.
- Cosner, Charlotte A. *The Golden Leaf: How Tobacco Shaped Cuba and the Atlantic World*. Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2015.
- Curry-Machado, Jonathan. *Cuban Sugar Industry: Transnational Networks and Engineering Migrants in Mid-Nineteenth Century Cuba*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011.
- Follett, Richard. *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana's Cane World 1820–1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.
- Gudmestad, Robert H. *A Troublesome Commerce: The Transformation of the Interstate Slave Trade*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2004.
- Rood, Daniel. *The Reinvention of Atlantic Slavery: Technology, Labor, Race, and Capitalism in the Greater Caribbean*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2017.
- Tomich, Dale W. *Through the Prism of Slavery. Labor, Capital, and World Economy*. Boulder: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2004.
- Walter, Johnson. ed. *The Chattel Principle: Internal Slave Trades in the Americas*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.
- Zeuske, Michael. *Amistad. A Hidden Network of Slavers and Merchants*, translated by Steven Rendall. Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2014.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the US South

Damian A. Pargas

INTRODUCTION

Although the nineteenth-century US South has often served as a static proxy for systems of racial slavery in the modern era, this slaveholding society in fact developed out of a number of structural transformations that radically altered the nature of slavery and freedom in the Atlantic world. The last quarter of the eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth century indeed witnessed both an unprecedented expansion of black freedom and an unprecedented expansion of slavery, not just in North America but throughout the Americas. For millions of African Americans, this was an age of emancipation. Whereas prior to the American Revolution (1775–1783), slavery was legally sanctioned and rarely challenged throughout the western hemisphere, during the second half of the eighteenth century, bondage came under increasing attack by prominent thinkers in Europe and America who condemned the institution as immoral, sinful, inefficient, socially undesirable, and politically untenable. Transatlantic discourses and social and political movements had a profound effect on public opinion and the very status of slavery throughout the Atlantic world. This period witnessed the legal abolition of slavery in various parts of the Americas and of the transatlantic slave trade. It also witnessed a significant spike in manumissions and

D. A. Pargas (✉)
Leiden University, Leiden, The Netherlands
e-mail: d.a.pargas@hum.leidenuniv.nl

self-purchase schemes by slaveholders who for whatever reason (whether ideological, religious, or financial) wished to free some or all of their bondspople, resulting in the emergence or bolstering of free black communities even *within* slaveholding territories.¹

Even as significant numbers of enslaved people exited slavery during this period, however, millions more found themselves increasingly trapped in what Dale Tomich and others have dubbed the “second slavery,” a period of renewed intensification and expansion of slavery in regions such as the US South, Brazil, and Cuba, largely as a result of the successful adoption and rapid expansion of American short-staple cotton, Brazilian coffee, and Cuban sugarcane production around the turn of the nineteenth century. While some parts of the Americas (such as the northern US) saw their free black populations considerably augmented, others devolved into “freedom’s mirror,” as Ada Ferrer has argued. The western hemisphere became increasingly bifurcated between regions where slavery was disappearing and regions where slavery was expanding.²

The geography of slavery and freedom that emerged in North America in the half-century following the American Revolution encapsulated this bifurcation. On the eve of the Revolution, the southern colonies of British North America had long constituted mature plantation-based slave societies, but slavery existed and was legally sanctioned throughout the continent, from Canada to Mexico. The Revolution constituted a turning point, however, as it mobilized a series of messy and exceedingly complicated transitions from slavery to freedom in regions where slavery was peripheral, and from slavery to a more deeply entrenched second slavery in the slave societies of the American South. The northern US, British Canada, and the Republic of Mexico—regions where African slavery never came to dominate local economies—all abolished slavery within their borders between 1777 and 1833. The first strikes were enacted in the northern US, where state-level abolition was achieved through a maze of gradual emancipation acts, state constitutional clauses, and court verdicts between 1777 and 1804. By 1804, all of the US states and territories north of the Mason-Dixon line and Ohio River had either prohibited slavery or put it on the path to destruction with gradual emancipation policies, and by 1808, the transatlantic slave trade had been officially banned throughout the United States. British Canada similarly chipped away at slavery until it had all but disappeared, even before Imperial Emancipation was announced in 1833. And in newly independent Mexico, a confusing series of partial and even contradictory emancipation laws were passed in the 1820s, ultimately resulting in national emancipation in 1829. In none of these “free soil” regions did formerly enslaved people enter into conditions of full equality with white populations. In the northern US, structural racism, discriminatory laws, and poverty constituted heavy burdens on free black communities. In Canada and Mexico, the laws promised equal treatment, but in practice free blacks there were also subjected to severe discrimination and structural

poverty. In all of these parts of the continent, however, slavery was clearly and unequivocally placed on the path to destruction in the Age of Revolution.³

In the southern US, by contrast, slavery not only survived the Age of Revolutions but underwent an enormous geographic expansion. Although manumission laws were briefly relaxed in the revolutionary era, especially in the Upper South—where free black communities were bolstered between 1790 and 1810—slavery itself proved largely impervious to the arguments of abolitionists in other parts of the continent. Originally concentrated in the tidewater tobacco lands of the Chesapeake (Virginia, Maryland, and Delaware) and coastal sea islands and rice swamps of the Carolina and Georgia Lowcountry during the colonial period, southern slavery indeed spilled across the Appalachians and into the Deep South like an unstoppable torrent during the first half of the nineteenth century, mainly due to the successful introduction of cotton in the newly acquired lands of the southern interior (as well as sugar in the south of Louisiana). In the age of the second slavery, slavery in North America became a “southern” institution—the South’s “peculiar institution,” as it was often referred to. Southern slavery grew at an unprecedented rate, transformed half of the US into a “cotton kingdom”—with cotton production surging from 3000 bales in 1790 to over 4 million bales in 1860—and became characterized by a number of unique features, including a slave population that was almost entirely born in slavery; the development of a massive internal slave trade that wrought havoc on slave communities; the dominance of cotton plantation agriculture in the lives of most enslaved people; the curtailment of manumissions; and the rise of a continent-wide refugee crisis, as freedom seekers fled to parts of the continent where slavery had been abolished.⁴

This chapter explores the institution of slavery in one of its most well-known contexts, delving in particular into enslaved people’s entry into various slavery settings, the extraction of their labor, and limited paths to freedom in the decades before final emancipation during the US Civil War.

PROCESSES OF ENSLAVEMENT DURING THE SECOND SLAVERY

From a global—or even an Atlantic—perspective, one of the most unique features of North American slavery in the era of the second slavery was its heavily “creolized” and self-reproducing slave population. In other words, at the time that the US South embarked on its unstoppable wave of expansion in the early 1800s, a vast majority of enslaved people in the southern states were not enslaved in acts of captive-taking or war or violence, as was the lot of most enslaved people throughout history. Rather, they were *born in slavery*. The American South ultimately developed the largest slave population in the Atlantic world—numbering over 4 million by 1865—but all told the North American mainland accounted for a relatively minor proportion of the transatlantic slave trade. According to the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade Database (TSTD), roughly 365,000 captive Africans boarded ships bound for

North America between 1650 and 1865; just over 306,000 disembarked in North American ports. This out of a total of over 10 million transported to the Americas in the same period.⁵ The development of a creolized slave population and positive population growth indeed began well before the American Revolution even broke out and can be explained by the relatively temperate climate on the North American mainland as well as the lack of sugar plantations. Neighboring Caribbean slave societies, by contrast, which were located in the tropical zone and dominated by sugar plantation economies, witnessed devastating mortality rates and negative population growth due to diseases and the higher death rates specifically associated with the cultivation of sugarcane. The opposite was true in North America. By the start of the war already some 80 percent of American blacks, and as many as 90 percent of those living in the Upper South (the tobacco states of Virginia, Maryland, Delaware) and northern US, were born in America. By the outbreak of the US Civil War in 1861, the conflict that would result in final emancipation, virtually all of the South's four million enslaved people had been literally considered property from the moment they were conceived. They had never known anything other than slavery and most were several generations removed from Africa.⁶

The early emergence of a self-reproducing American-born slave population meant that American slaveholders were less dependent on the transatlantic slave trade than their Caribbean and Brazilian counterparts, certainly around the turn of the nineteenth century when the cotton revolution began to transform the US South and the slavery began to expand geographically from the Atlantic seaboard into the new states and territories of the Deep South. In the wake of the Revolution itself, the natural increase of the slave population in the southern states even helped facilitate a political compromise between the northern and southern states that allowed for the definitive abolition of the transatlantic slave trade to the US in 1808. In the decades prior to the ban, planters in South Carolina and Georgia made a last-ditch effort to import as many Africans as they could before abolition took effect—ultimately bringing in over 63,000 “saltwater” Africans between 1787 and 1808—but by and large a substantial majority of enslaved people living in North America, including the Lower South, after the American Revolution was born in slavery. The process of physical *enslavement*, whereby a person experienced a violent transition from a situation of non-slavery to slavery, was not applicable to most African Americans in the age of the second slavery.

There were exceptions, to be sure. Indeed, there were two illegal and numerically relatively minor—yet nevertheless violent and horrifying—means by which Africans and African Americans became enslaved in the US South even after the ban of 1808. First, an illegal transatlantic slave trade transported over 5,000 captive Africans into mainland North America between 1808 and 1865, according to the TSTD (some recent estimates place the figure at around 8,000). Illegally transporting enslaved Africans was a serious offense that not only violated federal laws but also international treaties with Great Britain, whose navy regularly patrolled the Atlantic and seized ships that

contained human cargo bound for the Americas. The offense carried with it the death penalty, but that did not deter some determined smugglers and privateers from attempting to make vast amounts of money by supplying labor-hungry southern planters with additional slave labor. Illegal cargoes trickled onto North American shores right up until the final years of American slavery. The last slave ship to arrive in the US, the *Clotilda*, docked in Alabama in 1860, carrying a cargo of 110 men, women, and children from what is now Benin and Nigeria. Fresh memories of terrifying captive-taking and the traumatic middle passage were thus still very much alive in the US South on the eve of emancipation.⁷

A second method of illegal enslavement in the age of the second slavery entailed kidnapping free blacks and selling them into slavery in the southern states. Some such cases were characterized by outright seizure, while others were disguised as attempts by slaveholders to falsely retrieve runaway slaves who had supposedly run to the new free states. The figures for such practices are hazy, but the fact that kidnapping and fraudulent seizure of alleged runaway slaves was seen as a major problem in the border regions between the northern and southern US—especially as the northern states began to abolish slavery at the same time that slavery began to expand in the South—is clear from the flurry of anti-kidnapping legislation passed by northern states around the turn of the nineteenth century. Pennsylvania, for example, went to great lengths to enact legal mechanisms designed to prevent the kidnapping of free blacks within its borders. The Pennsylvania legislature passed laws in 1788 and 1790 that threatened fines and punishments for unlawful “man-stealing” of African Americans and prohibited their removal from the state. Massachusetts applied *habeas corpus* laws to African Americans who were dubiously “claimed” as runaways by southerners in order to ensure legal protection. Other northern states applied similar laws in order to protect their free black populations from unjust seizure and sale in the South. Despite such legislation, however, kidnapping remained a serious problem throughout the age of the second slavery, and prominent cases—such as that of Solomon Northup, whose 1853 memoir *Twelve Years a Slave* sent a chill through northern free black communities—commanded national attention and bolstered the abolitionist movement.⁸

As stated above, however, violent enslavement—whether through the illegal transatlantic slave trade or illegal kidnapping in North America itself—was a lot of a relatively small minority of enslaved people in the era of the second slavery. Most enslaved people were born in slavery and never had to undergo a *process* of enslavement. African American slaves born in the era of the second slavery did, however, experience something similar: forced migration and the terrifying reallocation of their bodies to distant slave markets in the *domestic* slave trade, a process that severed millions from loved ones, forced its victims into chained coffles or onto filthy steamboat ship holds, and transported human cargoes across vast distances to parts of the continent they had only heard horror stories about. Ira Berlin famously dubbed this experience the “second

middle passage.” As slavery expanded westward into the cotton (and sugar) regions of the Deep South, enslaved people were increasingly removed from their homes along the Atlantic seaboard and “sold down the river” to the heart of the new slavery in the southern interior. The domestic slave trade affected virtually all enslaved people, either directly or indirectly. It not only replaced the transatlantic slave trade after 1808 in terms of supplying southern slaveholders with enslaved labor but indeed numerically far exceeded it. Estimates suggest that between the American Revolution and the US Civil War, over a million American-born African Americans were sold from one state to another in the domestic slave trade—a figure that at least doubles (and almost triples) the estimated number of Africans transported to North America in the transatlantic slave trade.

The domestic slave trade wrought havoc on slave families and slave communities, especially those living along the eastern seaboard. Highly sophisticated and extensively organized, it plucked individual able-bodied men and women in their late teens and twenties from their homes and catapulted them to plantations hundreds or even thousands of miles away. Victims were often sold to slave traders with no prior notice (in order to prevent resistance), who marched them to filthy urban holding pens for weeks or even months, and finally transported them overland or by ship to the Deep South, where they were hawked to eager purchasers on auction blocks or in private transactions. Scholars have estimated that forced separations probably destroyed one out of every three first marriages among slaves in the Upper South; at least half of all slave families in the region were ruptured through the deportation of either a spouse or child during the antebellum period. Local sales and the westward migration of slaveholders from the eastern seaboard to the southern interior, moreover, severed cross-plantation marriages as well as extended family bonds in countless slave communities. While victims of the domestic slave trade were not *enslaved* in the process—they had always been enslaved—they did experience the sudden and violent forced migration and alienation that characterized enslavement in most societies.⁹

SLAVE LABOR IN THE ANTEBELLUM SOUTH

Whether forcibly migrated to the Deep South or not, enslaved people throughout the southern states were primarily valuable for their labor in commercial cash-crop agriculture, especially cotton, but also tobacco, rice, and sugar. The antebellum South was overwhelmingly rural and evidence suggests that about three-quarters of adults spent most of their working lives as field laborers, while one-third primarily performed other duties. Broadly speaking, the southern states in the era of the second slavery can be divided into four regions of slave-based agriculture. The Upper South (the Chesapeake region and the states spread along the southern shores of the Ohio River) was characterized by small tobacco and wheat farms; the tidewater Lowcountry (the barrier islands and lowlands of the South Carolina and Georgia coast)

contained relatively large and isolated rice and sea-island cotton plantations; the vast Deep South (the southern interior, stretching from the South Carolina upcountry all the way to Texas) constituted the “cotton kingdom” of the United States and quickly became the center of gravity for southern slavery; and in the semi-tropical parishes of southern Louisiana, plantations were dedicated to the cultivation of sugarcane. Slave-based agriculture varied from region to region but slave labor and plantation organization shared certain characteristics throughout the southern states.¹⁰

The demographics in the entire region, for example, were characterized by relatively modest-sized slaveholdings and close contact between enslaved African Americans and free white society. Unlike most Caribbean slave societies, the slave population in the American South never constituted a majority of the total population, making up about one-third of the southern population during this era. Most did not live on massive plantation estates with hundreds of slaves, as was the case in many Caribbean plantation districts, as neither cotton nor tobacco necessitated economies of scale and could be cultivated on small farms as well as large plantations. Instead, about one-quarter of American slaves lived on holdings with less than 10 slaves; half lived on holdings with between 10 and 49; and one-quarter on large plantations with more than 50. Even in the cotton regions of the Deep South, fully half of the enslaved people lived on holdings with less than 32 slaves. The only pockets of the South with structurally large plantations and local majority slave populations were the Lowcountry and southern Louisiana, due to the economies of scale necessary to cultivate rice and sugar, respectively. In a few counties and parishes in these regions, the average plantation size surpassed 100, but in the South as a whole such districts were rarities.

Also unlike many of their Caribbean counterparts, most slaveholders in the American South permanently resided on their estates and supervised labor and operations personally. This was especially true on farms and plantations with fewer than 30 slaves, where a vast majority of enslaved people lived. On the smallest farms with fewer than 10 slaves, slaveholders often worked in the fields alongside their slaves. Only on large estates was a more complicated organization necessary, with overseers and even black “drivers” and “stewards” (enslaved assistants to the overseer or master) supervising gangs of laborers as they marched through the fields in lockstep. On Lowcountry rice plantations, plantation owners were often semi-absentees, residing by the seaside or in the mountains during the summer months, due to the prevalence of malaria in the region. These districts also contained the largest and most isolated plantations in the South, with intricate organizational structures that included subdivided plantations into separate “farms” and placed a great deal of authority in the hands of black drivers while the white slaveholders were away. Only there did enslaved people live on vast estates in an overwhelmingly black world, as was common in the Caribbean. Again, however, these districts were exceptions to the rule for the South as a whole.

Agricultural labor was arduous and characterized by a basic “sunup to sundown” workday, although the number of hours and tempo of labor varied with the seasons and according to different crops, with harvesttime constituting the period with the most intense and quick-paced labor (often up to twelve or fourteen a day, as field hands worked far into the evening and even night). During the rest of the year fieldwork was constant but adapted to the number of daylight hours and the rhythm of specific crops. The threat of the lash ensured a steady pace, interrupted by short periods of more intense labor when it was necessary. There were regional variations, however. On the smallest tobacco and wheat farms in the Upper South, for example, cash-crop fieldwork was alternated with general farm work, including tending to livestock and truck farming operations. The Lowcountry and southern Louisiana also (again) constituted exceptions to the rule. On the rice plantations, field laborers worked according to the “task system,” whereby each laborer was assigned a certain task (for example, a number of acres to hoe), and was free to go home after his or her work was finished. Many finished their tasks within eight hours. On Louisiana sugar plantations, by contrast, plantation work was characterized by a furiously intense pace throughout the year, even in the winter (as the harvest could stretch well into December and preparation for the next planting began in January). Field hands there worked with a quasi-industrial discipline and knew little respite; during the winter harvest, they often doubled with shift-work in the sugar-processing mills, which were kept running day and night.

As stated above, roughly one-quarter of enslaved people in the southern states performed labor other than fieldwork. Some of these lived on farms and plantations but were assigned other duties, many of which were age- and gender-specific. For women and children who were considered too young to work in the fields, the main alternative to fieldwork was domestic—cleaning, washing, cooking, and catering to the personal comforts of the slaveholding family. Opportunities to perform skilled or managerial work—as drivers, coachmen, carpenters, and boatmen, for example—were more limited to large plantations and often reserved for men. In practice, however, even non-field laborers were often rotated in and out of the fields during especially intense periods in the agricultural calendar. During the harvest season, for example, it was all hands on deck throughout the southern states. Even children were sent out to the fields to carry water to the other laborers.

Relatively few enslaved African Americans experienced slavery in non-agricultural settings. Cash-crop agriculture undergirded the southern economy and dominated the institution of slavery, and farms and plantations therefore dominated the demand for slave labor. By 1860, however, roughly 5 percent of the southern slave population lived and worked in towns or cities (with more than 2500 residents), a statistic that was regularly augmented by “hired” slaves—enslaved people from the countryside who were hired out by their owners to work for an urban employer for a year. The adaptation of slavery to urban settings was not particularly successful overall, and indeed urban slavery

declined slightly over time during the second slavery. The reason is that in urban settings enslaved people were quite simply more difficult to control and supervise. They moved about more freely and anonymously, associated with free blacks, were better able to trade for prohibited goods, and lived in a way that seemed closer to freedom than their rural counterparts. Nevertheless, urban slave labor did characterize the lives of thousands of African Americans in the era of the second slavery. In towns and cities across the South, enslaved people worked as domestic servants (especially women), but also as washerwomen, skilled craftsmen, factory hands, and various kinds of day laborers. Virtually all of the South's major cities were riverside or seaside port towns—Baltimore, Washington, Richmond, Charleston, Mobile, New Orleans, St. Louis, Louisville—and enslaved people could be found in every harbor, loading and unloading ships, and transporting goods to and from warehouses. Most of the goods shipped out were agricultural commodities produced by their enslaved counterparts in the rural hinterlands—bales of cotton, barrels of sugar and molasses, and crates of dried tobacco recently processed in urban tobacco factories.¹¹

Whether they labored in the countryside or urban areas, however, all enslaved African Americans in the southern states lived in a world in which their labor was coerced through the threat of violence and forced separation from loved ones. Slaveholders in the era of the second slavery ironically developed an ideology of master–slave relations that scholars have dubbed “paternalism,” a concept that refers to white southern admonitions to take “good care” of enslaved people—whom they frequently referred to as “my people” or even “my black family”—so that threats and violence would be unnecessary. The close contact between white and black in the antebellum South did indeed lead to white slaveholders to take a more personal and day-to-day interest in their slave populations, and white southern literature and public rhetoric were dominated by assurances that the enslaved population was happy, well-cared for, well-fed and well-housed, and even “loved” by white slaveholders. As Walter Johnson has argued, however, paternalism constituted more a desperate alibi in the face of scathing abolitionist attacks than an ideology that actually guided master–slave relations in practice. Slavery more closely resembled a war, and violence—both physical and psychological—lay at the heart of its successful operation. To the enslaved population, the paternalistic “personal interest” their owners took in their lives amounted to an extraordinary amount of interference, as they attempted to dominate and insert themselves into every single aspect of slave life, from how much they ate to how they reared their children to how clean their cabins were. Violence and the threat of violence undergirded the entire institution.

In the countryside, the most common punishment for any infraction—but especially work-related—was a whipping, and most enslaved people experienced at least once during their working lives. Many slaveholders inflicted more severe punishments to maintain order—public humiliation, private jails, stocks, and deprivation of privileges (such as visiting family members who lived

on other farms or plantations on the weekends). Less common were more brutal forms of torture, although accounts of slaveholders burning, mutilating, and even killing enslaved people in a passionate frenzy were certainly not unheard of. In testimonies both during and after slavery, enslaved people described slaveholders (both their own and those they came into contact with in the neighborhood) as anywhere from “good” to psychopathic. In urban areas, slaveholders outsourced physical punishments to professionals. Many major cities such as Charleston and New Orleans had public workhouses where enslaved people could be sent to be whipped, imprisoned for a specific period of time, and brutally worked like mules in mills. Domestic servants—both in the countryside and in urban settings—were arguably even more susceptible to work-related punishments. At the beck and call of their masters day and night, they were routinely knocked around and beaten with whatever was to hand—from scalding water to candlesticks and fireplace pokers.¹²

The most dreaded punishment to enslaved people in any setting, however, was one that left no physical scars but rather psychological ones: the threat of forced separation from loved ones, especially being sold away in the domestic slave trade. For enslaved people living in the Upper South, especially, the threat of sale to the Deep South was the most important instrument of coercion employed by slaveholders, who regularly threatened their slaves that they would “put them in their pocket” (meaning convert them to cash by selling them to traders) if they failed to perform their work properly. Enslaved people knew that sale was a very real possibility—most knew someone from their own community who had been sold and never heard from again, and the domestic slave trade was moreover a visible feature of southern life, especially in the supply regions. Slave traders and their coffles regularly crisscrossed the region, snatching up young men and women for transportation to the cotton and sugar plantations. The headquarters and pens of slave-trading firms were visible in every town and city. The prospect of the auction block terrified enslaved people, as it threatened to permanently separate them from their homes, families, and friends. They also feared labor conditions in other regions. Enslaved people who were used to tobacco cultivation, or urban labor, heard fearsome rumors about the backbreaking work of slaves on the cotton and sugar plantations. Slaveholders in the supply regions, especially the Upper South, again handily used such rumors—and indeed sometimes actively promoted them—to keep their enslaved people in line.¹³

PATHS TO FREEDOM

In the era of the second slavery, two narrow paths to freedom existed for enslaved people living in the southern states. The first consisted of legal manumission. The second consisted of running away to various spaces of freedom throughout the continent.

Manumissions were in fact not uncommon in the wake of the American Revolution and into the first decade or two of the nineteenth century. The

revolutionary climate that led to the abolition of slavery in the northern US indeed caused southerners to briefly rethink bondage within their own states as well. Slavery was challenged—albeit with less vigor—in the southern states, especially in the Upper South. Attempts to abolish slavery there failed, but the era witnessed a brief yet significant relaxation of manumission laws, particularly in the Upper South, as well as a spike in manumissions and self-purchase arrangements throughout the slave states.¹⁴

The manumission trend began in the Chesapeake region of the Upper South, specifically in Virginia, which passed an *Act to Authorize the Manumission of Slaves* in 1782, greatly simplifying the conditions for manumission throughout the state. Many slaveholders from the revolutionary generation made good use of the act. Whereas before 1782, less than one percent of Virginia's African American population was free, by 1790, free blacks accounted for 4.2 percent of the total, and by 1810, they had reached 7.2 percent, surging in absolute numbers from 1800 to 30,570 in less than 30 years. Towns throughout the region saw their free black populations grow considerably.¹⁵ The rest of the Chesapeake followed suit. Maryland reversed its colonial restrictions on individual manumissions in 1796, and by 1810, almost a quarter of its African American population was free. In Delaware, 78 percent of the black population was free by the end of the first decade of the nineteenth century. In the Upper South as a whole more than 10 percent of the African American population had legally exited slavery by 1810, and by the eve of the Civil War parts of the Upper South had come to virtually resemble free states. In 1860, over 90 percent of the black population of Delaware and 49 percent of that of Maryland was free. Cities such as Baltimore and Washington had free black populations that outnumbered their slave populations, often by substantial margins, as manumitted slaves from rural areas gravitated towards urban centers. Even further south in North Carolina, some 10 percent of the African American population was free by 1860.

By contrast, manumission laws in the Lower South—where planters were more intensely committed to preserving slavery at all costs—were not relaxed in a meaningful way, and the number of manumissions therefore remained far more limited than in the Upper South in the revolutionary era. Nevertheless, the proportion of free blacks in the Lower South doubled from 1.6 percent of the black population in 1790 to 3.9 percent in 1810. In the Lowcountry, the colonial practice of manumitting favorite slaves (not unfrequently the mulatto offspring of slaveholders) and setting them up in urban trades continued after the Revolution. Such practices augmented the number of “free persons of color,” often tied through patronage to the planter class, laying the groundwork for the region's antebellum free black population, especially in major cities like Charleston (where a third of the free black population of South Carolina lived), Savannah and later Atlanta, as well as countless smaller towns. The largest free black population in the revolutionary Lower South, however, lived in Louisiana, beyond the borders of the United States at that time. Between 1769 and 1803 Spanish laws in the territory allowed for self-purchase

arrangements, and as a result, the free black population in port towns all along the Gulf coast grew steadily, especially in New Orleans. By the time the US took control in 1803, over 37 percent of the black population in New Orleans was free.¹⁶

Even as manumissions spiked across the South in the revolutionary period, however—significantly in the Upper South and more modestly in the Lower South—white southerners grew increasingly anxious about the growth of the free black population in their midst. The insurrection on Saint-Domingue and the insurrection plot of Gabriel Prosser, a manumitted blacksmith in Virginia who attempted to organize a major slave rebellion in the Richmond area in the summer of 1800, convinced many white southerners that free blacks formed a potential threat to their society. The fading of the revolutionary era and the transition to the antebellum period witnessed a conservative backlash throughout the southern states, characterized by renewed attempts to crack down on the free black population, prevent the entry of free blacks from other states, and close the doors to manumission.¹⁷ In both South Carolina and Virginia, the most important slave states of the South, the backlash commenced even before the turn of the new century. By 1800, South Carolina had passed an anti-manumission law that required slaveholders to secure approval from the courts before freeing any slaves; by 1820, manumission could only be granted by the General Assembly, and by 1841, manumissions were barred altogether. In Virginia, the legislature prohibited the entry of free blacks from other states in 1793, and in 1806, it passed its own anti-manumission law that required all freed slaves to leave the state. Other states followed suit, making manumission only a very limited path to freedom in the era of the second slavery.¹⁸

With avenues to manumission and legal emancipation from slavery increasingly blocked, enslaved people in the nineteenth-century US South pursued the only other option available to them to escape slavery: they fled to various “spaces of freedom” throughout North America, unleashing one of the largest refugee crises in North American history. Over 100,000 ultimately fled to the northern states and Canada in the half-century prior to the US Civil War. Over 4,000 are thought to have fled south across the border into Mexico after the 1830s. Tens of thousands attempted to illegally pass as free blacks in southern towns and cities with newly augmented free black populations, like Baltimore, Washington, Charleston, and New Orleans.¹⁹

The changing geography of slavery and freedom that characterized the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries not only provided enslaved people trapped in the second slavery with a renewed sense of urgency to flee bondage but also new opportunities to actually do so. Prior to the American Revolution, the possibilities to escape slavery were largely limited to strategies of wilderness marronage; passing for free in port towns that had very small free black populations; and fleeing to the enemies of their masters in specific geopolitical conflicts. None of these options were very reliable or sustainable in the long term, and relatively few enslaved people succeeded in attaining freedom

by such means. The expansion of black freedom in the revolutionary era, however—both in free soil territories and in urban areas within slaveholding states (as a result of the wave of manumissions)—greatly enhanced enslaved people’s possibilities to successfully flee slavery. It disrupted the link between blackness and slavery that had hitherto prevailed (and been taken for granted) throughout the hemisphere. By the early nineteenth century, various parts of North America constituted spaces where African Americans were not—or at least not automatically—marked as enslaved, and where runaways could realistically attempt to live as free people.

Not all of these spaces provided runaways with the same legal protections from reenslavement. Three distinct spaces of freedom can be distinguished, each of which constituted a separate legal regime of asylum for runaways. First, enslaved people fled to spaces of *informal freedom*. These were places *within* the slaveholding states where enslaved people attempted to flee slavery by trying to disguise their identities and pass for free, especially in urban areas with relatively substantial free black communities such as Baltimore, the District of Columbia, Richmond, Charleston, and New Orleans, but also in a myriad of smaller towns scattered all across the South. In spaces of informal freedom, runaways had no legal claim to freedom or protection from reenslavement. Their successful navigation of freedom and evasion of recapture was based almost exclusively on their ability to hide their true identities, often by employing strategies aimed at achieving anonymity, integrating into free black communities, and procuring false documents (especially passes and freedom certificates).²⁰

Second, enslaved people fled to spaces of *semi-formal freedom*, or places where slavery was abolished according to free soil principles, but where the precise status of fugitive slaves, as well as the conditions for their potential reenslavement, were contested by different legal authorities representing overlapping jurisdictions. In spaces of semi-formal freedom, slavery either did not exist or was on the path to destruction, but asylum for refugees from slavery was not guaranteed. The concept refers specifically to the northern states in the antebellum period, where slavery was abolished (either gradually or immediately) but where overarching federal fugitive slave laws, enshrined in Article IV of the US Constitution as well as the Fugitive Slave Act of 1793 and its amended version of 1850, theoretically allowed for the rendition of runaway slaves to their owners in the southern states. Conflicting interpretations of federal fugitive slave laws and constitutional protections of due process, as well as state anti-kidnapping and personal liberty laws, however, often resulted in serious challenges to fugitive slave renditions, including legal disputes and mass civil disobedience. Refugees from slavery in the antebellum northern US enjoyed more protections from reenslavement than their counterparts passing for free in southern towns and cities, but their freedom nevertheless remained precarious, highly dependent on the compliance of sympathetic members of the community (including local authorities), and subject to conflicting interpretations of the law.²¹

Third, enslaved people fled to spaces of *formal freedom* beyond the borders of the United States in the late antebellum period, especially from the 1830s through the 1850s. Spaces of formal freedom were places where slavery was abolished according to free soil principles but where *no* extradition or rendition agreements with southern slaveholders existed that might theoretically make refugees from slavery vulnerable to rendition and reenslavement. In spaces of formal freedom, an asylum for runaway slaves from the US was unconditional and guaranteed, at least on paper. In the Age of Revolution various spaces of formal freedom developed in the immediate vicinity of the US and within reach of the most determined runaway slaves, most notably after abolition policies were enacted in British Canada (between 1793 and 1833) and the Republic of Mexico (1829), but also throughout the Caribbean (such as Haiti in 1804; the British Empire—including the Bahamas—in 1833; and the French colonies in 1848).²²

The spaces of freedom that developed in the period between the American Revolution and the Civil War were far from perfect but they provided enslaved people trapped in second slavery with *options*. A runaway from the Virginia countryside in the 1840s could attempt to escape slavery in a southern city like Baltimore, a northern state like Pennsylvania, or a foreign territory like Upper Canada. There were good reasons for individual runaways to prefer certain destinations over others, depending on their circumstances. Factors such as social and support networks, geographic proximity, rumors, political developments, and sheer circumstance lured freedom seekers to various destinations. Slave flight in turn not only led to freedom for some but also further exacerbated the structural tensions wrought by the second slavery—the fierce commitment to slavery’s expansion combined with the expansion of black freedom throughout North America. By the 1840s and 1850s, for example, exasperation with urban free blacks’ assistance to runaway slaves in southern cities led many white southerners to call for the expulsion or reenslavement of all free blacks. Frustration with abolition policies in Canada and Mexico and both countries’ refusal to sign extradition treaties for runaway slaves led to diplomatic rows and—along the southern border—even armed conflict. And white southerners’ fury with northerners’ obstruction of fugitive slave renditions ultimately led them to take their states out of the Union altogether, unleashing a bloody civil war that would end in definitive abolition and the destruction of slavery’s last bastion in North America.

CONCLUSION

North American slavery in the nineteenth century was in many respects a unique institution. Increasingly “peculiar” to the US South—as all other parts of the continent set bondage on the path to destruction in the revolutionary period—it expanded across the southwestern states and territories at an unprecedented rate. Its slave population mushroomed to over 4 million on the

eve of emancipation in 1865, and yet this expansion was almost entirely self-sustaining, without the captive-taking that predicated the expansion of slavery in other global contexts (or even colonial America itself). Fueled largely by the cotton revolution and the insatiable demand for agricultural labor in the southern interior, it stimulated a vast forced migration of enslaved people from the eastern seaboard to the Deep South, destroying families and communities in its wake. As southern slaveholders became ever more committed to black enslavement, they shut the doors to manumission, leaving slave flight to various spaces of freedom throughout the continent as the only conceivable way out for those trapped in the second slavery.

NOTES

1. Christopher Brown, *Moral Capital: The Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006); Manisha Sinha, *The Slave's Cause: A History of Abolition* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 34–193.
2. Dale W. Tomich and Michael Zeuske, eds., “The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World Economy, and Comparative Microhistories, Part I” [special issue], *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 31, no. 2 (2008); Anthony E. Kaye, “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World,” *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (Aug. 2009): 627–50; Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror: Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
3. Ira Berlin, *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003), 119–23, 135–50, 159–244; Peter Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1993), 80–85; Sue Peabody and Keila Grinberg, “Free Soil: The Generation and Circulation of an Atlantic Legal Principle,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (2011): 331–39.
4. Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 159–244; Walter Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton Kingdom* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017).
5. See slavevoyages.org/voyage/.
6. Kolchin, *American Slavery, 1619–1877*, 49.
7. John Harris, *The Last Slave Ships: New York and the End of the Middle Passage* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2020); Sylviane Diouf, *Dreams of Africa in Alabama: The Slave Ship Clotilda and the Last Africans Brought to America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007).
8. Matthew Pinsker, “After 1850: Reassessing the Impact of the Fugitive Slave Law,” in *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, ed. Damian Alan Pargas (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018), 95–98; Richard S. Newman, “‘Lucky to be Born in Pennsylvania’: Free Soil, Fugitive Slaves, and the Making of the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Borderland,” *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 3 (2011): 414.
9. There is a rich literature on the domestic slave trade and its effects on slave communities. See for example: Michael Tadman, *Speculators and Slaves: Masters, Traders, and Slaves in the Old South* (Madison: University of Wisconsin

- Press, 1989); Walter Johnson, *Soul by Soul: Life Inside the Antebellum Slave Market* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999); Damian Alan Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration in the Antebellum South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
10. For more on slave labor in various agricultural regimes of the American South, see Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 159–244; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, ch. 4; Calvin Schermerhorn, *Unrequited Toil: A History of United States Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 127–48.
 11. Rashauna Johnson, *Slavery's Metropolis: Unfree Labor in New Orleans During the Age of Revolutions* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018); Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009); Richard Wade, *Slavery in the Cities: The South, 1820–1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967).
 12. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 93–132; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 159–244.
 13. Pargas, *Slavery and Forced Migration*, 56–93.
 14. Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 80–85; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 119–23, 135–50; Rosemary Brana-Shute and Randy J. Sparks, eds., *Paths to Freedom: Manumission in the Atlantic World* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 2009).
 15. General Assembly of Virginia, “An Act to Authorize the Manumission of Slaves (May 1782),” reprinted in, *The Statutes at Large; Being a Collection of All the Laws of Virginia from the First Session of Legislature, in the Year 1619*, ed. William Waller Hening (Richmond, VA: George Cochran, 1823), 11, 39.
 16. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 93–94; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 81; Berlin, *Generations of Captivity*, 127–28, 137, 142; Robert Olwell, “Becoming Free: Manumission and the Genesis of a Free Black Community in South Carolina, 1740–1790,” in *Against the Odds: Free Blacks in the Slave Societies of the Americas*, ed. Jane G. Landers (New York: Routledge, 1996), 1–19.
 17. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 92–95; Kolchin, *American Slavery*, ch. 3.
 18. Sinha, *The Slave's Cause*, 86, 94; Bernard E. Powers, *Black Charlestonians: A Social History, 1822–1885* (Fayetteville: University of Arkansas Press, 1994); Kolchin, *American Slavery*, 81.
 19. For more on the concept of “spaces of freedom” throughout North America, see *Fugitive Slaves and Spaces of Freedom in North America*, ed. Damian Alan Pargas (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2018); Damian Alan Pargas, *Freedom Seekers: Fugitive Slaves in North America, 1800–1860* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2022).
 20. John Hope Franklin and Loren Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves: Rebels on the Plantation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), 124–48; Amani Marshall, “‘They Will Endeavor to Pass for Free’: Enslaved Runaways’ Performances of Freedom in Antebellum South Carolina,” *Slavery & Abolition* 31, no. 2 (2010): 161–180.
 21. Andrew Delblanco, *The War before the War: Fugitive Slaves and the Struggle for America's Soul from the Revolution to the Civil War* (New York: Penguin Press, 2018); Richard M. Blackett, *The Captive's Quest for Freedom: Fugitive Slaves, the 1850 Fugitive Slave Law, and the Politics of Slavery* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018).
 22. Franklin and Schweninger, *Runaway Slaves*, 116–23; Jeffrey Kerr-Ritchie, “Fugitive Slaves Across North America,” in Leon Fink, ed., *Workers across*

the Americas: The Transnational Turn in Labor History (New York: Oxford University Press, 2011).

FURTHER READINGS

- Berlin, Ira. *Generations of Captivity: A History of African-American Slaves*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Berry, Daina Ramey. “*Swing the Sickle for the Harvest is Ripe*”: *Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007.
- Camp, Stephanie M.H. *Closer to Freedom: Enslaved Women and Everyday Resistance in the Plantation South*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.
- Davis, David Brion. *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.
- Diouf, Sylviane A. *Slavery’s Exiles: The Story of the American Maroons*. New York: New York University Press, 2014.
- Follett, Richard. *The Sugar Masters: Planters and Slaves in Louisiana’s Cane World, 1820-1860*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2005.
- Johnson, Walter. *River of Dark Dreams: Slavery and Empire in the Cotton South*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017.
- Kaye, Anthony E. “The Second Slavery: Modernity in the Nineteenth-Century South and the Atlantic World.” *Journal of Southern History* 75, no. 3 (August 2009): 627–50.
- Kolchin, Peter. *American Slavery, 1619–1877*. New York: Hill & Wang, 1993.
- Schermerhorn, Calvin. *Unrequited Toil: A History of United States Slavery*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2018.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in the Middle East and North Africa

Ismael M. Montana 

INTRODUCTION

In the historiography of slavery and the slave trade, historians have underscored the paradox underlying the revitalization of the slave trade during the Age of Abolition, spanning from the early through the last decades of the late nineteenth century. Dale Tomich and Michael Zeuske, for instance, using the term “second slavery” to conceptualize the continuation of slavery in the Atlantic world during the Age of Abolition, have attributed the expansion of the slave trade to the effects of the global economic growth engendered by industrialization. Paul Lovejoy, by contrast, has argued that in Muslim West Africa, the greater expansion of the slave trade and enslaving activities during the same period was due not to the global economic growth Tomich and Zeuske expounded, but rather to the region’s own economic autonomy.¹ In the Middle East and North Africa, where the volume of slave imports tripled for much of the same century, historians have recognized the expansion of European capitalism as fundamental to the increase of slave import from Africa. Recently, however, Toledano and Ferguson in their study, “Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth Century,” have placed both the growth of the slave import and its eventual abolition at the heart of the long nineteenth-century reforms and transformation processes in the Middle East and North Africa.² Building on Ferguson and Toledano’s rehabilitation of

I. M. Montana (✉)
Northern Illinois University, DeKalb, IL, USA
e-mail: montana@niu.edu

Ottoman enslavement, the slave trade and its abolition within the context of the long nineteenth-century reforms, this chapter seeks to illustrate the breadth of the nineteenth-century transformation processes on the expansion of the slave import and its abolition in the larger Middle Eastern and North African context. After a cursory overview of the nineteenth-century transformations process in the political, economic, and cultural landscapes, the chapter explores the effects of these transformations on African slavery through the lens of the modern *nizam al-Jadid* (New Order) army schemes as well as the economic growth fueled by the rise of European capitalism. In the second part, the chapter considers the implications of the transformation processes on slavery with a focus on the suppression of the slave trade and its abolition. Taking the implications of the transformation processes into consideration, the last section explores the various ways in which enslaved Black Africans were employed in the Middle Eastern and North African destinations of the African slave trade.

THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY TRANSFORMATIONS

Preconditions to the vigorous increase in the African slave trade and the process of its abolition in the Middle East and North Africa cannot be disassociated from the specter of political, cultural, economic, and social transformations arising from the European domination of the region. After playing crucial military, economic, and political roles around the western and eastern Mediterranean since the sixteenth century, toward the middle of the seventeenth century, the Ottoman Empire began to suffer territorial losses. By the late eighteenth century, these incremental yet steady territorial losses, with an occasional reassertion of its military strength, had spilled over to its Middle Eastern and North African territories.³ In 1798, intercontinental imperial rivalry involving France and Great Britain led to the invasion of Egypt by Napoleon's expeditionary forces, signaling a "fin de siècle" and major political, military, and economic shifts dominated by the rise of Europe and its colonization of the region. Brought into the orbit of the Ottoman Empire in 1517, Egypt had for over three centuries been one of the most economically and strategically valuable provinces in the Ottoman Empire. Besides supplying grain to Istanbul through the expansive agricultural production centered on the richness of the Nile River, Egypt was also vital to the Sublime Porte (the Ottoman government) for its strategic location for control of the eastern Mediterranean. Yet, in 1798, when Napoleon's army invaded Cairo to prevent British access to the eastern Mediterranean, the Mamluks cavalry forces in charge of the defense of this strategically important Ottoman province crumbled and for the first time in over ten centuries *al-Qahira al-Mahrusa*, the Godly-Protected city of Cairo fell to non-Muslim invading forces. Within three years after the invasion, the Sublime Porte, with the help of Great Britain, retook Cairo in 1801. Under the command of Muhammad Ali Pasha, an Albanian general dispatched to Cairo by Sultan Selim III, Egypt was rescued. Soon

after, Muhammad Ali, with the consent of Selim III in 1805, declared himself governor of Egypt and thereafter purged the Mamluk forces, who attempted to capitalize on the political vacuum created by the Napoleonic invasion to reassert their full control of Egypt.⁴

In the course of these developments rapidly shaping the political landscape in the heartland of the Ottoman Empire and its periphery in the Middle East and North Africa, Selim III, reckoning with the imminent political disequilibrium and the shift in the balance of power, recognized the need to modernize the Ottoman state's institutions by proposing to introduce new military corps called the *Nizam al-Jadid* army in lieu of the classic janissaries. To fund the creation of this modern army, Selim III instituted revenue sources from state-administered tax farms and government-seized *timar* lands, although this ambitious goal was thwarted by the powerful anti-reformist forces within the Sublime Porte. Mahmud II (r. 1808–1839), who ascended to the throne at the height of the shift in the balance of power, was better known than Selim III for his keen interest in European institutions, his decisiveness, and willingness to redress the balance of power disfavoring the Ottoman Empire. Convinced by the need to modernize the Ottoman military, Mahmud II promulgated major reforms, disbanded the age-old janissary corps, and created in its wake a fresh *nizam al-jadid* army organized along the lines of the modern European military institution. The cornerstone of Mahmud II's reforms came in 1839 in his promulgation of the *tanzimat*, the "Reordering" (c.1839–1876). With its goal to modernize the state military institutions along western European lines, the *tanzimat* reforms—aside from the political, military reforms it instituted—echoed ideas of the Age of Enlightenment fashioned after French and American Revolutionary ideals centering Liberty, Rights of Man, and the Citizen.⁵ By the middle of the nineteenth century, reform-minded elites, inspired by the Enlightenment ideas, grappled with slavery; and citing the *tanzimat* reforms, many of these elites, while acknowledging the hard task of ridding the empire of slavery, became sympathetic to ending the slave trade.

Across North Africa, the effects of the transformations arising from the balance of power favoring European domination were equally drastic. In Egypt, for instance, within a decade after he successfully maneuvered and installed himself as the *Wali* (Governor) of Egypt in 1805, Muhammad Ali embarked on ambitious dreams to rule Egypt as independent from the Porte. By the second decade of the century, along with several grand projects in irrigation, economy, and education all designed to bolster his modernization goals, Muhammad Ali sought to establish a loyal *nizam al-jadid* army similar to the highly efficient European military institution and recruited foreign army officers to modernize the new Egyptian Army. Egypt was not alone in its modernization goals. Further west in the Maghreb, the Husaynid beys, who rose to power in 1705 and ruled Tunisia until the French occupation in 1881, had similar ambitions. Flanked at the time by imperial rivalry involving France and the Ottoman Empire in the Mediterranean rim, the Husaynid beys emulating Muhammad Ali sought to strengthen the Tunisian army, composed

mostly of Mamluks, and modernize it along the *nizam al-jadid* scheme underway in Egypt.⁶

A crucial dimension of the nineteenth-century transformation processes in North Africa was the sudden rise of European economic expansion, particularly in the wake of Lord Exmouth's military intervention and bombardment of Algiers in 1816. During the three decades leading up to this military intervention, North African corsairs, organized by states and private individuals, taking advantage of Britain and France's preoccupation with the Napoleonic Wars had intensified the enslavement of seafaring nationals by raiding vessels and villages around the southern Mediterranean. Between 1798 and 1814, the number of corsair campaigns organized by the North African states, Algiers, Tunis, Tripoli, and Morocco, while never reaching the scale they had during their apex in the seventeenth century reached alarming rates targeting Mediterranean islands such as Sicily and Sardinia.⁷ Yet, in 1814, after the wars ended, European countries had gathered at the Congress of Vienna to discuss its political and economic consequences in continental Europe. Among the many goals of the Congress was not only to find solutions for the growing European nationalism that resulted from the Napoleonic Wars but also to address concerns surrounding Europe's Industrial Revolution, which occurred after the 1760s and led to the profound transformation of methods of commodity production. Advancement in industrial and production methods, for instance, helped Europe's population to boom. As economic growth reached its peak during the first quarter of the nineteenth century, so did improvements in various industrial sectors, which forced Europeans to look beyond Europe for colonies. By 1815, many European states were searching, if not for colonies, then at least for outlets for trade. North Africa was one of the favorite destinations.⁸

In the heartland of the Middle East, unraveling effects of the balance of power favoring European political and economic domination were no less significant. In the Arabian Peninsula, for instance, the presence of the Ottoman Empire had been limited to Hijaz, where they administered custodianship of the Muslim Holy Cities of Mecca and Medina by providing security for pilgrim caravans to these sites from Cairo, Damascus, and several parts of the Muslim world. Within a few years after its creation, the new Saudi-Wahhabi state seized on the weakening of the Ottoman Empire's territorial losses and embarked on a campaign for its own territorial expansion to central and eastern Arabia. This prompted Sultan Mahmud II to dispatch Egyptian military forces led by Muhammad Ali's son Ibrahim Pasha between 1811 and 1818. Meanwhile, in the southeastern coast of Arabia, the powerful state of Oman, with the invitation of local rulers expelled the Portuguese from the Swahili coast during the sixteenth century and signed a series of political and economic treaties to favor the British and the French in the region. In 1840, the Sultan of Muscat Oman, after increased trading activities and with the encouragement of Arab merchants, moved his capital to Zanzibar. In the Persian Gulf, the collapse of the Safavid family's central rule in 1722 also paved the way for major

political, economic, and social transformations with ramifications on regional trade expansion spearheaded by the southern and northern Iranian heirs of the Safavids. According to Thomas Ricks, this expansion of the economy resulted in the need for enslaved labor for employment in agricultural enterprises and other activities procured through Indian, Jewish, Persian, Arab, and Turkish merchants and seamen, all of whom catered to the Iranian labor shortage.⁹

SLAVERY AND THE NINETEENTH-CENTURY TRANSFORMATIONS

Modernization of the Military

As stated above, when reckoning with the weakening of the Ottoman Empire, particularly on the military front, Sultan Selim III, who sought to redress this political reality, attempted to introduce the *nizam al-jadid* army to strengthen if not replace the centuries-long system of janissaries that by the mid-eighteenth century had become noticeably ineffective. Selim III, however, faced staunch opposition from the janissary, the religious establishment, and anti-reformist forces within the Porte. The opposition to his broader reforms not only derailed the introduction of his much-desired modern army but also culminated in his murder in 1807. While Selim III's plans to modernize the military were thwarted by anti-reformists and modernization elements within the Sublime Porte, the Governor of Egypt, whom he appointed prior to his murder, embraced and successfully modernized the military in Egypt as part of his own broader state modernization scheme.

Soon after he rose to the governorship of Egypt in 1805, Muhammad Ali was determined to rule the province free from the sway of the Sublime Porte. Hitherto, the Mamluks had governed Egypt for almost three centuries as viceroys of the Ottoman imperial government after the Ottoman conquest in 1516. Wary that the Mamluks, as the janissary had opposed Sultan Selim's efforts to modernize the army at the Sublime Porte, might seize the opportunity of the political vacuum created by the Napoleonic invasion to reassert themselves in power, he massacred their ruling establishments in the Citadel in March 1811. To eradicate any further threats the remaining Mamluks might pose to his political ambitions, he also purged regular Mamluk troops throughout Egypt. Not long after he eliminated the perceived threats of the Mamluk ruling class, by late 1815 an unexpected mutiny instigated by Albanian and Turkish soldiers forced him to consider creating a loyal army and special army of his own. To achieve such a goal, the Pasha, as Muhammad Ali was also known, resorted to the long-standing practice of the use of enslaved Black Africans, in North Africa particularly, as soldiers for political ends. Ultimately, he commissioned his generals to purchase enslaved Blacks for conscription into the *nizam al-jadid* army. By 1819, he established military camps in Aswan and Isna where enslaved captives, drawn predominantly from the Nilotic Sudan were to be trained by officers of the slave regiments.

As the scheme proved successful by the early 1820s, Muhammad Ali embarked on the conquest of Sudan with the clear purpose of obtaining more slaves and gold to fund the establishment of the infantry regiments composed exclusively of enslaved Blacks. To secure the slaves needed to build this unit, Muhammad Ali banned the regular sale of slaves in the Cairo slave market, except for the Egyptian state. Between 1820 and 1824, a period that marked the peak of this operation, the Egyptian historian Emad Ahmed Helal put the number of enslaved Black Africans conscripted into the *nizam al-jadid* army at over 25,000 slaves.¹⁰ According to Helal, the Egyptian government organized the enslaved conscripts into “six brigades, each containing five battalions composed of about eight hundred soldiers.”¹¹ These figures, however, do not take into consideration other thousands of enslaved captives who either perished within Egypt or en route from Sinnar, Kordofan to the military camps where they were to be trained by the Pasha’s foreign military advisors. According to Helal, of the 6566 documented to have died during the four-year period, 4102 were military conscripts while the other 1464 belonged to those employed in factory work within the military complex of the *nizam al-jadid*.¹²

Faced with a pressing demand to replenish these soldiers in the ensuing years, Muhammad Ali instructed the invading Egyptian army in Sudan to supply more captives for conscription into the *nizam al-jadid*. Unsurprisingly, the Egyptian invading army terrorized local polities with plunder, conducted *ghazw* (slave-raiding expeditions), and forced local rulers whom they outgunned to pay tribute in slaves to the Egyptian government. According to Janet Ewald, during the early years of the operations, the *ghazw* raids culminated in the enslavement of up to 10,000 from the Nubian hills alone, and by the late 1830s, 10,000–12,000 enslaved Black Africans were sent annually to Egypt for the military enterprise.¹³

The above developments had debilitating effects in intensifying and broadening the scope of enslavement activities to levels never seen before the nineteenth century. Apart from supplying the Egyptian state with enslaved captives, the invading Egyptian army, being poorly funded and compensated in slaves by the government in Cairo, sold surplus slaves to the itinerant *Jallaba* slave traders. In the course of this practice, captives destined for Cairo but not suited for conscription in the *nizam al-jadid* were sold to the *Jallaba* slave merchants. Ultimately, demand for the surplus slaves fueled by the voracious appetite of the soldiers for captives culminated in the recruitment of local Sudanese slave dealers to expand the frontiers of slave-raiding beyond the Nubian hills to Kordofan, and Bahr al-Ghazal.¹⁴ Due to the outbreak of cholera and the plague epidemics of 1831 and 1855, which killed up to two-thirds of Cairo’s population, Muhammad Ali halted the importation of slaves for enrollment in the *nizam al-jadid* army. More than any other demographic group in Cairo, the epidemics decimated the enslaved Africans the most, and

at a more staggering rate.¹⁵ Despite this, the scope of the slave trade broadened as the *Jallaba* continued to furnish the Cairo slave market with victims of the Egyptian conquest until the late 1880s.

Another major implication of the Egyptian conquest and increasing the enslaving activities in Sudan was that it expanded enslavement from Northeast Africa to other parts of North Africa and the Middle East. Prior to the Egyptian conquest, while Sudan and Northeast had been a main source area for enslaved Black Africans in the Mediterranean basin, the Persian Gulf, and the Arabian Peninsula through the Red Sea and the Nile Valley, after the conquest the scale of enslavement and enslaving activities tripled, surpassing the volume of slave exports of any previous period.

In other parts of North Africa, Muhammad Ali's *nizam al-jadid* scheme inspired the Grand Wazir (wazir) Shakir (1836–1837) to urge the Tunisian ruler, Husayn Bey (r. 1824–1835), to increase the size of his *nizam al-jadid* army with conscripts from enslaved and freed Black Africans. This proposal occurred at the peak of the Ghadamese slave caravans furnishing Tunis slave market with enslaved Africans from the western and central Sudan. While we have no direct evidence of Husayn Bey tapping on the caravan slave trade to augment his *nizam al-jadid* military scheme already underway, the Tunisian Chronicler, Bin Diyaf reported that the bey did attempt to enlist existing enslaved and freed Black Africans in Tunisia into the army. According to Bin Diyaf, when acting on the bey's approval, the minister ordered General Salim, but without specific guidance, to recruit freed blacks for conscription into the new military scheme. Within a few days, soldiers dispatched to implement this measure randomly rounded up every Black-skinned adult male they came in contact with, whether free or enslaved, and locked them up like cattle in the Bardo barracks ready to be conscripted into the *nizam al-jadid* army.¹⁶ In the process, even servants of the bey and the French consul were picked up for conscription. This scheme, which caused chaos, led households and shops to shut their doors to protect dark-skinned enslaved and free Blacks under their employment or ownership. Upon realizing the gravity of this indiscriminate act, and after much lamentation about the manner in which General Salim had implemented the scheme, the minister ordered that many of the Blacks gathered in the barracks be freed.¹⁷ Despite the failure of this scheme, further evidence points to the enlistment of enslaved and freed Blacks into the *nizam al-jadid* army during the reign of Husayn's successor, Ahmad Bey (r. 1837–1855). In April 1846, when Ahmad issued his mass emancipation decree, he instructed the caid (Governor) of Sousse "not to allow any individual to prevent a slave of any kind, be the slaves an *askeri* (a soldier) or not from obtaining his liberty." This reference to *abid* (Black slaves) in the Tunisian *asker* (military) in Sousse strongly suggests that in spite of the failed effort of wazir Shakir to recruit freed slaves into the *nizam al-jadid* army, enslaved Black Africans were still enrolled in the army. Moreover, in 1846 when the inhabitants of Jerba in southern Tunisia vented their resentment toward Ahmad Bey's abolition decree, their grievance rested on rumors that

the real cause behind abolition was not to free the enslaved from their abusive masters for humanitarian reasons, but rather to enlist the male slaves into the *nizam al-jadid* army.¹⁸ Register No. 7789 of the Tunisian *majba* (tax) census data listing 27 enslaved individuals as *asker* (army) in Sousse provides further evidence that, despite the fiasco to emulate the Egyptian example of creation of an exclusive infantry unit, the beylic tapped on the slave trade to enlarge its military, however meager that might have been.¹⁹

Effects of European Capitalism

Besides the vivid effects of the introduction of the *nizam al-jadid* on the increased enslaving activities, the integration of the Middle East and North Africa's economy into the expanding European capitalism had a much greater impact in stimulating demand for slaves from the trans-Saharan, the Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean trading network. Beginning in the last decade of the eighteenth century, for instance, the import of European goods by European merchants into North Africa such as Spanish wool, coffee, sugar, spices, clothes, and manufacturing hardware were retailed in large quantities across the Sahara by Ghadames merchants conducting the caravan trade with the African interior. In 1798, the growing momentum of the retail commerce between the North and the African interior was so strong that the British Foreign Office instructed British consuls in Tunisia, Tripoli, and Morocco to report on each country's commerce with the African interior, including its share of the slave trade.²⁰ Responding almost a year later, Robert Traill, British Consul in Tunis, provided a detailed account revealing that in addition to ostrich feathers, a much-needed commodity in Britain, trade caravans returning from the African interior were furnishing the Tunis market alone between 1000 and 1300 slaves per annum.²¹ We learn from Traill's report that most of the enslaved imported into Tunis, mostly boys and prepubescent girls, were re-exported across the Mediterranean and overland to the Ottoman Empire and other parts of the Middle East. Besides the regular enslaved individuals, Traill reported that each of these caravans brought a few eunuchs.²² Unlike the regular enslaved individuals, the eunuchs, highly prized and valued, were bought from Gwari south of Katsina in the central Sudan only upon special commission by the state or wealthy families. Like the regular enslaved individuals, most of the eunuchs were re-exported as *hadāya* (gifts) for employment in the imperial harems of the Sultan and ruling families, particularly in Istanbul.

At the turn of the nineteenth century, the above European commercial activities in the region dramatically affected the expansion of the African slave trade. After suppressing corsairing activities hampering European and American commerce around the Mediterranean and with Exmouth's bombardment of Algiers in 1816 and freeing Christian slaves, European commercial activities fueled by industrialization in Europe boomed. By the 1830s, while Exmouth's military intervention ended Christian slavery, during the same period, a sudden

rise in demand for enslaved Blacks in the Ottoman Empire fueled by the growth of European capitalism in the region spearheaded a rigorous expansion of the slave trade. At its peak during the 1840s and 1860s, enslaved imported into the heartland of the Ottoman Empire came from several principal source areas, including Libya, Tunisia, and from the Nilotic Sudan via Egypt to the Porte. Because the demand for enslaved Blacks in the Ottoman Empire coincided with the growing commercial prosperity in North Africa as well as the abolitionists' efforts to ban the slave trade, slave dealers partnered with European consul agents manning port facilities in Benghazi, Tunis, Derna, and other places to transport slaves aboard steamships to Izmir, Istanbul, and other Middle Eastern destinations of the slave trade. To elude the British naval authorities patrolling the Mediterranean basin, the enslaved Black Africans aboard these steamships and vessels were disguised as passengers.

Other effects of the growth of European capitalism on the slave trade were also apparent in the cotton boom in Egypt in the period between 1861 and 1864.²³ After the eruption of the American Civil War in 1861, cotton prices spiked globally, resulting in a second wave of mass import of slaves into Egypt from Northeast Africa for cotton cultivation. According to Kenneth Cuno, who analyzed Egyptian census data from the third quarter of the nineteenth century, during the five years of this experiment, Egypt imported up to 5000 annually, totaling between 25,000 and 30,000 slaves to satisfy the demand for labor generated by the rapid expansion of cotton cultivation.²⁴ Unlike the military conscripts, the enslaved Black Africans imported for employment in the cotton agricultural plantations settled in four Egyptian villages in the eastern Delta province of al-Daqahliyya.²⁵

In Arabia and the Persian Gulf, commercial prosperity driven by the rise of European capital expansion increased demand and importation for slaves from Northeast Africa into Persia, Hijaz, and Yemen in western Arabia. A most important and dominant factor contributing to the increased importation of enslaved Black Africans from the Swahili coast and Northeast Africa into Arabia and then Persia, however, was the ascension of the Sultanate of Oman as a commercial empire in Zanzibar.²⁶ Originally based in southwestern Arabia, in the late sixteenth century, the Omanis had been instrumental in ousting the Portuguese on the Swahili coast. Although the Omanis had been trading extensively with the Swahili coastal city-states, the ascension of Sayyid Said ibn Sultan (1791–1856), who rose to power in 1806, altered the extent of their commercial presence on the Swahili coast. After ascending to power following a prolonged internal and dynastic conflict in Oman, Said ibn Sultan, capitalizing on the Omani presence on the Swahili coast, established commercial relations with the British and the French to curtail Portuguese influence on the Swahili Coast. Then, in 1840 he moved his capital from Muscat (Oman) to the offshore Island of Zanzibar. This move, which made Zanzibar a substantial commercial base, also marked a significant turning point for slave imports from the Swahili coast into Arabia and the Persian Gulf. Following the move of his capital to Zanzibar, he encouraged Omani Arabs and Indian financiers to settle

on the nearby islands of Pemba, where he established a series of plantations for cultivation and export of cloves and grain using slave labor procured from within the region. From the 1830s until the British pressured them to halt the increased enslaving activities, the Omanis attracted merchants from the Middle East and the Indian subcontinent. Through the Omanis' influence, Arab slave raiders penetrated deep into the hinterland of the Swahili coast in search of slaves. Aided by African intermediaries, the merchants went as far west as the eastern part of the Zaire River basin in central Africa and further south into the Zimbabwe highlands in Southern Africa. At the height of the slave trade, between 1859 and 1872, the Arab slave raiders procured and furnished Zanzibar with nearly 20,000 slaves annually. While up to half of the enslaved were put to work on the commercial agricultural plantations, the rest were destined to other parts of the Swahili coast, Arabia, or the Persian Gulf.

Consequently, as the slave trade across the Atlantic world diminished by the middle of the nineteenth century, the volume of slave imports into the Middle East and North Africa reached its apex and rose steadily until the 1870s. Accordingly, slave imports during this century from the Western, Central, Nilotic Sudan, and Northeast Africa via the Sahara, Red Sea, and the Indian Ocean trade systems into the Middle East and North Africa, while they cannot be quantified with exactitude, are estimated to have reached two million, with the upper Nile Valley, hotbed of the Egyptian enslaving activities along with Ethiopia, accounting for half of this figure.²⁷ Of this, the heartland of the Ottoman Empire and its Arab provinces or domains were as Ferguson and Toledano disaggregate as follows: from Swahili coasts to the Middle East and India 313,000; across the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden 492,000; into Egypt 362,000; and into North Africa (Algeria, Tunisia, and Libya) some 350,000.²⁸ Excluding the slave imports ending up in India and taking Morocco into consideration, the total number would indeed have been around two million during the nineteenth century. While historians may disagree over these estimates, there can be no denying that the thriving European commerce across the western and the eastern Mediterranean shores coupled with political conditions arising from the Nilotic, Western, and Central Sudan, especially the Islamic Jihad movements, played a crucial role in the dynamics of the slave trade and triggering calls for its abolition.

ENSLAVED LABOR

Throughout the preceding centuries, enslaved Black Africans had performed various tasks in agriculture, pearl diving, maritime, military, and domestic service, and a range of casual and menial jobs. While these pre-existing forms of labor persisted down to the end of the eighteenth century with regional and gendered variations, in the course of the nineteenth century, they expanded exponentially in new and vigorous ways resembling in some cases conditions of labor historians attribute to transatlantic slavery. One such area where enslaved Black Africans' labor expanded was in the army. As the modern Middle East's

rulers sought to build independent empires or modern states, they found in the enslaved brought *en masse* to the region a cheap source of labor to bolster, enlarge and strengthen their armies. In Persia and the Arabian Peninsula, while the use of enslaved Black Africans as soldiers in local and regional forces was not new, it expanded considerably. In North Africa, the scale of enrollment of enslaved Black Africans into the army was even more remarkable.²⁹ In Tunisia, for instance, historians are yet to uncover the full scope of duties enslaved Black Africans listed as *asker* (soldiers) in the Sahel cities of Sousse and Mahdiyya performed. In Morocco, by contrast, we know that Malay Sulayman revived the disbanded *abid al-Bukhari* soldiers established by his predecessor, ‘Alawī ruler Sultān Ismā‘īl (reigned 1672–1727), and used them in his expeditions to the countryside to enforce security and order.

Meanwhile, in Egypt, where close to 10,000 enslaved Sudanese were sent annually for conscription into Muhammad Ali’s *nizam al-jadid* army for decades, their duties and working conditions received much attention from historians. According to Sikainga and Helal, immediately after completing their military training in Aswan, the enslaved Sudanese conscripts were drafted into infantry battalions and were also integral in domestic security and Egypt’s foreign military campaigns. Domestically, they were used to enforce internal security, including quelling the peasant revolt of 1824 Banja in Upper Egypt. Between 1823 and 1835, they were vital in Muhammad Ali’s foreign wars and were part of the expedition to suppress the Bedouin and Wahhabi movement’s revolt in Hijaz against the Ottoman Empire. When Ottoman Sultan commissioned Muhammad Ali to put down a similar rebellion in Greece in 1824, up to 8000 of the enslaved Sudanese soldiers formed part of the Egyptian and Turkish soldiers that landed in Morea (Greece) to suppress that rebellion.³⁰ In 1863, they fought alongside the French army in Mexico. In Sudan, their original homeland, they replaced many of the invading Egyptian and Turkish soldiers who could not withstand the hot climate. While in Sudan, the enslaved Sudanese soldiers performed casual and menial jobs, collected gum Arabic and taxes, worked in mining, and logged lumber to build boats.³¹ Enslaved Sudanese women brought to Egypt to serve as marital partners to the enslaved Sudanese conscripts also performed military-related factory duties.³²

Other than the army, European travelers’ accounts shed light on other forms of labor that enslaved Black Africans fulfilled as servants, retainers, attendants, eunuchs, and nannies in the harems and royal courts of the political class. In 1844, an English woman Miss Smith who accompanied Mrs. Reade, wife of Sir Thomas Reade, the British consul in Tunis, and visited a harem outside Tunis, gave a glimpse into the lavish lifestyle involving enslaved Blacks as domestic servants and pages. When recounting her interaction with princess Lillah Karimat in the women’s quarters, Miss Smith wrote that “a black page entered and kissed the Lillah’s hand, who then arose inviting us to go upstairs into her gallery.” Miss Smith “counted more than fifty Black attendants dressed in the gayest colors” in the courtyard of the harem attesting to the large cohort of domestic slaves and servants that filled the inner space of

these grand facades.³³ Besides those working in the harem as servants and pages, others served as palace guards for the outer space of the harems and as *bawwaba* (doormen) in the royal courts. In the heartland of the Middle East, eunuchs of Sudanic African descent appointed by the Ottoman Sultan administered the two Holy sites in Mecca and Medina well until the 1960s.

With the burgeoning economic growth occurring by the middle of the century, the wealthy and well-to-do middle-class families, particularly in the urban metropolis throughout the Middle East and North Africa, relied increasingly on enslaved Africans, mainly women, and prepubescent girls, to supplement their domestic service. Typically, a household of six family members or less could own one to three slaves, while wealthy aristocratic households mimicking the harems of the ruling class often had dozen or enslaved Black African as servants, attendants, gardeners, and caregivers. Historians have emphasized the use of enslaved women within the domestic arena for sexual pleasure. Theoretically, enslaved women acquired for sexual pleasure could become a *Harim* (concubine), securing a position as that of a wife. An enslaved woman not acquired as a concubine but bores a child to the owner if the owner acknowledges paternity becomes an *umm al-walad* (Mother of the Child). As the Mother of the Child, her child following the legal dispensation of the father is free, and she cannot be sold, inherited, and becomes automatically free upon her owner's death. Generally, such was the fate of a number of domestic servants, a rampant phenomenon that lasted until the twentieth century.

Economically, enslaved Black Africans fulfilled intensive labor in the Atlantic-style plantations and commercial agriculture. In Pemba and Zanzibar, where the Omanis set up several agricultural plantations, they used enslaved Africans as farm laborers, and porters to transport export products such as grain, sesame, and cloves from the plantations to dhows or steamships bound to the Middle East. Within Arabia and the Persian Gulf, enslaved Africans also labored in agriculture, irrigation, canal works, and mining. As a result of the commercialization of cotton, grain, and olive oil, more enslaved Africans were put to work on commercial farms in North Africa and parts of the Ottoman Empire. By the end of the nineteenth century, the effects of the expanded commercialized agriculture were noticeable in transforming the traditional clientele mode of enslaved labor, particularly in North Africa. Before the expansion of commercial agriculture, freed and former enslaved Black Africans who had been manumitted through the local Islamic framework or the pressure of European abolitionism while often remained with their former owners could work under the latter as *Khammass* (sharecroppers or tenant farmers). Under such arrangements, the *Khammass* received a one-fifth share of their agricultural labor. As commercial agriculture intensified, demand for labor disrupted the existing sharecropping arrangements between former enslaved Black Africans and their owners. In Tunisia, for instance, state authorities promoting commercial agriculture were forced to regulate

sharecropping practices, thus attracting sharecroppers to labor in commercial agriculture. Consequently, instead of working for or with their former owners, many former enslaved Black Africans contracted through brokers and middlemen to work in the commercial agricultural schemes. By the end of the century, a few unfortunate former enslaved who could not find their niche and had to support themselves relied on casual and menial jobs for survival, including prostitution.

ABOLITION AND EXIT FROM SLAVERY

Over the previous centuries, Islamic legal and juridical works had devoted sections in legal compendiums dealing with wide-ranging avenues of manumission through which the enslaved could attain *Hurriyat* (freedom). Accordingly, the sharia considers freeing one's slave an exemplary religious act. And slaves, theoretically, could earn their way out of bondage by means of *Mukatabah* (contract), which entails working until they paid their owners the agreed-upon price in labor. As indicated above, a female slave who gave birth to her owner's child immediately attained status as *Umm al-Walad* (Mother of the Child); she could not be sold or inherited and automatically gained her own freedom upon the death of her owner. According to Islamic law, the ulama considered being the conscience of the community, had the legal right to free the enslaved, especially from abusive owners or conditions. Enslaved persons fleeing abusive owners and seeking the intervention of religious authorities have historically taken refuge in *zawiyas* (Sufi convent) where they could not be forcibly removed and could attain freedom through the intercession of the ulama.

Despite the above-established avenues and pathways through which the enslaved could attain freedom, what paved the way for most enslaved Africans during the long nineteenth century to exit bondage was the pressure of European and western abolitionism, which triggered political, economic, and cultural reforms in the region. After the mid-nineteenth century, the number of intellectual elites exposed to European Enlightenment ideas and ideals of "liberty, equality, and freedom" grew and were increasingly in favor of ending the slave trade. Intellectuals such as Bin Diyaf, the chronicler who accompanied Ahmad Bey of Tunisia to Paris in 1846, vigorously supported abolition and considered it "timely, necessitated by the circumstance of the time, which did not necessarily contradict the sharia."³⁴ Throughout the Middle East and North Africa, proponents of modernization and like-minded reformists were sympathetic to ending the slave trade. Their opposition to the slave trade and slavery, nonetheless, fell short and did not culminate in an organized anti-slavery movement. At the same time, conservative Muslims during the nineteenth century, critical of the effects of the reforms and modernization designs underway, staunchly rejected abolition, and defended slavery as a permissible act regulated by the Sharia.³⁵

In the absence of a fully grown indigenous abolitionism, British humanitarians taking their cue from outlawing the transatlantic slavery in the Americas campaigned for the extension of the abolition of the African slave trade in the western coast of Africa to the Middle Eastern and North African destinations of the slave trade. As an emerging superpower in the western and eastern Mediterranean following its defeat of Napoleon, Britain acting on the abolitionist pressure signed a series of treaties with France, Holland, Spain, and other European powers to impose a global end to the slave trade out of Africa. In 1838, it directed its attention to the Ottoman Empire, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf, which had been importing enslaved Africans to their slave markets at increasing and soaring rates. Immediately after turning its attention to these regions, Britain signed a series of treaties with the Ottoman Empire and the Iranian government prohibiting the African slave trade into the Porte, Arabia, and the Persian Gulf through the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean. Meanwhile, abolitionist groups around the Mediterranean composed mostly of merchants and missionaries were unsatisfied with Britain's cautious approach to outlawing the slave trade through treaties. Under the aegis of the British Foreign and Anti-Slavery Society (BFASS), founded in 1839, the abolitionists organized their first anti-slavery convention in London in 1840 aimed at outlawing slavery in the Muslim context. During the convention, the BFASS outlined strategies to outlaw the slave trade out of Africa to Middle Eastern and North African destinations. Key among these strategies was to inundate the British government with petitions from its membership scattered throughout Malta, Sicily, Naples, Gibraltar, Smyrna, Tunis, Tripoli, and Cairo. In response to these petitions, Lord Palmerston, the British Prime Minister, cautiously instructed Lord Ponsonby, the British ambassador in Istanbul, to approach the Porte to take measures to limit the slave trade to the Ottoman Empire and its domains. As a principal supplier of the slave trade to the Porte, the BFASS also directed its campaign on Muhammad Ali, pressuring him to end procurements of slaves in the Nilotic Sudan for conscription into his *nizam al-jadid* army.

While the BFASS was pressuring the British government to cajole the Ottoman sultan and Muhammad Ali to take measures against the slave trade, the trafficking of slaves from the North African coast across the Mediterranean aboard steamship vessels registered under European flags, spurred by the growth of European capital infusion in the region after the third decade of the nineteenth century, was reaching an alarming scale. Rather than deal with Britain's cautious and diplomatic approach to outlaw the slave trade, the BFASS changed its strategy by appealing to public opinion through a barrage of newsletter coverage highlighting the scale of the broadening scope of the nefarious traffic across the Mediterranean. Among the numerous cases the BFASS brought to public attention was the detention in April 1841 of *Miltiades*, a Greek vessel bound for Istanbul from Tunis carrying fourteen enslaved Africans. Investigation into the Miltiades Affair lasted close to a year and

stretched from Tunis to London to Greece. The case of the *Miltiades* implicated Tunisian statesmen, European citizens, consular agents, and a network of slave traders scattered across Tripoli, Tunis, and Istanbul. As the report on the *Miltiades* Affair revealed both the extent and scope of the traffic taking place since the mid-1830s across the Mediterranean basin, it triggered fresh concerns for the British humanitarians working to end the slave trade. Under the energetic and influential role of James Richardson (1806–1851), a prominent abolitionist who headed the British Foreign and Anti-Slavery Society, the BFASS with the assistance of Thomas Reade (British Consul in Tunis) worked with the progressive ruler of Tunis, Ahmad Bey to abolish the slave trade. Immediately after the conclusion of the investigation into the Miltiades Affair, the bey banned the slave trade. Within five years, he implemented a series of decrees prohibiting slaveholding and, by 26 April 1846, abolished slavery altogether in the Regency of Tunis.³⁶ Under similar pressure, the Shah of Persia followed suit, issuing an anti-slavery decree in August 1846, although not until the Brussels Convention Act of 1890 did Iran formally abolish the slave trade.³⁷ Faced with daily reports pouring in from BFASS's agents stationed across the caravan slave routes in Murzuk, Tripoli, detailing both the volume and mortality of enslaved Africans, the British government finally adopted a more realistic approach toward the slave trade and slavery in the Ottoman Empire. After issuing a series of provisional measures against the slave trade, in 1847 the Ottoman sultan issued an imperial *ferman* abolishing the import of slaves. A few years later, in 1854, under British pressure, Egypt banned the public sale of slaves but did not outlaw the slave trade until 1877. In Northeast Africa and the Swahili coast, intense abolitionist pressure forced the Omanis in Zanzibar and Pemba to ban the slave trade by 1877, even though the clientele and paternalistic culture the Omanis instituted in the region kept a vast majority of the enslaved dependents on their former masters well into the early part of the twentieth century. In the Arabian Peninsula, slavery lingered well into the 1960s.

It must be emphasized that while manumission had been a common occurrence under the provisions of the *sharia*, during the process of formal abolition, the enslaved developed abolitionist consciousness by increasingly escaping to European consulates and legations. While evidence of enslaved Black Africans seeking refuge under European consuls before the 1840s is hard to come by, after 1841 resort to European consuls became a daily affair, with some European consuls using fugitive slaves to interfere in local affairs. Thus, when Ahmad Bey wrote to the highest religious office (*al-Majlis al-Shar'i*), justifying his compulsory emancipation and abolition of slavery, one of his key three arguments rested on *al-maslaha al-siyasiya* (public good) to prevent unhappy slaves from resorting to non-Muslims who used those incidents to interfere in state matters.³⁸

CONCLUSION

Reevaluating the African slave trade to the Middle East and North Africa during the long nineteenth-century transformation processes allows for a greater understanding of the extent to which the political and economic developments engendered by these processes shaped the exponential increase in the import of slaves and their abolition. As discussed above, these processes that began in the wake of Napoleon's invasion of Egypt in 1798 not only prompted a significant restructuring of the political, economic, and cultural landscapes of the Middle East and North Africa, but also produced significant repercussions on slavery and its abolition. It must also be stressed that both the expansion of the slave trade and its abolition were inextricably linked to the global effects of this ever-expanding European capitalism. Henceforth, in the same manner that economic growth and demand for sugar and coffee in Cuba, Brazil, and southern United States shaped the continuation of slavery in Atlantic world, progressive modernization coupled with rising European capitalism in North Africa and the Middle East had similar effects in fueling the demand for enslaved Black Africans' labor well into the last decade of the nineteenth century. By the mid-nineteenth century, while European advancement in the military, industrialization, and Enlightenment ideals may have inspired progressive modernizers such as Ahmad Bey of Tunisia to lead the way in abolishing slavery in 1846, paradoxically the same European ideals had less than a decade earlier enthused the largest conscription of enslaved Black Africans into the modern *nizam al-jadid* enterprise as did Muhammad Ali who drained the Nilotic Sudan for captives to fulfill his grand modernization ambitions. Even in the Persian and the Arabian Gulf where the *nizam al-jadid* scheme did not take off, a parallel demand for slave soldiers and eunuchs to strengthen the modern states or to perform administrative duties in the Holy Cities of Islam in Mecca and Medina surpassed the number of enslaved imports for the same functions in the preceding century.

Along with the grand military modernization schemes, the economic prosperity fueled by the expanding European economic growth in the Middle East and North Africa had even greater implications in stimulating demands for enslaved Black Africans for employment in the upper- and middle-class households in the region. Thus, until the late 1890s when the pressures of abolitionism diminished the slave imports, more and more enslaved Africans bound to the North African and Middle Eastern destinations were put to work in new ways, particularly in the commercialized agriculture engendered by the expansion of European capitalism.

NOTES

1. See Dale Tomich and Michael Zeuske, eds., “The Second Slavery: Mass Slavery, World Economy, and Comparative Microhistories, Part II,” *Review: A Journal of the Fernand Braudel Center* 3, no. 2 [special issue] (2008); Paul E. Lovejoy, “Jihad and the Second Slavery,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 1 (2016): 29–30.
2. See Michael and Toledano R. Ferguson, Ehud, “Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth Century,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, ed. Stanley L. Engerman David Eltis, David Richardson, and Seymour Drescher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
3. Renée Worringer, *A Short History of the Ottoman Empire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2021), 239–40.
4. Worringer, *A Short History of the Ottoman Empire*, 244.
5. *Ibid.*, 260.
6. See L. Carl Brown, *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 1837–1855* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1974).
7. See Ismael M. Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2013).
8. See Julia Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans: North Africa and Europe in an Age of Migration, 1800–1900* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011).
9. See Thomas Ricks, “Slaves and Slave Traders in the Persian Gulf, 18th and 19th Centuries: An Assessment,” *Slavery & Abolition* 9, no. 3 (1988): 60–70.
10. Emad Ahmad Helal, “Muhammad Ali’s First Army: The Experiment in Building an Entirely Slave Army,” in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, eds. Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 35.
11. Helal, “Muhammad Ali’s First Army,” 24–25.
12. *Ibid.*
13. See J. Janet Ewald, “The Nile Valley System and the Red Sea Slave Trade 1820–1880,” *Slavery & Abolition* 9, no. 3 (1988): 73.
14. Ewald, “The Nile Valley System and the Red Sea Slave Trade 1820–1880,” 73.
15. “My Ninth Master was a European”: Enslaved Blacks in European Households in Egypt, 1798–1848,” in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, ed. Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 110.
16. See Ibn Abi Diyaf, *Ithaf al-Zaman*, 9 vols., vol. 4 (reprinted Tunis: al-Dar al-Arabiyya lil-Kitab, 1999), 262–64.
17. Brown, *The Tunisia of Ahmad Bey, 1837–1855*, 186.
18. Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia*, 127.
19. Registre fiscaux et administrative [Tax Census Records]. R.F. no. 819, 1856–1860.
20. Robin Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa: European Exploration in North and West Africa to 1815* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965).
21. Hallett, *The Penetration of Africa*, 207.
22. *Ibid.*
23. Zach Sell, *Trouble of the World: Slavery and Empire in the Age of Capital* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2021), 123.

24. See Kenneth M. Cuno, "African Slaves in Nineteenth Century-Century Rural Egypt: A Preliminary Assessment," in *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*, ed. Terence Walz and Kenneth M. Cuno (Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010), 81.
25. Cuno, "African Slaves in Nineteenth Century-Century Rural Egypt," 81–84.
26. See Bernard K. Freamon, *Possessed By the Right Hand: The Problem of Slavery in Islamic Law and Muslim Cultures* (Leiden: Brill, 2019).
27. Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Ralph A. Austen, "The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade Out of Africa: A Tentative Census," in *The Human Commodity: Perspectives on the trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, ed. E. Savage (London: Frank Cass, 1992).
28. See Ferguson and Toledano, "Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth Century," 201–02.
29. Ricks, "Slaves and Slave Traders in the Persian Gulf, 18th and 19th Centuries: An Assessment," 65–66.
30. See Helal, "Muhammad Ali's First Army".
31. Ahmad A. Sikainga, "Comardes in Arms or Captives in Bondage: Sudanese Slaves in the Turco-Egyptian Army, 1821–1865," in *Slaves in the Middle East and Africa*, ed. Miura Toru and John Edward Philips (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 206–208.
32. Helal, "Muhammad Ali's First Army," 35.
33. Clancy-Smith, *Mediterraneans*, 114.
34. Ibn Abi Diyaf, *Ithaf ahl al-Zaman*, 4: 86–87.
35. Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia*, 123–24.
36. *Ibid.*, 75–95.
37. Behnaz A. Mirzai, *A History of Slavery and Emancipation in Iran, 1800–1929* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017).
38. See Ismael M. Montana, "The Ordeal of Slave Slaves' Flight in Tunisia," in *African Voices on Slavery and the Slave Trade*, ed. Sandra E. Greene Alice Bellamba and Martin A. Klein (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

FURTHER READINGS

- Austen, Ralph A. "The Mediterranean Islamic Slave Trade out of Africa: A Tentative Census." In *The Human Commodity. Perspectives on the Trans-Saharan Slave Trade*, edited by E. Savage, 214–48. London: Frank Cass, 1992.
- Ewald, J. Janet. "The Nile Valley System and the Red Sea Slave Trade 1820–1880." *Slavery & Abolition* 9, no. 3 (1988): 71–92.
- Ferguson, Michael and Toledano R., Ehud. "Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth Century." In *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, edited by Stanley L. Engerman David Eltis, David Richardson, and Seymour Drescher, 197–225. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- Harms, Robert, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight. *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013.

Terence Walz, and Kenneth M. Cuno, eds. *Race and Slavery in the Middle East: Histories of Trans-Saharan Africans in Nineteenth-Century Egypt, Sudan, and the Ottoman Mediterranean*. Cairo and New York: The American University in Cairo Press, 2010.

Toledano, Ehud R. *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in Islamic West Africa

Jennifer Lofkrantz

INTRODUCTION

The time of revolutions in West Africa refers to a series of reform movements, also known as the West African jihads, which swept across the western and central Sudan region from the late seventeenth century to the mid-nineteenth century. They began with Nāṣir al-Dīn's 1670s failed movement along the Senegal River on the contemporary border between Mauritania and Senegal. In the eighteenth century, the Imamates of Fuuta Bundu (1698–1699), Fuuta Jaalon (1726–1727) and Fuuta Toro (1769–1776), located in modern-day Guinea and Senegal, were established through revolution. Starting in 1804 and centered on Hausaland in contemporary northwestern Nigeria, the Sokoto jihad led to the formation of the largest state in precolonial sub-Saharan Africa, the Sokoto Caliphate (1804–1903), which at its greatest extent in the 1850s stretched westward to present-day Burkina Faso, north into modern Niger, east into contemporary Cameroon and south into modern southwestern Nigeria. It did so by conquering both Muslim and non-Muslim states. This revolution was followed by the establishment of the Caliphate of Hamdallāhi (c.1820–1862) centered on Māsina in present-day central Mali in the second decade of the nineteenth century which was subsequently overthrown and included in the states established by 'Umar Taal in the 1850s and

J. Lofkrantz (✉)

Gulf University for Science and Technology, Mishref, Kuwait

e-mail: Lofkrantz.J@gust.edu.kw

1860s which lasted until they were conquered by the French in the 1880s and 1890s.

These jihad revolutions were all led by scholars trained in the Mālikī *madh'hab*, the Sunni school of law that was prevalent in precolonial West and North Africa, and who were affiliated with the Qādiriyya *ṭarīqa*, which was the Sufi brotherhood predominant in eighteenth and nineteenth-century Muslim West Africa. Survivors of al-Dīn's failed revolution helped establish Fuuta Bundu in the Upper Senegal River valley under the leadership of the scholar Malik Sy (d. 1699). Qādiriyya scholars also led the jihads that led to Fuuta Jaalon, Fuuta Toro, the Sokoto Caliphate and the Caliphate of Hamdallāhi. Even though Taal was the leader of the Tijāniyya Sufi brotherhood in West Africa, he was also associated with the Sokoto jihad. Taal referred to the Sokoto scholars' writings in his own treatises, used their arguments to support his own actions and only left the Sokoto Caliphate to prepare for his own jihad in the western Sudan region after he failed to secure the leadership of the Sokoto Caliphate after the death of Muḥammad Bello in 1837.¹

There have been several explanations for the causes of the revolutions, including that they were a Fulbe ethnic movement, a rural uprising of pastoralists against urban farmers, or that they were religious movements. Since 1988, when Humphrey Fisher first introduced the argument, the dominant viewpoint has become that the jihads/revolutions were primarily anti-slavery movements.² This then, makes it especially ironic that no state established through these revolutions outlawed slavery, and that in some, including the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States, slavery actually increased, as demand for slave-produced crops such as cotton, sorghum and indigo grew. These states were concerned with regulating enslavement, slavery and the trade of slaves according to their interpretations of the Mālikī school of law. They wanted to safeguard people they considered to be freeborn Muslims. They did not want to abolish slavery and the slave trade as a whole. In the states established by these revolutions, interpretation and application of Mālikī law provided the structure within which people were enslaved, how they lived and worked and how they were freed. This is exemplified by the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States.

HOW PEOPLE WERE ENSLAVED

The vast majority of people enslaved in West Africa, both Muslim and non-Muslim, were enslaved through warfare, followed, in descending order, by raiding, banditry, kidnapping and judicial punishment. Kidnapping was illegal in all societies, although where there was legal enslavement and a legal slave trade there was space for illegal enslavement. Enslavement as punishment for a crime is illegal under all interpretations of Islamic law but formed part of the judicial code in some non-Muslim societies such as in precolonial Igbo society (contemporary southeast Nigeria). People were also born into slavery. In Muslim societies, a child's status was dependent on their father's. A child

born of a slave mother and a free father was free and had the social status of the father if the father recognized his paternity.

The revolutionary leaders of the jihads were interested in protecting from enslavement people who shared their interpretation and practice of Islam but viewed people who did not as non-Muslims who could possibly be legally enslaved. The Sokoto Caliphate undertook a number of measures to protect who they considered to be freeborn Muslims, many of which Taal and his successors later adopted. First, even though the leaders of the Sokoto jihad and early Caliphate, ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye, his brother ‘Abdullāhi b. Fodiye and ‘Uthmān’s son Muḥammad Bello, did not consider all Fulbe to be Muslim, they made it illegal to enslave any Fulbe in order to protect freeborn Muslim Fulbe. Second, in order to stop the export of illegally enslaved Muslims from the Sokoto Caliphate they instituted export checks of northbound caravans. Third, they made it illegal to sell slaves south towards the Atlantic slave trade, as one of the justifications for enslavement was to encourage the conversion of non-Muslims to Islam, which could not happen if people were sold outside of the *dār al-Islām*. Indeed, this was also the case for the jihad states closer to the coast such as Fuuta Jallon and Fuuta Toro which tried to limit as much as possible, but were unable to do so entirely, the sale of enslaved people into the transatlantic slave trade. Fourth, they supported the ransoming of captive freeborn Muslims before they were enslaved. The preferred remedy in accordance with local interpretation of Mālikī law was for a Muslim captor to freely release a captive they suspected might be a freeborn Muslim. However, the Sokoto government realized that captors would be more likely to release illegally held captives if they were financially compensated and therefore helped to arrange ransoms by providing negotiators and funds when needed.³

The revolutionaries’ definition of who was and who was not a Muslim and the political and economic structures of the jihad states, especially in Sokoto Caliphate and the Umariyan States, affected who was enslaved and how they were enslaved. For seventeenth to nineteenth-century West African Muslims, the key factor in determining whether or not a free person taken captive was enslavable was their religious identity. As demonstrated by John Hunwick, Bruce Hall, and Timothy Cleaveland among others, Muslim West African jurists since the sixteenth century were in agreement that the only basis for enslavement was personal unbelief.⁴ However, who was considered a “proper Muslim” and therefore a “freeborn Muslim” in West Africa was dependent on time and place. Many of the revolutionary jihad leaders, including those of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umariyan States, based their definition of a freeborn Muslim on the definition of Muḥammad al-Maghīlī (d. 1504), the fifteenth-century Tlemsen (contemporary Algeria) scholar who is often credited with introducing the Mālikī school of law to Hausaland (contemporary northwest Nigeria) from where the Sokoto jihad would originate.⁵ Al-Maghīlī defined as non-Muslim those who denied the existence of God and the prophecy of the Prophet Muḥammad and those who behaved in ways that an “unbeliever” behaves, even though those behaviors, such as drinking alcohol, on their own,

are not acts of unbelief.⁶ Following this definition, ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye, the intellectual leader of the Sokoto jihad, divided people into three categories. The first group consisted of people who followed “pure” Islamic law. The second category included individuals who followed a mixture of orthodox Islamic practices and *bori* practices, the polytheistic religious practices that pre-existed Islam in the region, while the third group consisted of people who had never accepted the “truth” of Islam. ‘Uthmān considered it fully permissible to enslave members of the last two groups, along with their children, and to confiscate their property.⁷ Moreover, the leaders of the Sokoto jihad also held the view that the prevalence of syncretic religious practices within a community, which they deemed deviant forms of Islam, made the community as a whole non-Muslim. For example, they used the concepts of *takfīr* (declaring a self-professed Muslim an infidel) and *taqlīd* (the emulation of the ideal Muslim leader) to justify attacking the self-identified Muslim state of Bornu, to the east of the Sokoto Caliphate, and enslaving people taken captive during the warfare.⁸ Similarly to ‘Uthmān, Taal also divided non-Muslims into three groups—“infidels” by origin such as Christians; “apostatized” Muslims and people who “pretended” to be Muslim but whose actions are those of an “infidel.”⁹ In his dispute with Aḥmadu b. Aḥmadu, the Caliph of Hamdallāhi, in the lead-up to his invasion of the Caliphate of Hamdallāhi, Taal also adopted Sokoto’s strategy of declaring the leader of a state who considered himself to be Muslim as non-Muslim to justify the declaration of war against that state and the enslavement of people taken captive in the fighting.¹⁰

Who and how people were enslaved was also very much affected by the political and economic structure of the state. Both the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States faced an internal rebellion by people who they did not consider to be Muslims and both were constantly expanding their borders. This warfare led to captives being taken which both states viewed as enslavable according to their interpretation of Mālikī law. Both states were also economically dependent on captive-taking and access to slave labor, especially for plantation agriculture.

Once established, the Sokoto Caliphate functioned more as confederation than a federation. It had a central government at Sokoto but was divided into 33 emirates, which were themselves divided into numerous smaller administrative units. Unity of the Caliphate was dependent on the diplomatic skills of the Sarkin Muslimi at Sokoto and the prestige of the founders. Emirs were initially chosen from among the surviving jihadists who conquered a particular region such as Kano or Bauchi. Later emirs were chosen according to the rules of succession of the individual emirates. To maintain a unified state, the government at Sokoto had to continually balance their interests and the Caliphate as a whole with the interests of the individual emirs and emirates.

Similar to the Sokoto Caliphate, Umarian rule also faced challenges to its governance and unity. Unlike ‘Uthmān who grew up and lived his adult life in Gobir, the Hausa state from which he launched his jihad in 1804, Taal was not from the region which he eventually conquered. He grew up in Fuuta Toro

and spent a significant portion of his adult life in the Middle East and the Sokoto Caliphate prior to establishing his community at Dinguiraye on the Tinkisso river, on the border with Fuuta Jalon, on land he had leased from the King of Tambo, which became his base for launching his jihad. Moreover, the army that he led that conquered Segou, Kaarta, and the Caliphate of Hamdallāhi was mainly recruited from Fuuta Toro and Fuuta Jalon. The Umarians conquered Kaarta in 1855, and Segou and most of Hamdallāhi in 1862. The state that was established by Taal was faced with both constant resistance from the people it conquered, especially from the Bambara, Maraka and Masinanke, divisions within the ruling elite, and later conflict with Samori Turé, another expansionist leader, and the French as they moved into the interior from the coast. Taal was killed in an attack by revolting Masinanke in 1864 and his empire was effectively divided into five polities governed by four of his sons and a nephew.¹¹ These polities operated at various times as independent states, fighting off attempts at unification, attacks and conquest by Samori in the 1880s until finally they were all conquered by the French by 1893.

Both the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States were dependent on booty, including captives to be sold as slaves, taken in wars and raids, to maintain key social, political and economic relationships. Booty, including captives, was the main payment for soldiers. Indeed, often, civilian captives, particularly women and children, were the most valuable booty soldiers could collect from a conquered village or town.¹² For the Umarians booty collection was also important in terms of maintaining the unity of the army. The Umarian armies were composed of several different groups. At the top of the army hierarchy were the elite cavalry troops who were mostly of Fuutanke origin from Fuuta Toro and Fuuta Jalon. Below them were local Fulbe and “new Muslims” who had converted to Islam prior to the beginning of the jihad. Below them were the *sofa*, local polytheists, whose leaders were allied to Taal and his successors. The division of booty reflected status and ethnic differences. For example, in the Bambara regions, the Umarians used a hybrid of Mālikī and Bambara law for the division of booty. In accordance with Mālikī law, the Fuutanke soldiers kept four-fifths of the booty they captured and turned over one-fifth to the state whereas in alignment with Segou Bambara law, the Umarian State claimed half of the booty captured by the *sofa*. “New Muslims,” to the chagrin of their military and government superiors, often did not turn in any of the booty that they captured.¹³

Booty was also an important source of government income. According to Mālikī law, booty was one of the seven legitimate sources of income for the public treasury along with the fifth, the land tax, the poll tax, the tithe, inheritance and property with a missing or no owner.¹⁴ In *Usulul-adlilwullatil umuri wa ahlil-fadli*, a treatise on the principles of justice, ‘Uthmān justified the taking of booty, including captives, in warfare and raids by stating that proper uses of the government’s and imam’s share of the booty included defense spending, the payment of government employee salaries, the welfare of the poor and needy, the building of mosques, and the freeing (ransoming)

of prisoners of war.¹⁵ Further demonstrating the importance of booty for the Sokoto Caliphate, Moses Ochonu argues that Caliphate expansion south of the Benue during the reign of Bello was not motivated by ideology and territorial gain but by soldiers' desire for booty, captives and tribute.¹⁶ Even in the 1890s, as indicated by a letter from the Emir of Katsina to the Sarkin Muslimi in Sokoto, booty collection, including captives, remained an important part of Sokoto military expeditions throughout the nineteenth century.¹⁷ Enslavement of captives came to form the base of many political and economic relationships within the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States especially with the growth of plantation agriculture.

WORK OF ENSLAVED PEOPLE

As in other regions of West Africa, enslaved people in the precolonial revolutionary jihad states labored at various professions, although the majority of enslaved people worked in agriculture. Moreover, similar to other regions in West Africa, women made up the majority of the enslaved population. This is because in West Africa, most agricultural tasks were gendered female and women were valued primarily for their productive capabilities and to a lesser extent their reproductive capabilities. This is reflected in slave prices. Eunuchs were the most expensive slaves since many boys did not survive the operation, followed in descending order by young women, older women, children and adult men. The work performed by an individual slave was dependent on gender, on the region where the person lived, the amount of time the owner had owned the person, whether the enslaved individual was a first-generation slave or was either born into the community or bought at an early age, and on the occupation and wealth of the owner. Enslaved people worked as farmers, soldiers, porters, miners, domestic servants, traders, cattle-raisers and concubines. Slaves within the warrior/aristocratic sector tended to be employed as soldiers and farmers while within the merchant sector, enslaved people performed tasks in support of their owner's trading activities such as producing food and trade goods. For example, urban Songhay in Djenne in contemporary Mali, which was conquered by Taal in 1862, employed their slaves in a diverse number of professions such as blacksmiths, weavers, cobblers and traders.¹⁸ Both the warrior/aristocratic and merchant sectors also used their slaves as concubines and as servants. An important use of male slaves was as royal slaves working in government.¹⁹

For both Muslim and non-Muslim communities of the western and central Sudan region, slaves who were born into the community or were purchased at a young age, and who therefore shared cultural values with their owners, were less likely to be sold, were given more desirable tasks and generally had more freedom of movement than first-generation slaves who were more closely watched, performed harder and less desirable work, and were the first to be sold. This remained true with the establishment of the revolutionary jihad states. For example, in late nineteenth-century Sokoto, which had been

conquered by the Umarians, first-generation slaves worked for their owners until four in the afternoon for six days a week while slaves born into the community worked until two in the afternoon for five days a week.²⁰ The work regimen provided this second group a better chance than first-generation slaves to rest, to look after their own needs and to gather assets that could be used to make their lives more comfortable or to buy themselves out of slavery. This distinction between first-generation slaves and people born into slavery in the community can also be seen in the terms used to categorize people. For example, *komo* (Soninke) *maccube* (Fulbe) and *banniya* (Songhay) all refer to enslaved people who were enslaved in their own lifetime while *woloso* (Bambara) *woroso* (Soninke), *rimaibe* (Fulbe) and *horso* (Songhay) refer to enslaved individuals who were either born in the community or came into it at a young age.²¹

An individual slave's experience with slavery was also dependent on whether they were enslaved within a high-density or a low-density slave system. High and low-density systems differed in terms of where slaves and owners lived in relation to each other, in demographic structure, in the degree of economic rationality and most importantly in the number of slaves. There was a much closer relationship between owner and slave in low-density systems than in high-density systems. In a low-density system, enslaved individuals formed the minority of the population, and owner and slave often lived in the same household, worked together, ate the same food and participated in the same culture. In contrast, in high-density systems, enslaved people formed the majority of the population, lived apart from their owners often in separate villages, had very little contact with their owner, and worked while their owner or overseer supervised. Furthermore, in low-density systems, slaves often assimilated within three generations while in high-density systems a child usually had the exact same status as their slave parents. High-density and low-density systems could co-exist within the same region differing on the needs of the owners. For example, in Umarian Segu, there was a political/military structure that utilized slaves as soldiers; a merchant town structure where enslaved individuals were used in production and trade; fishing villages and farming communities where slaves were engaged in the subsistence requirements of their owners; and the more higher-density plantation agriculture system where slaves lived in separate villages from their owner and labored as agricultural workers.²² It is in these high-density agricultural slave systems where most enslaved people in the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States labored.

The economy of both the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States was based on plantation agriculture and the majority of enslaved people worked in this sector. In the eighteenth century, Hausaland's agricultural sector had suffered because of intra-Hausa warfare and periodic draught. The founding of the Sokoto Caliphate unified Hausaland for the first time which led to the integration of a regional economy that was based on slave-produced plantation agriculture. Plantation-produced agricultural products included cotton, millet, sorghum, rice, tobacco, locust beans, cowpeas, groundnuts, sugar

cane, kola nuts and shea nuts. Most of these products were prepared for the domestic market but indigo, tobacco, dried onion leaves and finished goods such as cotton textiles were produced for the export market.²³ Enslaved people in the Sokoto Caliphate constituted between 20 and 45 percent of the total population and varied in concentrations across the emirates with the more plantation-focused emirates, such as Kano, having the higher slave populations.²⁴

On Sokoto plantations, except for the most physically demanding jobs and many of the skilled work which was reserved for men, both men and women slaves performed the same agricultural tasks and worked the same hours. On most Sokoto plantations, enslaved people were organized into highly regimented work gangs. On some plantations, however, such as in Bida Emirate, enslaved people had more control of their work lives, lived in slave villages located on their plantation, were overseen by a village head, and owed their owners a set amount of produce or money, known as the *murgu* system. On plantations where slave labor was organized into work gangs each gang, headed by an overseer, was usually tasked with a specific duty such as cultivating particular fields. Enslaved individuals usually worked from sunrise to afternoon prayers at 2 p.m., every day except for Fridays, Sundays and public holidays with a period of rest around noon for lunch and other rest periods as the overseer saw fit. The overseer was usually an older trusted enslaved man. Enslaved children too young to work were usually cared for by an older enslaved woman, sometimes mothers carried their infants with them, and nursing mothers were usually given permission by the overseer to stop work and nurse their babies as needed. After the official work day ended, enslaved people could use the remaining hours of the day for rest, leisure, their own domestic tasks and for working their own plots for supplemental food and income.²⁵

Similar to the Sokoto Caliphate, the Umarian economy was also based on plantation agriculture with a constant demand for enslaved labor. The region produced cotton for the local textile industry and grain such as sorghum for the export market. Sinsani had been the most important agricultural city of the western Sudan region prior to the Umarian conquest. After the Umarian conquest, agricultural and commercial hegemony shifted to Banamba. By the 1890s, agricultural plantations encircled the city for 25–50 kilometers with an estimated slave population of 30,000–35,000, where the enslaved population outnumbered the free population on a ratio of 2:1.²⁶ In Banamba, like in most Maraka towns, most enslaved people lived and worked in slave villages of between 50 and 500 people where most people could build a family life.²⁷ Like in the Sokoto Caliphate, in the Umarian States in general, enslaved people worked for their owners five days a week from sunrise to afternoon prayer time although many newly acquired slaves worked for two hours longer and for an extra day. Unlike in the Sokoto Caliphate, it appears that there was a more gendered division of agricultural labor in the Umarian States. Most work gangs were single-gendered. Men did the physically difficult work such as

clearing land, but some crops such as indigo, which was important for dyeing cotton cloth, were viewed as strictly women's crops whereas planting cotton was gendered male and harvesting cotton was gendered female. Both men and women also participated in making cotton cloth. Spinning, the more time-consuming task, was viewed as women's work while weaving was viewed as men's work.²⁸

PATHWAYS TO FREEDOM

In accordance with the Mālikī school of law enforced in the jihad states, there were several avenues through which an enslaved person could gain their freedom. Owners could manumit their slaves. Manumission was viewed as an act of benevolence and many pious owners manumitted slaves for that reason. Manumitting slaves was viewed as a way to make amends for committed sins. Owners could also permit slaves to buy their freedom, redemption, or pledge to free the slave at a later date or after the owner's death. The Qu'ran recommends that owners permit their slaves to purchase themselves or permit a third party to purchase their freedom. A judge could also order an owner to free a slave on account of mistreatment. A concubine who gives birth to her owner's child who recognizes his paternity gains the title of *umm al-walad* and certain legal rights that eventually lead to her freedom. A slave owned by a non-Muslim who converts to Islam must be freed or sold by their owner, since a non-Muslim is forbidden to own a Muslim, although a Muslim is permitted to continue to own an enslaved individual who converts to Islam.²⁹ The vast majority of enslaved individuals could only legally gain freedom with the cooperation of their owners.

The most common way for an enslaved person to gain their freedom in the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umariyan States was through redemption where either the enslaved individual themselves or another person purchased their freedom. People who were redeemed by others were usually redeemed by family or friends. Often, one person will pay for their own redemption and once free start saving to redeem their still enslaved family members. In general, since women were often more burdened by non-paying domestic tasks, it was easier for enslaved men to raise self-redemption fees than enslaved women.³⁰

Theoretically, slaves could not own property and everything they earned belonged to their owners. However, owners could grant their slaves certain privileges of ownership. In practice, this could give enslaved people access to the resources with which to earn enough money to pay their redemption fee such as assess to a plot of land. In Mālikī law, and Muslim law in general, there are three ways for slaves to redeem themselves. First, enslaved individuals could buy themselves. In this case the person must pay their owner the full demanded purchase price at the time of sale and is freed immediately. Second, an enslaved person could gain self-redemption by entering into a *mukātaba* or a *fansar kai* contract with their owner by which they bought their freedom through instalments. During this process, until the person has paid his or her

full purchase price, while they are not free, there are limits placed on the control of the owner. For example, the owner would not be able to sell the slave or force them into a marriage. The third form of self-redemption is when there is an “imperfect expectancy of manumission.” In this case, the enslaved person is given the option of gaining their freedom through work. An example of an “imperfect expectancy of manumission” is when two owners jointly own a slave and one owner manumits their share.³¹ The owner controls the first two means of self-redemption. An enslaved person could only redeem themselves with the cooperation of the owner and at the price set by the owner. With a mukātaba contract, the owner is in complete control in deciding the purchase price, the method of payment and any attached conditions. While a slave may have the right to ask for a mukātaba contract, the owner has the option of putting the purchase price or conditions so high that the enslaved person could never gain their freedom in that manner.³² Furthermore, if an enslaved individual missed an agreed-upon payment under the mukātaba contract, they forfeited the payments already made and were returned to their previous status.³³ With the third option, however, the right to redemption rested fully with the slave. In Muslim West Africa the third option was either uncommon or not practised. Most enslaved people redeemed themselves by either purchasing themselves outright or through a mukātaba or a fansar kai contract.

In the Sokoto Caliphate, the *murgu* and *wuri* systems allowed for the possibility for enslaved individuals to save for self-redemption or fansar kai. *Murgu* and *wuri* were similar in that they both permitted slaves to work on their own in return for payment to their owners but differed in that *murgu* was a fixed payment, usually in cash but sometimes in kind, whereas *wuri* was a proportional payment usually one-tenth of a day’s earnings. *Murgu* was much more common than *wuri*. It was the owner’s decision whether or not to permit slaves to work under the *murgu* system. Usually, *murgu* payments were fixed and they were required to be paid regularly on a daily, weekly, monthly or annual basis. For example, according to Muḥammadu Rabi’u, an informant to the 1970s oral interview Economic History Project, an owner could demand that each Friday his male slave give him seven hundred or eight hundred cowries as his *murgu* payment.³⁴ Owners benefited from the *murgu* system. They were not taxed on *murgu* payments nor were responsible for the upkeep of slaves on the *murgu* system. It was pure profit for them. While *murgu* costs varied, it was usually more than the cost of subsistence. Therefore, in order to maintain themselves, slaves on the *murgu* system had to earn twice what they needed to survive before they could consider saving for self-redemption. Only slaves who were skilled craftsmen or who were very good traders, the individuals who would also probably be making higher *murgu* payments and whose redemption price would have also been set high, could have afforded to redeem themselves. Even then it usually took them between five and seventeen years.³⁵

In Muslim West Africa during the jihad period, redeemed slaves, although free, held a low social status in their former owner's society. Claude Meillassoux makes an important distinction between manumission and enfranchisement. According to Meillassoux "enfranchisement" meant that a freed slave would acquire all the prerogatives of the freeborn, including honors, and the stigma of slave birth or capture would be removed. For him, enfranchised slaves, usually families, had the right to leave their former owners, settle on new land and enjoy all of the privileges of the freeborn. In contrast, a "manumitted" slave, according to Meillassoux, who gained their freedom either by redemption or by other legal means, was considered free but was usually viewed as a junior member of their former owner's family, was under their former owner's control and was expected to perform certain duties towards their former owner and give them gifts on certain occasions.³⁶ Using Meillassoux' terminology most slaves who were freed according to Mālikī law in the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umariān States were manumitted slaves. Indeed, social inequality between people of slave and free descent and contestations over rights and identity continues to the present as shown by recent research, especially by Mirjam de Bruijn and Lotte Pelckmans, Benedetta Rossi and Marie Rodet.³⁷

Colonial conquest of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umariān States altered how enslaved people could gain their freedom. The Sokoto Caliphate was conquered by British, French and German forces with the 1903 conquest of Kano, the economic center of the Caliphate, by the British marking the official end of Sokoto independence. Most of the Sokoto Caliphate was conquered by the British and became the Protectorate of Northern Nigeria. The French reached Bamako in 1883, conquered Segu in 1890 and Māsina in 1893 effectively ending Umariān independence and enfolding it into the French Soudan. While there were important differences between British and French policies towards the slave trade, slavery and emancipation, in general, colonial officials did not want to disrupt the economies and social orders of the societies they had conquered. They favored a gradual end to slavery with redemption as the preferred means through which enslaved people gained their freedom. Yet, British and French officials did alter the practice of redemption in significant ways. First, slaves no longer needed the permission of their owner to self-redeem or to be redeemed by a third party. If they could raise the redemption fee, still a difficult task, owners had to accept it. Second, owners were no longer in control of setting the redemption price.³⁸ Colonial policies, however, affected enslaved men and women differently. For example, in the British occupied Sokoto Caliphate as demonstrated by the 1905–1906 Zaria redemption records more men either self-redeemed or were redeemed by a third party than women even though women made up the majority of the enslaved population.³⁹ This was due to two reasons. First, it was more difficult for women to raise their redemption fees due to the gendered nature of domestic work. Second, it was British colonial policy to regard women slaves as wives instead of as slaves and to treat enslaved women who wanted to leave their owners

as divorce cases. This made it much more difficult for enslaved women to be redeemed if their owners objected than it was for enslaved men. It was not until 1936 that slavery was abolished in the British Protectorate of Northern Nigeria which encompassed most of what had been the Sokoto Caliphate.⁴⁰ Starting in 1905 in the French Soudan, which included the Umarian States, enslaved people, both men and women, took their freedom into their own hands by leaving their owners and either returning home or establishing new communities.⁴¹

CONCLUSION

All of the West African jihads from al-Dīn's to Taal's were led by men dedicated to reforming society and implementing their interpretation of the Mālikī madh'hab. The establishment of the two largest states through revolutionary jihad, the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States, coincided with the nineteenth century's increased demand for plantation-produced agricultural products for both local consumption and for export. The establishment of these two states corresponds with the period which Paul Lovejoy terms the "transformation of slavery" in the region from where slaves were present in society but where the economy was based on free labor to where the economy was based on enslaved labor.⁴² Yet, even so, in these states founded through revolutionary jihad, enslavement, the slave trade, slavery and pathways to freedom were regulated according to the revolutionaries' interpretations of Mālikī law. The leaders of these states wanted to protect people who they considered to be freeborn Muslims from enslavement while regulating the enslavement and trade of people they considered to be non-Muslims. They were only considered as Muslim people who followed their interpretation of Islam. According to their interpretations of Mālikī law, only people they considered non-Muslims who were taken captive during a war could be legally enslaved.

Local interpretations of Mālikī law also regulated pathways to freedom. Enslaved people could legally gain their freedom if a judge freed an enslaved person due to gross maltreatment. A concubine whose owner recognized his paternity of her child gained certain rights which would eventually lead to her freedom. Owners also manumitted slaves as an act of benevolence, as a way to make amends for committed sins, or as a generous act upon their deaths. However, the way that most enslaved people legally gained their freedom, with the permission of their owner, was through either self or third-party redemption where the enslaved person purchased their freedom, or had their freedom purchased for them. Depending on the type of work an enslaved individual performed, the type of system in which they lived and labored and on their owner, enslaved people sometimes had access to land and the time with which to use their labor and skills to earn the money they needed to purchase their freedom. Due to the gendered division of work, it was more difficult for women to raise their self-redemption fees than for men. The vast majority of

slaves worked in agriculture and most slaves were women who were valued for both their productive and reproductive abilities. However, enslaved people worked in all professions and in all segments of the economy including as soldiers, porters, miners, domestic servants, traders, cattle-raisers, concubines and royal officials. Whether an enslaved person gained their freedom through the legal pathways provided by the Sokoto Caliphate and the Umarian States or through those provided by the French and British colonial states after the conquest, freed slaves remained in a subservient social position compared to their former owners, and people of slave descent continue to face social barriers that people of free descent do not.

NOTES

1. For recent overviews of the West African Jihads see Rudolph Ware III, *The Walking Qur'an: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa* (Raleigh: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014); Mauro Nobili, *Sultan, Caliph and the Renewer of the Faith: Ahmad Lobbo, the Tarikh al-Fattash and the Making of an Islamic State in West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2020); Paul E Lovejoy, *Jihād in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016). For 'Umar Taal's use of Sokoto arguments especially those of the Fodiye see 'Umar Taal, *Bayān mā waqa 'a*, ed. and trans. Sidi Mohamed Mahibou and Jean-Louis Triaud (Paris: Editions du Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique, 1983), 107–38. See also the correspondence between Taal and Ahmadu b. Ahmadu in Muhammad al-Hafiz al-Tidjānī, *Al Hadj Omar Tall (1794–1864) Sultan de l'état Tidjanite de l'Afrique Occidentale*, trans. Fernand Dumont (Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire: Les Nouvelles Editions Africaines, 1983).
2. Humphrey J. Fisher, "A Muslim William Wilberforce? The Sokoto Jihād as Anti-Slavery Crusade: An Enquiry into Historical Causes," *De la traite a l'esclavage du XVIII au XIVieme siècle: Actes du Colloque International sur la traite des Noirs Nantes 1985* (Nantes and Paris: Center de Recherche sur l'histoire du monde atlantique, société française d'histoire d'outre mer, 1988), 2: 537–55.
3. Jennifer Lofkrantz, "Protecting Freeborn Muslims: The Sokoto Caliphate's Attempts to Prevent Illegal Enslavement and its Acceptance of the Strategy of Ransoming," *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 1 (2011): 109–27; Jennifer Lofkrantz and Paul Lovejoy, "Maintaining Network Boundaries: Islamic Law and Commerce from Sahara to Guinea Shores," *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 2 (2015): 221–32.
4. See John Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay: The Replies of al-Maghīlī to the Questions of Askīya Al-hājj Muhammad*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1985); Bruce S. Hall, *A History of Race in Muslim West Africa 1600–1960* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Timothy Cleaveland, "Ahmad Baba al-Tinbukti and his Islamic Critique of Racial Slavery in the Maghrib," *The Journal of North African Studies* 20, no. 1 (2015): 42–64.
5. For al-Maghīlī's definition of who is and who is not a Muslim see Hunwick, *Sharī'a in Songhay*. For 'Uthmān b. Fodiye see Uthmān b. Fodiye, *Nūr-al-albāb*, trans. Ismail Hamet, *Revue Africaine* XLI (1897): 300–03. For a

- discussion on the influence of al-Maghīlī on ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye’s intellectual thought see Jennifer Lofkrantz, “Intellectual Discourse in the Sokoto Caliphate: The Triumvirate’s Opinions on the Issue of Ransoming ca 1810,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2012): 393–95.
6. Hunwick, *Shari’a in Songhay*.
 7. ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye, *Nūr-al-albāb*, 300–03.
 8. For a detailed discussion of the debate between the leaders of the Sokoto Caliphate and the Bornu Empire on whether or not it was legal for Sokoto to invade Bornu see Murray Last and M.A. Al-Hajj, “Attempts at Defining a Muslim in 19th Century Hausaland and Bornu,” *Journal of the Historical Society of Nigeria* 3, no. 2 (1965): 231–9; Louis Brenner, “The Jihad Debate between Sokoto and Borno: A Historical Analysis of Islamic Political Discourse in Nigeria,” in *People and Empires in African History: Essays in Memory of Michael Crowder*, ed. J.F. Ade Ajayi and J.D.Y. Peel (London: Longman, 1992), 21–45.
 9. Taal, *Bayān mā waqa ‘a*, 98.
 10. *Ibid.*, 107–38.
 11. David Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 310–11; Roman Loimeier, *Muslim Societies in Africa: A Historical Anthropology* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 124.
 12. Murray Last, “Slavery or Death in Sokoto and Borno: Tactics, Legalities and Sources,” in *Landscapes, Sources and Intellectual Projects of the West African Past*, ed. Toby Green and Benedetta Rossi (Leiden: Brill, 2018), 438.
 13. Richard Roberts, *Warriors, Merchants and Slaves: The State and the Economy in the Middle Niger Valley, 1700–1914* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), 92–94; Robinson, *The Holy War of Umar Tal*, 185–86.
 14. ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye, *Kitāb al-farq*, in M Hiskett, “Kitāb al-farq: A Work on the Habe Kingdoms attributed to ‘Uthman dan Fodio,” *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 25, no. 1/3 (1962): 571.
 15. ‘Uthmān b. Fodiye, *Usulul-Adlilwullatil Umuri wa ahli-l-fadli*, trans. Mohammad Isa Talata Mafara (Sokoto: 1992), 15.
 16. Moses Ochonu, “Caliphate Expansion and Sociopolitical Change in Nineteenth-Century Lower Benue Hinterlands,” *Journal of West African History* 1, no. 1 (2015): 133–76.
 17. Abubakar, 7th Emir of Katsina to the Sultan of Sokoto, the Sarkin Musulmi Abderrahman, undated, *The Occupation of Hausaland 1900–1904*, ed. H.F. Backwell (London: Frank Cass & Co Ltd, 1969), 34.
 18. Archives Nationales du Sénégal (ANS) K14 Captivité au Soudan 1894. Cercle de Djenné Rapport sur la captivité.
 19. For a detailed discussion on royal slaves in the Sokoto Caliphate see Sean Stilwell, *Paradoxes of Power: The Kano “Mamluks” and Male Royal Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate 1804–1903* (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004).
 20. ANS K14 Captivité au Soudan 1894. Cercle de Sokolo, Etude sur la captivité.
 21. For African terms see Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 5.
 22. Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*, 3–5.
 23. Paul Lovejoy, “The Characteristics of Plantations in Nineteenth-Century Sokoto Caliphate,” *American Historical Review* 84 (1979): 1282–83.

24. Paul Lovejoy, *Slavery Commerce and Production in West Africa* (Princeton, NJ: Africa World Press, 2005), 9.
25. Mohammed Bashir Salau, *Plantation Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Historical and Comparative Study* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018), 82–84.
26. Paul E Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 191–92.
27. Richard Roberts, “Slavery, the End of Slavery, and the Intensification of Work in the French Soudan, 1883–1912,” *African Economic History* 49, no. 1 (2021): 54.
28. Martin Klein, “Women in Slavery in the Western Sudan,” in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, ed. Claire C Robertson and Martin Klein (Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 1997), 84–85.
29. Lofkrantz, “Protecting Freeborn Muslims,” 118–19. On the treatment of slaves and the avenues of manumission advocated in the Qu’ran see, for example, passages 4: 92, 5: 89, 16: 71, 24: 32, 24: 33, and 90: 13. For Malik b. Anas’ opinion, the founder of the Mālikī school of law which was the school of law followed in Islamic West Africa, see Aisha Abdurrahman Bewley *Al-Muwatta by Imam Malik ibn Anas* (London: Kegan Paul International Limited), 320–26.
30. Klein, “Women in Slavery in the Western Sudan,” 85.
31. Joseph Schacht, *An Introduction to Islamic Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1982), 129.
32. L.O. Sanneh, “Slavery, Islam and the Jakhanke People of West Africa,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 46, no. 1 (1976): 91.
33. Abī Zayd ibn al-Qayrawānī, *Risālah*. Trans. Leon Bercher, 3rd ed. (Algiers: Editions Jules Carbonel, 1949), 222–25.
34. Economic History Project, Interview with Muḥammadu Rabi’u, Fanisau, July 13, 1975. Copies of these oral interviews are held at The Tubman Institute for Research on the Global Migrations of African Peoples, York University Toronto, among other depositories.
35. Paul E. Lovejoy, “Murgu: The wages of Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate,” *Slavery & Abolition* 14, no. 1 (1993): 168–85.
36. Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery, The Womb of Iron and Gold*, trans. Alide Dasnois (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1991), 121–23.
37. See for example, Mirjam de Bruijns and Lotte Pelckmans, “Facing Dilemmas: Former Fulbe Slaves in Modern Mali,” *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 39, no. 1 (2005): 69–95; Benedetta Rossi, *From Slavery to Aid: Politics, Labor and Ecology in the Nigerien Sabel 1800–2000* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015); Marie Rodet, “Escaping Slavery and Building Diasporic Communities in French Soudan and Senegal, ca 1880–1940,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 363–86.
38. Jennifer Lofkrantz, “Ransoming Policies and Practices in the Western and Central Bilād al-Sūdān c1800-1910” (PhD diss., York University, 2008), 178–86.
39. Nigerian National Archives, Kaduna (NAK) SNP 15/1 Acc 90 Register of Freed Slaves Zaria Province 1905–1906.

40. For more on the end of slavery in British Northern Nigeria see Ibrahim M. Jumare, "The Late Treatment of Slavery in Sokoto: Background and Consequences of the 1936 Proclamation," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27, no. 2 (1994): 303–22.
41. Marie Rodet *Les migrants ignorees du Haut-Sénégal (1900–1946)* (Paris: Karthala 2009); Marie Rodet, "Migrants in French Sudan: Gender Biases in the Historiography," in *Trans-Atlantic Migration: The Paradoxes of Exile*, ed. Toyin Falola and Niyi Afolabi (New York: Routledge, 2007); Richard Roberts and Martin Klein, "The Banamba Slave Exodus of 1905 and the Decline of Slavery in the Western Sudan," *The Journal of African History* 21, no. 3 (1980): 375–94.
42. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 9–11.

FURTHER READINGS

- Jumare, Ibrahim M. "The Late Treatment of Slavery in Sokoto: Background and Consequences of the 1936 Proclamation." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 27, no. 2 (1994): 303–22.
- Last, Murray. "Slavery or Death in Sokoto and Borno: Tactics, Legalities and Sources." In *Landscapes, Sources and Intellectual Projects of the West African Past*, edited by Toby Green and Benedetta Rossi. Leiden: Brill, 2018.
- Lofkrantz, Jennifer. "Protecting Freeborn Muslims: The Sokoto Caliphate's Attempts to Prevent Illegal Enslavement and Its Acceptance of the Strategy of Ransoming." *Slavery & Abolition* 32, no. 1 (2011): 109–27.
- Lofkrantz, Jennifer, and Paul Lovejoy. "Maintaining Network Boundaries: Islamic Law and Commerce from Sahara to Guinea Shores." *Slavery & Abolition* 36, no. 2 (2015): 221–32.
- Lovejoy, Paul. *Jihād in West Africa during the Age of Revolutions*. Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2016.
- Ochonu, Moses. "Caliphate Expansion and Sociopolitical Change in Nineteenth-Century Lower Benue Hinterlands." *Journal of West African History* 1, no. 1 (2015): 133–76.
- Rodet, Marie. "Escaping Slavery and Building Diasporic Communities in French Soudan and Senegal, ca 1880–1940." *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 363–86.
- Salau, Mohammed Bashir. *Plantation Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Historical and Comparative Study*. Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2018.
- Stilwell, Sean. *Paradoxes of Power: The Kano "Mamluks" and Male Royal Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate 1804–1903*. Portsmouth, NH: Heinemann, 2004.
- Ware, Rudolph III. *The Walking Qu'ran: Islamic Education, Embodied Knowledge, and History in West Africa*. Raleigh: The University of North Carolina Press, 2014.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Urban East African Slavery

Michelle Liebst 

INTRODUCTION

Histories of urbanization and histories of slavery are closely intertwined.¹ In nineteenth-century East Africa, many towns were born out of or thrived from wealth derived from slavery. Moreover, slave labor was primarily responsible for the building of these towns. Enslaved persons quarried the stone, carried materials long distances, and constructed the buildings, including some of the more delicate architectural detail. Slaves made the towns, and significant portions of town populations consisted of slaves. Nevertheless, identifying and understanding urban slavery in East Africa remains a challenge for a contemporary scholarship, as do identify what towns of East Africa in the nineteenth century could be described as “urban” and establishing criteria to identify “urban” spaces.

The stone towns of the Swahili Coast—with access to trans-oceanic trade—hold the most visible archeological and architectural traces of East African urbanism. The connection between stone and urbanism is not arbitrary; there was a clear correlation between the ability to build in stone and coastal power, influence, and wealth, which was in turn largely derived from the ability to trade and own slaves. Yet, even the great stone towns like Lamu and Zanzibar town had significant and growing areas filled with buildings made of natural and degradable materials such as thatch, timber, and earth. These were the

M. Liebst (✉)
University College London, London, UK
e-mail: m.liebst@ucl.ac.uk

dwellings of slaves, ex-slaves, and their descendants who tended to serve the wealthier individuals living in stone houses.

The main stone towns include those of the Zanzibar and Lamu archipelagos, as well as Mombasa. There were also the smaller towns of Malindi, Pangani, Kilwa Kivungie, and Bagamoyo. All these stone towns, whose wealth was derived largely from slavery, were governed by Omani, Zanzibari, and British rule in the nineteenth century. There were also many towns that emerged from the nineteenth-century trade routes, such as Tabora, Ujiji, Kirando, Kasongo, Riba-Riba, and Mtaka. In Ujiji in the 1880s, for example, the majority of the population were enslaved persons and did not only work on plantations but also in the homes of wealthy merchants as domestic staff or as part of harems.² Although many of the people captured in the slave trade were incorporated into these relatively urban hinterland economies and societies between the Great Lakes and the coast, little is known about what it was like to be enslaved in these towns.

The social history of East Africa's towns provides perhaps the most important insight as it suggests the existence of an urban consciousness closely but complexly linked to slavery. In Pangani, Jonathan Glassman tells us that there existed an urban "plebian" consciousness potent enough to revolt against and overthrow the Omani hegemony in 1888. Whether these individuals, described at the time as "barbarians" (*washenzi*) and "young men" were indeed slaves who perhaps even created a community out of their slave identity is less clear. Yet, it is certain that newcomers (many of them slaves) flocked to urban towns, in search not only of wealth but also of the cosmopolitan cultures of town life. Most struggled to share in the wealth of the dominant patrician elite, often being reduced to menial labor or sinking into unpayable debt. Swahili proverbs often imply that slaves could not become part of respectable (urban) society. For example: "free men hold together, assist each other in word and in everything; slaves do not and cannot, because they are dependent on their master and cannot join others."³

However, newcomers were able to integrate into existing community institutions from which they were by default excluded. When turned away, they established their own institutions, such as prayer groups and Koranic schools. Dance societies, too, were a way for new arrivals to network, find communities, and even challenge the political hegemonies.⁴ Laura Fair and Patricia Romero have observed in Zanzibar and Lamu respectively distinctive fashions, music, and social events suggesting an urban consciousness among slaves and ex-slaves in the post-abolition period.⁵ Whether this urban consciousness was specifically linked to an identity of enslaved persons is difficult to track, largely because these individuals tended to use the towns to remove themselves from slavery, rather than to solidify and prolong their slave identity. Mostly, it seems that people with slave status sought to integrate and camouflage themselves into the hegemonic urban Muslim culture, and so they did not form easily-definable groups of acculturated (ex-)slaves. If there did exist an urban slave consciousness, it would have been a complex one in which people with slave

status bound themselves together, while also endeavoring to bring themselves closer to the cultures of the people who had enslaved them.

Even as we come closer to determining criteria for “urban,” distinguishing between slavery in urban areas and slavery in rural areas remains very challenging as the two were always closely related and networked.⁶ For example, the Lamu Archipelago was dependent upon the rural mainland for agricultural crops. These spaces were key meeting points between Swahili traders and non-Swahili groups in which goods were collected from the slightly more distant mainland. Moreover, urban and rural populations were far from static and there was a lot of travel for work purposes for both free and enslaved persons. Enslaved persons who worked in urban settings might live in peri-urban or rural areas. Equally, enslaved persons who worked on their master’s plantations were likely to have masters residing in town. Sometimes they lived with their masters in town and traveled to the plantations for work. Movements between town and country could also be seasonal. For example, many slave owners in the town of Zanzibar would hire out their slaves to help with the intensive harvesting periods of cloves. “Urban slavery” is, therefore, a complex phenomenon to define, and this complexity shows in itself how interrelated East African towns, villages, and hamlets were.

This chapter analyzes these interconnections through three sections. The first relates to the ways in which people came to be enslaved and were brought (eventually) to work in urban settings. The second section is about what it was like to live and work as an urban slave and how experiences depended upon gender, social status, skills, and the socio-economic status of one’s master. The third and final section explores how urban slaves became emancipated largely through their own efforts, but also with the support of their masters, and anti-slavery legislation.

ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

The peak of the slave population in Zanzibar and Pemba was reached in the 1840s and 1850s, soon after the increase in slave imports in the mid-1840s at the time of the Hamerton Treaty (among other anti-slave trade measures). In the early nineteenth century, the total volume of the East African slave trade was between 6000 and 13,000, much of which was absorbed into the Indian Ocean trade. In the 1850s, the trade between 14,000 and 15,000, and in the 1860s it increased further to 20,000.⁷ When Seyyid Barghash, the second Sultan of Zanzibar, prohibited the importation of slaves to the island in June 1873, there was a shift in demand for slaves for plantations to women and children for domestic use in Zanzibar and Oman, so urban slavery actually retained its relevance in relation to plantation slavery.⁸

The people who were traded, whether they were destined to work in urban homes or on plantations, originated mainly from the rural East African mainland. According to estimates from 1860, the majority of slaves (about 15,000 out of 19,000) came from Lake Malawi. Most of the remaining 4000 slaves

came from the Mrima coast and a minority of slaves in urban elite homes came from Uganda, Ethiopia, and Sudan.⁹ As the demand for slaves multiplied and as hinterland populations depleted in the nineteenth century, slave traders were increasingly opportunistic nearer the more urban coast.¹⁰

There were many ways in which people came into the slave trade, including war, abduction, sale, debt, or even sale of oneself. There was extensive depopulation on the East African mainland, in both towns and rural areas. This suggests that the demand for slavery in urban centers on the coast robbed hinterland areas of the chance to develop larger urban centers, unless they were along the caravan route. Some enslaved persons did not enter the coastal slave trade immediately but were rather pawned and passed several hands in the hinterland, until at some point they were sold into the coastal trade. The story of a boy of about eight years of age from the Makua region, which straddles modern-day Tanzania and Mozambique, gives some insight into the turmoil of undergoing pawnship and living as a slave in multiple homesteads:

I kept on thinking and thinking, and fancying, "I shall never get to a quiet, settled place, where there is no more going away and being sold over and over again." I kept on brooding over this, and I could not get my food down; yet some of those people pitied me, but I refused to eat. I used to say I had had enough, because I was very, very sad indeed; and, besides, I had no one to play with.¹¹

Some accounts of entering the slave trade are particularly detailed, such as the story of Swema recounted by herself in Swahili and translated by Père Anton Horner in 1866. Swema was born around 1855 in Yaoland and remembers eating well and that her family had been able to barter rice for beads, cotton, and salt with passing traders. Swema's life started to fall apart when her father, a hunter, died after being attacked by a lion. Not only did she lose her father, but locusts came and stripped the fields bare. There was famine and disease that killed all her siblings. Swema and her mother moved to a different area where they incurred debts that she was unable to pay back. As a result, Swema was seized and taken into the slave trade. Her mother struggled and pleaded to join and stay in the caravan Swema had been taken up in but, being considered well past her prime and very weak, she was unwanted by the slave traders, who beat her incessantly and eventually abandoned her on the route to the coast, revealing much about the brutality of the economics of the slave trade. Listless from her unimaginable grief, Swema finally arrived in Kilwa, where she and the other slaves were kept in a dark room for some days before departing again for Zanzibar. The arduous journey to Zanzibar by boat took six days, leaving Swema even weaker. At the slave market, orders were barked at her in a language she did not understand. She was so weak and despondent that the slave traders cut their losses, bundled her up in a straw mat, and buried her alive in a shallow grave. It was a young Creole man from Reunion who heard her muffled cries and took her to the Spiritans' mission in Zanzibar,

where she became Christian and later embarked upon a career as a nurse.¹² Narratives such as this belong to enslaved children who were declared legally free with the help of Christian missionaries on arrival in Zanzibar. Although they may not have been destined to work as urban slaves, their journeys to the coast are likely to be similar to those of many others who did end up as urban slaves.

It was logical that capturing people from distances far off from the coast reduced the risk of flight once on the coast, but not all urban slaves originated from so far into the hinterland. Some of the enslaved persons originated from areas much closer to the coast. This was true of Mombasa, for instance, as a flight to the nearby mainland was not always easy as patrons were well connected and frequently helped each other trace runaway slaves (this was less true of Zanzibar). Moreover, there are stories of people from the nearby hinterland being tempted onto ships with promises of better livelihoods further north, only to be taken out to sea to be disorientated, then taken to Mombasa.¹³ Especially for enslaved young people who had never traveled beyond their homesteads, this kind of trickery may well have worked.

Sometimes, the centers in which slavery was most institutionalized could be vulnerable to slave raiding. In the 1850s, there was a spate of traders from Oman and the Persian Gulf abducting slaves from both town and country in Pemba, Mombasa, and Zanzibar. The Consul of Zanzibar reported on 28 March 1860 that:

Zanzibar resembles a city with a hostile army encamped in its neighborhood. Every person who is able to do so, sends his children and young slaves into the interior of the island for security, people are afraid to stir out of their houses after dark, reports are daily made of children and slaves kidnapped and in the suburbs of the town. They even enter the houses and take the children away by force.¹⁴

Ironically, these abductions seem to have been a consequence of the enhanced patrolling of the slave trade, which had made acquiring slaves even more desirable.¹⁵

So, once enslaved, slaves could be vulnerable to re-enslavement and abduction, even in urban areas like Zanzibar. Some arrived as slaves in urban centers having already worked as slaves in rural areas. However, most of the enslaved persons who had recently been taken from their homes on the mainland were destined for plantation slavery on the coast or the Middle East. There was little appetite among slave owners living in the towns of East Africa for slaves recently arrived via the caravan route. Urban slaves who lived and worked in the homes of their masters tended to be *wazalia* (s. *mzalia*), meaning “born here.”¹⁶ “Here” could either mean the actual house of their owner, or it could carry a more general meaning of “here in the town.” Thus, most enslaved persons who entered urban slavery were second or third generation slaves. Therefore, their entry into slavery was usually from birth. These *wazalia* spoke

Swahili and were more assimilated than slaves who had recently arrived. This notion of being more assimilated is central to how urban slavery has been conceived by scholars and will be explored in the following section that deals with the spectrum of exploitation, coercion, and violence that people living and working as urban slaves experienced.

EXTRACTION OF LABOR DURING SLAVERY

Enslaved persons who lived and worked in urban areas in East Africa experienced varied levels of exploitation, coercion, violence, and social stigma. What it was like to be an urban slave depended on a number of factors, including the slave's gender, the slave's social status, whether the slave lived in their master's home, as well as the social and economic status of the masters. The conditions of a slave depended greatly upon the financial security—or lack thereof—of their owners. Some of the worst abuses towards slaves occurred when slave owners had turned out slaves who had become sick, as they could not afford to look after them. This was increasingly the case towards the end of the nineteenth century when the economic impact of the collapse in clove prices truly made its mark. To take an example from 1895, in which a slave mistress beat Jamili, her slave of about eleven years, then tied her by the arm to a tree. Following this incident, Jamili's arm swelled so much that the rope could not be removed. Jamili's arm was then cut off and she was sent out to live on the street.¹⁷ This shows that not all slave owners in the towns were wealthy and that this lack of wealth sometimes aggravated the conditions of enslavement.

The slaves who lived with their urban elite masters played mostly non-commercial functions. In 1842, Hamerton wrote that, "a man's wealth and respectability in the dominions of the Imam of Muskat is always estimated by the number of African slaves he is said to possess."¹⁸ Likewise, Ephraim A. Emmerton, a Salem merchant who regularly visited Zanzibar, declared in 1849 that, "[s]laves are owned here because it is fashionable to have them, not because it is profitable."¹⁹ The social value of having slaves visible in the household, rather than hidden in the clove farms that gentile society did not visit, is reflected in prices for slaves as plantation slaves were sold for only £5–8, while domestic servants were sold for £12–25.²⁰ Not all elite slave owners thought this way. Some considered the accumulation of slaves as a demonstration of wealth was a needless extravagance. They would therefore have their slaves trained in various trades, potentially hired out for a profit, and thus reduced their household expenditure.²¹ No doubt slave owners were increasingly likely to think this way amidst the economic downturn of the late nineteenth century.

In Swahili coastal towns, slaves who lived in the households of their masters were usually *wazalia* and this, along with their proximity to the urban centers, granted slaves some social status. It is noteworthy that "*mshenzi*" (a "raw slave" or, more generally it could mean "barbarian" or "foreigner," pl. *washenzi*) and "*mjinga*" ("idiot slave," pl. *wajinga*) carried the suggestion of

rural origins and were obviously derogatory. So, through these terms, we see that the social status of slaves varied depending on whether they were seen as coming from the country or the city. These views were not just held by elites, but even by slaves. While studying the impact of cholera in Zanzibar, Dr. James Christie also observed that “The town negroes look down upon their country cousins with a good deal of contempt, and consider themselves a superior class.”²² Representing the other end of the social scale are words like “*uungwana*” (“civilization”) and “*uarabu*” or “*ustaarabu*” (“Arabness”) that are associated with Islam and the architectural and clothing fashions of the urban coast. The *wazalia* urban slaves occupied a position somewhere between the extremes of enslaved *ushenzi* (“barbarianism”) and freeborn *uungwana* (meaning something akin to refined urban Muslim civilization). They seem to have been treated like fictive kin, were trusted to work independently, and usually had some knowledge of Islamic teaching. *Wazalia*, by demonstrating their loyalty through years of service, could climb to positions of considerable authority as politicians, plantation supervisors, caravan leaders, traders, dhow captains, or skilled artisans. For instance, Emily Ruete (then Seyyida Salme of Zanzibar) was taught calligraphy by one of the Sultan’s slaves (most likely a *mzalia*) “who was notoriously proficient in the art, to the dignity of writing master.”²³ This is all to say that the social status of urban slaves was extremely varied and linked closely to their proximity to the town and assimilation to urban culture.

Urban slaves were also sometimes allowed to hire themselves out, this was less often the case in very rural parts. Hire slaves were known as *vibarua* (s. *kibarua*) and had to share a portion—usually half—of their wages with their master. The owner’s financial share of the *kibarua*’s labor often changed over time. For example, in the case of Rashid bin Hassani, who worked as a *kibarua* in the late nineteenth century, he gave over all his wages to his mistress, Bibi Zem-Zem, but once he was married, he kept his entire wage. As he described it, he was “merely under Bibi Zem-Zem’s protection.”²⁴ Male *vibarua* work was very varied and could include building work, carpentry, boatbuilding, smithing, sailing, and load-carrying. Meanwhile, although female *vibarua* did sometimes work as porters, they tended to be more commonly forced into sex work, or performed household work such as cooking and water fetching. *Vibarua* tended to be *wazalia* who had gained the trust of their owners. Many of them lived with their owners, but some lived in their own homes. In the latter cases, these slaves could accumulate enough wealth to rebuild their homes with lime and stone, or to have some domestic slaves of their own. For landless or newly arrived people—whether slaves or free—acquiring slaves to hire out was a common strategy that could help garner both wealth and status. There was a significant market for this kind of work, especially when European and Indian traders could not legally own slaves (from 1860 as per the Indian Penal Code), while also not being able to easily acquire non-slave labor.

Some female slaves in both town and country were classed as “*suria*.” “*Suria*” were female slaves who had sexual relations with their owners, who

they were not legally married to. Their status was both variable and precarious. Although the children of *suria* were legally free according to Islamic law, their status could be ambivalent. In Lamu it was believed that *suria* contaminated her offspring. In Zanzibar, *suria* and their children were more likely to suffer from status struggles if they belonged to non-elite families. The account of Emilie Ruete suggests that concubines in Sultan's palace were highly regarded, and it is noteworthy that her own mother was a Circassian concubine, and Ruete had nonetheless inherited a sizeable fortune upon the death of her father Seyyid Said. Many of Said's sons, such as Seyyid Barghash, who became Sultans, were children of concubines.

Vijakazi (female slaves working within the household, s. *kijakazi*²⁵) were mostly young women who were also *wazalia* and tended to live with their masters in urban areas. These slaves were greatly valued, fetching higher prices than unskilled male slaves of the same age group and also higher than older women.²⁶ *Vijakazi* would carry out domestic work such as cooking, cleaning, washing laundry, fetching water, and sometimes fieldwork. In less affluent homes, the mistress of the house would perform these tasks alongside them.²⁷ Sometimes *vijakazi* were given gifts of money or earned money from selling foodstuffs.²⁸ *Vijakazi* (and, for that matter, *suria*) who refused the sexual demands of their owners were sent out to the fields to work. There was a proverb that went: *kijakazi kina meno chauma/sikitaki tenna, kipileke shamba/kikalime*, meaning, "the slave girl has teeth, she bites/I do not want her any longer, send her to the fields/to do agricultural work."²⁹ This proverb is telling about both the potential for the sexual exploitation of *vijakazi*, but also the likely preference for work in the town as opposed to the plantations. Conversely, though, it may have been that work in more rural parts offered some an escape from sexual abuse.

For many elites, who tended to live in towns, slaves acted as an extension of the self and their owners shaped their dress and comportment in order to represent their own perceived identity. Elite women, in particular, had their *vijakazi* do things that were considered improper for them to do themselves, such as going outside, spreading gossip, or attending dances. The female slaves of elite families carried umbrellas to hide their mistresses from the sun and male onlookers. For more complete coverage, groups of slave women sometimes carried coverings known as *ramba* or *shiraa* around their mistresses. Other tasks might include massaging their mistress to sleep, while another gently fans her. At the weddings of freeborn women, they would get their skin rubbed with ground sandalwood, and have their hands and feet painted by slave women. The kinds of female slaves who performed these tasks were often referred to as *wapambe*. The term comes from the verb "*-pamba*" (to adorn) but it is unclear whether it was the *wapambe* themselves who were adorned or did the work of adorning their mistresses, or both. The meaning of the term has changed dramatically since, to mean "bodyguard," though the sense of a person serving their master or employer closely still remains.³⁰

Household slaves, who were mostly women, often held very intimate relationships with their town-dwelling owners. The case of slave women who looked after elite slave owners' children illustrates this point. In Ruete's autobiography, she explains that slaves who looked after royal children were "highly esteemed and honoured as long as they lived" and "as a rule they are freed as reward for their fidelity and devotion." They were also seen as "second mothers" to the children. Ruete believed that the slave nurses of Zanzibar were far superior to the nurses available for employment in Germany, the country she fled to in order to marry her German husband. She mused that this was probably because German nurses tended to have their own children, and working away from home was a huge sacrifice for them. Meanwhile, for the enslaved childcarer in Zanzibar:

She has been in [her master's] service for years, may even have been born in her house: thus, her own interests and those of her master's are closely knitted together. And further, there may be added a circumstance of much weight—a black nurse is not required to part with her child, but frequently, if not always, she retains it. The child of the nurse receives the same nourishment as its little foster brother or sister, shares its pap.³¹

Likewise, Bi Kaje, a woman who grew up in a slave-owning family in Mombasa and whose life has been recorded in oral history, remembered many of the slaves in her household affectionately. In many ways, they seemed to be treated much like part of the family, especially when they had become Muslim and acculturated to freeborn Swahili norms and practices.

Despite the widespread notion of slaves working in the master's urban household as being "family," status distance between them was always maintained. Slaves had to show deference to their masters at all times. For instance, they could not wear shoes in the presence of their masters and were not allowed to wear any kind of headdress or veil.³² In addition, they were rarely given names of the Prophet and His descendants. Although slaves were able to marry, they required consent from their masters. In addition, male slaves usually had to pay about five Maria Theresa Thalers, or a *kilemba* (turban). When showing their masters obedience, they would say "*shikamoo*" (a contracted version of "*nashika miguu yako*," or "I clasp your feet"). Composed in the 1850s, the poem, "The Advice of Mwana Kupona upon the Wifely Duty," instructed that a proper freeborn wife should ensure social distance was maintained between themselves and their slaves. It is noteworthy that this was an extremely popular poem that was often recited in the 1930s. It is difficult to determine how slaves perceived and personally experienced their social status, though there is evidence to suggest that slaves themselves used particularly dehumanizing language to describe enslaved persons. For instance, an Anglican missionary in Zanzibar observed that "among the poorer class and slave population of Zanzibar," a slave might be called "*chitu*" (a "vulgar pronunciation" of "*kitu*" meaning "thing"; newly arrived slaves in

Zanzibar tended to pronounce “ki” as “ch.”³³ This implies a sense of feeling like inalienable and poorly treated property.

Porterage increasingly offered distinct opportunities for emancipation and upward mobility that many male slaves felt were worth the risk in the face of the great dangers of joining caravans. Slave masters rarely exercised their legal right to stop their slaves from joining caravans, so many were able to do so. Just as entering slavery involved a migration from the hinterland to the coast, escaping slavery often involved joining trade caravans that would take slaves from the coast into the hinterland, and with good fortune, they were likely to return with increased wealth to spend in the towns. Porters did not only gain wealth through transporting goods; many of them traded goods they had produced themselves or offered services wherever they ventured. *Fundi* (pl. *mafundi*) was the term designated to trained artisans or craftspeople, who were often *wazalia*. *Mafundi* rarely stayed put in the towns. In fact, it was through travel and porterage that they acquired wealth, status, and networks.³⁴ However, life on the road was hard and limited the more leisurely time people preferred to spend in towns. Proverbs such as “*msafiri masikini ajapokuwa sultani*,” meaning “a traveler is poor, even if he be a sultan,” evoke this sense that the pursuit of wealth through travel could undermine one’s enjoyment of life.³⁵ Another drawback was that Indian merchants, who were not allowed to own slaves themselves, often had slaves bound to them through debt. Because entrepreneur slaves required capital to conduct independent trade while working as porters, for instance, they sought loans from Indian financiers. Thus, some slaves in pursuit of wealth accumulation could find themselves entrapped by more than one master, though legally slave owners were obliged to foot the bill of their slaves’ debt.

A unique feature of urban slaves in East Africa was their tendency to be assimilated into hegemonic Arab culture. This came with many benefits as higher social status tended to open doors to better and more secure livelihoods. However, the proximity to one’s master, coupled with the high level of surveillance characteristic of the Swahili towns, may have felt oppressive. As for the nature of the urban slave’s labor, it was more variable than the kind of work that existed for slaves in the countryside. Urban slaves could live quite independently by hiring themselves out or working in intimate contact with their masters whom they maintained contact with long after abolition. Indeed, the nature of the terms upon which the urban slave was bound to their master had an enormous bearing upon their options for exiting slavery, as shall be discussed in the next section.

EXITS FROM SLAVERY

There were varied ways in which urban slaves could cease being slaves, and some of these predated anti-slavery legislation. One method was to physically escape. Naturally, *watoro* (fugitive slaves) would aim for destinations where they could hide from their owners and avoid re-enslavement.³⁶ Some fled to

Christian mission stations, often, where they would usually have to conceal (often without great difficulty) the fact that they had been enslaved. These mission stations would usually be situated on the outskirts of urban centers (so as to be removed from the temptations to sin those cities presented, as the European missionaries' logic had it), but some became very large. Typically, it was rural slaves who fled to urban areas where they were more likely to be absorbed into the growing urban population with little chance of retribution from their former owners. However, in some areas, it was more likely for urban slaves to flee to comparatively rural areas. On the Kenyan coast especially, both urban and rural slaves fled to *watoro* settlements, which tended to be heavily barricaded and afforded them some protection from their masters. Though these settlements were in rural locations, some of them were extremely large and powerful. The best example is that of the Sultanate of Witu, which was founded in 1867 by Fumo Lotti, a chief who had been outlawed by the Sultan of Zanzibar and welcomed over 10,000 *watoro*. However, slavery continued in this area, and some *watoro* were sent back to their former owners, so it was not necessarily a route to emancipation. Still, many slaves tried to flee their masters, even after the enactment of anti-slavery legislation, which was often partial in its coverage. As for the urban slaves who fled, it has been argued that they were not fleeing the urban environment but rather the masters and terms of their enslavement; many of these urban slaves would look to other urban settings to benefit from a fuller role in urban institutions of commerce and community.³⁷

According to Islamic law and custom, slaves could and should be manumitted upon the owner's death. Manumission was much more commonplace in the town than in the countryside, where slaves were working on financially critical plantations. For example, Sultan Said manumitted thousands of concubines, soldiers, domestics, and messengers, but his plantation slaves remained enslaved. Seyyid Barghash, too, ensured that all his "town slaves",³⁸ who numbered more than 3000, as well as the slaves in his army and the concubines in his harem, were freed upon his death. As such, Dr. Christie estimated that nearly half the town's population was made up of manumitted slaves.³⁹ Ironically, anti-slavery legislation made slave owners less willing to manumit their slaves as slaves were in increasingly high demand and owners were particularly reluctant to part with them.⁴⁰ Still, even after Seyyid Hamoud, the Sultan of Zanzibar between 1896 and 1902, passed the 1897 abolition decree, which contained a promise of monetary compensation, some slave owners did opt to manumit their slaves under Islamic law, perhaps following the lead of the sultan himself who manumitted hundreds of slaves after passing this decree.⁴¹

In Zanzibar, most manumitted slaves lived on land given to them by their former owners. In the 1830s, years before moving his capital from Muscat to Zanzibar, Seyyid Said (Sultan of Oman, 1807–1856) took possession of such a piece of land, called Kiungani (meaning "in the suburbs"), and used it as a way to maintain ties between himself, the Busaidi dynasty, and his manumitted

slaves.⁴² Successive sultans who reigned over Zanzibar followed suit, sometimes charging the former slaves rent. Indeed, the practice of charging rent became increasingly commonplace through the emancipation process, which was in turn met with objections on the part of ex-slaves and their descendants. The united refusal to pay rent in Ng'ambo, Zanzibar, culminated in the 1928 rent strike.

So, manumission did not equal complete emancipation, though ties to one's former owners were not necessarily undesirable for ex-slaves. In some cases, personal relationships between former masters and former slaves were very long-lasting. This was probably especially true for unmarried women or aging individuals. As such, this is the story of Baadadhiki recounted by her mistress, Bi Mariamu in Mombasa:

Baadadhiki, her work was to cook in the kitchen. She didn't marry. She was married where she came from [Yao territory]; when she came here she didn't marry again. She was granted her freedom by Mwana Hadija. She freed her in writing: "She is not my slave. I have used her many days. It's over. Now she is a *buru* [freed slave]." Still Baadadhiki accompanied her to places. For example, if there were somewhere to spend the day, a wedding, Mwana Hadija said, "Let's both go." They both spent the day. If there were food and she wanted to take some, she would do so. [When Mwana Hadija died,] she stayed with a slave from the same household (my father's concubine who had been married off to another man and lived in her own quarters).⁴³

Here, we might conclude that maintaining master-slave relationships was desirable for personal and economic reasons. Manumission was, for many, preferable to claiming legal freedom through the colonial courts as the ex-slaves freed by the abolition decree were thought of as slaves of the government, who had, the logic went, paid for them with the compensation money.⁴⁴

In many ways, claiming emancipation through anti-slavery legislation did shift the control from slave owners to the government. For example, article five of the 1897 abolition act dictated that ex-slaves were liable to be charged as vagrants if they did not have an employer, landlord, or patron to vouch for them. Consequently, individuals in the town who the British officials identified as "vagrants" were rounded up and taken to work on plantations. This vagrancy article was the first of many legal measures to attempt to control the labor of able-bodied workers.⁴⁵ Perhaps the greatest limitation was the lack of provision for concubines, which was due to British fears that they would turn to sex work if freed. Both the 1897 and 1907 abolition decrees stated that the law would only allow concubines to claim freedom on the grounds of cruelty. The 1907 ordinance was amended in 1909 to include concubines, but they required the consent of their owners to both claim freedom and "continue to be entitled to all the rights and privileges which they have previously enjoyed under the Mohammedan Law" (e.g. inheritance). Also, concubines who left their masters without their consent would lose custody of their children.

Despite the skepticism towards abolition and its significant limitations, anti-slavery legislation was an important way in which slaves—both urban and rural—were able to emancipate themselves. In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, several decrees were issued that allowed slaves to claim legal freedom in East Africa. These included those of 1890, 1897, 1907, and 1909. Little is known about how these decrees affected urban and rural areas differently but it seems that urban slaves were more likely to claim legal emancipation. Following the 1897 decree, 64 percent of the slaves on Zanzibar island who claimed emancipation lived in the city. It is thought that many of these urban slaves were *vibarua* who saw an opportunity to rid themselves of the duty to pay part of their earnings to their owners. For other *vibarua*—especially those who were older—they preferred to continue paying their owners so as to maintain their relationship with their owner in case they needed to turn to them in hard times.

Yet, equally, there is also reason to believe that urban slaves—especially those who had converted to Islam and integrated into coastal culture—were less likely to claim freedom through the anti-slavery legislation. In Lamu, urban slaves who had converted to Islam were taught that these secular laws had no bearing on their situation: according to Muslim law, slaves could only be freed by their masters. In addition, slaves of elites (many of whom resided in urban centers) were less likely to claim freedom because they had more to lose from cutting off ties with their patrons. This was especially true for the slaves of elite owners who were status symbols. These individuals often lacked the training and transferrable skills that could help them get work elsewhere, and many had little choice but to remain dependent on their owners. Thus, although the majority of slaves who claimed legal freedom resided in urban areas, it did not follow that most urban slaves claimed legal freedom.

Legal abolition sparked the migrations of ex-slaves from plantations to the towns, not necessarily for paid work. In Kenya, young Mijikenda males would travel to Mombasa to work unpaid and gain experience as *watumishi* (servants) while also taking Koranic studies. When they completed this training, they would often search for well-paid jobs as domestic servants in colonial households. In Zanzibar, many ex-slaves gravitated to the town, which was a refuge from dependent relations. Many of the ex-slaves educated by missions did so, too, finding and developing new networks beyond the small Christian community, much to the despair of missionaries.⁴⁶ Wage labor was relatively plentiful in import-export houses, as well as in domestic service and government. Urban wages were also much higher than those that could be found in rural parts. When wages rose due to unusually heavy crops, urban workers found temporary work on the plantations.

Although many household slaves in urban areas were women, it was also true that females were less likely to escape agricultural slavery than males. The main ways out of agricultural slavery were to join the caravan trade or become a craftsperson. However, women were excluded from these opportunities, largely because their male counterparts prohibited them from doing so.

For women slaves, concubinage was the most likely route out of agricultural slavery but this was rife with risk and, even if they were to reach the highest possible status in a household as a concubine, they would probably never be able to manage their own household.⁴⁷

Post-abolition, many ex-slaves maintained relationships with their former owners. Interviews with Muslim women in Mombasa in the 1970s by Margaret Strobel revealed as much. One woman who belonged to a slave-owning family spoke of the closeness between her and one of their former slaves:

She was like my mother, so in the morning she would come and sweep for me. She lived in her own rented house. In the morning she came to sweep for me, she drew water for me, she cooked food for me. That's it, children have been born there, and she has raised them and made them like her own. You can't come and tell her, "do this." [...] Once the British had come, you didn't dare to call a person a slave. Mama, that's all. You send her on errands, she is useful to you if she wants to be herself, out of her own kindness.⁴⁸

An anonymous informant from Mombasa conveys a different way of looking at these kinds of situations as evidence of the persistence of the slave-master dynamic:

Nowadays people are not sold [as slaves], but something persists. They know that they cannot come to us inappropriately and say, "I want my child to marry yours." We attend weddings and dances together, but they know their place. There is one thing, however; if a child of ours wants to set up household with them, it is the child's own business. [...] Even nowadays, people are not [considered to be] of one kind [i.e., equal]. Even if we see that his thoughts are good, he will not receive a wife from us. We go to weddings together, but the matter of intermarriage creates problems. Older people still do not approve.⁴⁹

As Strobel's informants suggest, even when slaves managed to attain legal emancipation and secure livelihoods, the hardest thing to shift was slave status, which even today can compromise a slave descendant's claim to citizenship. In Kenya, the descendants of slaves are still referred to as "*wageni*" (foreigners). A good example of contemporary discrimination based on slave genealogies is the case of the self-named "Freretownians" of Mombasa, who are mobilizing politically to be recognized as an ethnic group. The importance of being part of an ethnic group officially recognized by the Kenyan government is colossal as without this (or without marrying a person who is part of a recognized ethnic group), one cannot get an identity card, which is essential for gaining access to state social welfare, schooling, and healthcare. The Freretownians are descended from the ex-slaves and *watoro*, living in Frere Town or other surrounding mission settlements, who the CMS gave land in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. At this time, Frere Town would not have been considered "urban." Moreover, the inhabitants of the mission station

were, at least in theory, legally freed slaves rescued through anti-slavery patrols and free persons from the surrounding areas, though many were likely to have been slaves fleeing their masters in Mombasa. Despite its rural beginnings, Frere town eventually became an important part of Mombasa city, by which point the land was classified as church property and much of it was sold to private enterprises, though it had been maintained for decades by the slave descendants who had valid titles for the land. The Freretownians are not an isolated case. Similar challenges are faced by people on the coast who have struggled with stigma as they live on land (much of which had been rural and is now urban, and thus more valuable) owned by former slave owners. So, while slavery as a labor practice is rare in East Africa, the social, economic, and political impact of slavery system is still great. And, although the ascendants of these individuals may not have been urban slaves, the difficulties of their predicament, namely their landlessness, are enhanced by recent urbanization.

CONCLUSION

There were several urban centers of East Africa, and their prosperity, size, and influence were derived largely from slavery. Yet there was significant overlap between urban and rural slavery, so much so that “urban slavery” proves to be a problematic analytical category. Many slaves who had resided with their masters in towns moved to peri-urban settlements when they were manumitted, often benefitting from access to the land courtesy of their former masters. Many rural slaves flocked to the towns once they had their freedom papers, but were then subject to coerced labor under local businesspeople or the colonial government, who might label them “vagrants.” Urban slaves often shared intimate relationships with their masters, which suggests that towns fostered a sense of loyalty between the enslaved and the slavers. However, towns were also a refuge for *watoro* who would hide themselves in the growing maze-like mud and thatch townships that developed on the edges of the main Swahili towns. Equally, on the plantations there were some slaves whose owners entrusted them with much responsibility, to help oversee and manage the slave labor force, so there was some variation in the roles of slaves in rural areas.

Still, slavery in urban spaces was distinctive compared to the forms of slavery that existed in rural parts. Firstly, most urban slaves had been enslaved for a long time or were second- or third-generation slaves. This was in contrast to the enslaved who were exported into the Indian Ocean trade, or those who populated plantations. Secondly, slavery in urban areas was more varied according to the more varied social and economic standing of slave owners and forms of labor they tried to extract from their slaves. Thirdly, in terms of exiting slavery, slaves of elites—who tended to live in urban environments—had a good chance of being manumitted. Hire slaves who had already carved out ways of making independent livelihoods were also likely to claim emancipation once slavery became illegal. The distinction between town and country

would have felt very stark for people at the time, even if in practice lives and livelihoods constantly transgressed it. The enslaved who rebelled or resisted were threatened with exile to the countryside. Meanwhile, many rural slaves sought the opportunities available in the town. Lacking ties in the city could make slaves more vulnerable. The town and the communities within it that some urban slaves belonged to, were assets. Yet, like all communities have the potential to be, they could be oppressive and force slaves deeper into relationships in which they were irrevocably confined. These dependent relationships characterized Swahili towns and, in some cases, also contributed to their downfall as they became increasingly impoverished and comparatively insignificant in the shadow of leading economic centers such as Nairobi and Dar es Salaam in the twentieth century.

NOTES

1. This paper was written as part of the project, *African Abolitionism: The Rise and Transformations of Anti-Slavery in Africa* (AFRAB), which has received funding from the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's Horizon 2020 research and innovation programme (grant agreement No. [885418]).
2. Paul E. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa* (Cambridge University Press, 2011), 225–26.
3. Johann Ludwig Krapf, *A Dictionary of the Swahili Language* (London: Trübner and Co., 1882), 269.
4. Glassman, *Feasts and Riot: Revelry, Rebellion, and Popular Consciousness on the Swahili Coast, 1856–1888* (Portsmouth, NH: James Currey, 1995).
5. Laura Fair, *Pastimes and Politics: Culture, Community, and Identity in Post-Abolition Urban Zanzibar, 1890–1945* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2001); Patricia W. Romero, *Lamu: History, Society, and Family in an East African Port City* (Princeton: Markus Wiener, 1997).
6. G. H. O. Abungu and H. W. Muturo, “Coast-Interior Settlements and Social Relations in the Kenya Hinterland,” in *The Archaeology of Africa: Food, Metals and Towns*, eds. Bassey Andah, et al. (London: Routledge, 2014), 694–704.
7. Abdul Sheriff, *Slaves, Spices, & Ivory in Zanzibar: Integration of an East African Commercial Empire Into the World Economy, 1770–1873* (London: James Currey, 1987), 60.
8. Edward A. Alpers, “Representations of Children in the East African Slave Trade,” *Slavery & Abolition* 30, no. 1 (2009): 27–40.
9. Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery*, 230.
10. Hideaki Suzuki, *Slave Trade Profiteers in the Western Indian Ocean: Suppression and Resistance in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017).
11. A. C. Madan, ed., *Kiungani, or, Story and History from Central Africa* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1887), 41.
12. Edward A. Alpers, “The Story of Swema: Female Vulnerability in Nineteenth-Century East Africa,” in Claire Robertson and Martin A. Klein, eds., *Women and Slavery in Africa* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1983), 185–219.

13. Justin Willis, *Mombasa, the Swahili, the Making of the Mijikenda* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993).
14. Cited by Suzuki, *Slave Trade Profiteers*, 102.
15. Suzuki, *Slave Trade Profiteers*, 103.
16. William Ernest Taylor, *African Aphorisms: Or, Saws from Swahili-Land* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1891), 78; Carol Eastman, "Service, 'Slavery' (Utumwa) and Swahili Social Reality," *Afrikanistische Arbeitspapiere* 37 (1994): 91.
17. J. P. Farler, "Second Letter from the Rev J. P. Farler," *Central Africa*, September 1895.
18. Hamerton to the Secretary to the Bombay Government, Zanzibar, 2 January 1842, Zanzibar National Archives, AA12/29/43.
19. Norman Robert Bennett and George E. Brooks, *New England Merchants in Africa: A History Through Documents, 1802 to 1865* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1965), 427.
20. Frederick Cooper, *Plantation Slavery on the East Coast of Africa* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1977), 195–196.
21. Emilie Ruete, *Arabian Princess* (Leiden: Brill, 1993), 81.
22. James Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa, from 1821 till 1872* (London, n.p., 1876), 312.
23. Ruete, *Arabian Princess*, 45.
24. Margery Perham, ed., *Ten Africans* (London: Faber, 1963), 99.
25. Older female slaves were called *wajakazi* (s. *mjakazi*).
26. Jan-Georg Deutsch, "Prices for Female Slaves and Changes in Their Life Cycle: Evidence from German East Africa," in Gwyn Campbell, Suzanne Miers, and Joseph C. Miller, *Women and Slavery*, vol. 1 (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2007).
27. Katrin Bromber, "Mjakazi, Mpambe, Mjoli, Suria: Female Slaves in Swahili Sources," in *Women and Slavery*, 111–28.
28. Deutsch, "Prices for Female Slaves and Changes in Their Life Cycle".
29. C. Velten, *Desturi za Wasuaheli, na khabari za desturi za sheri'a za Wasuaheli* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1903), 394.
30. Bromber, "Mjakazi".
31. Ruete, *Arabian Princess*, 65–66.
32. Fair, "Dressing Up".
33. Madan, *Swahili-English Dictionary*, 34, 122.
34. Glassman, *Feasts*, 75, 78.
35. Taylor, *African Aphorisms*, 70 no. 310.
36. Edward A. Alpers and Matthew S. Hopper, "Speaking for Themselves? Understanding African Freed Slave Testimonies from the Western Indian Ocean, 1850s-1930s," *The Journal of Indian Ocean World Studies* 1, no. 1 (2017): 72.
37. Glassman, *Feasts*, 108.
38. The English translation of the will used the phrase, "town slaves." No. 56 Euan Smith to Lord Salisbury, Zanzibar, 7 April 1888, FO 84/1906, UKNA.
39. Christie, *Cholera Epidemics in East Africa*, 303–5.
40. Elisabeth McMahon, "Trafficking and Reenslavement: The Social Vulnerability of Women and Children in Nineteenth-Century East Africa," in *Trafficking in Slavery's Wake: Law and the Experience of Women and Children in Africa*, eds. N. Lawrance Benjamin and L. Roberts Richard (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2012), 39.

41. Frederick Cooper, *From Slaves to Squatters: Plantation Labor and Agriculture in Zanzibar and Coastal Kenya, 1890–1925* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1980), 74.
42. Fair, *Pastimes*, 118.
43. Strobel, “Slavery and Reproductive Labor,” in *Women and Slavery in Africa*, 126.
44. Cooper, *Slaves to Squatters*, 76.
45. *Ibid.*, 116–17.
46. Michelle Liebst, *Labor and Christianity in the Mission: African Workers in Tanganyika and Zanzibar, 1864–1926* (Oxford: James Currey, 2021).
47. Glassman, *Feasts*, 90–91.
48. Strobel, “Slavery and Reproductive Labor,” 126.
49. Strobel, *Muslim Women in Mombasa, 1890–1975* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), 18.

FURTHER READINGS

- Becker, Felicitas. *Becoming Muslim in Mainland Tanzania 1890–2000*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008.
- . “Female Seclusion in the Aftermath of Slavery on the Southern Swahili Coast: Transformations of Slavery in Unexpected Places.” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 48, no. 2 (2015): 209–II.
- Brennan, James R., Andrew Burton, and Yussuf Lawi, eds. *Dar Es Salaam: Histories from an Emerging African Metropolis*. Dar es Salaam: Mkuki Na Nyota, 2007.
- Gooding, Philip. “Slavery, ‘Respectability,’ and Being ‘Freeborn’ on the Shores of Nineteenth-Century Lake Tanganyika.” *Slavery & Abolition* 40, no. 1 (2019): 147–67.
- Morton, Fred. *Children of Ham: Freed Slaves and Fugitive Slaves on the Kenya Coast, 1873 to 1907*. London: Routledge, 1990.
- Rockel, Stephen J. “‘A Nation of Porters’: The Nyamwezi and the Labor Market in Nineteenth-Century Tanzania.” *Journal of African History* 41, no. 2 (2000): 173–95.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in South Asia

Emma Kalb 

INTRODUCTION

This chapter addresses the complex history of slavery in South Asia during the early modern and colonial periods. This period witnessed a diverse range of practices that can be considered under this rubric, from household slavery and concubinage to military and agrarian slavery; it also witnessed both shifts and continuities in practice and discourse in the midst of profound political transformations. In fact, to talk about slavery in this broad geographical area, during this period of history, is to straddle divisions of polity, language, and era. To compare slavery in contexts as divergent as the North Indian Mughal Empire, Portuguese Goa, and British India within such a short essay entails a great deal of simplification. Nevertheless, this chapter can provide a useful starting point for thinking through the numerous forms of, and beliefs surrounding, slavery in this region during this period, as well as the kinds of shifts that occurred in the wake of the emergence of colonialism and abolitionism. What we find, as Richard Eaton notes, is not “a single story of slavery,” or a “tidy sequence of evolutionary ‘stages,’”¹ but rather many different stories taking place in many different contexts, that may or may not relate one to the other. While it may not necessarily be productive to consider so many different practices under the single rubric of “South Asian slavery,”²

E. Kalb (✉)
Bonn Center for Dependency and Slavery Studies,
University of Bonn, Bonn, Germany
e-mail: ekalb@uni-bonn.de

if we consider instead a range of South Asian *slaveries*, we can avoid presuming similarities or commonalities between disparate examples, and arrive at a more accurate understanding of our subject.

PRELIMINARIES: ON TERMINOLOGY

The identification of slavery and enslaved individuals in early modern and colonial South Asia as well as the distinction between slavery and other forms of servitude are ongoing challenges for understanding slavery in South Asian history. Many scholars have argued against imposing a modern, post-enlightenment strict binary definition of slavery here, categorizing individuals as simply either enslaved or free.³ While some individuals were unequivocally identified as slaves who had been bought or gifted, many other social positionalities blurred such sharp binary distinctions. Aside from the existence of other highly coercive forms of labor, however, we encounter difficulties even on the fundamental question of identifying enslaved individuals. Although there are a range of words that unequivocally mean “slave” in early modern South Asian languages, including terms such as *ghulām* and *banda* (from Persian) and *dāsa* or *dāsī* (from Sanskrit), these same terms are also used in historical sources to simply denote loyal service and devotion. Thus, for instance, one sees references in the Mughal context to (free) nobles as *banda-yi darjāh* (slaves of the court).⁴

Furthermore, a range of terms blur the lines between slave and other categories denoting relations of servitude, kinship, and discipleship. In the north Indian context, the Hindi term *chela* can denote either slave or disciple;⁵ the Persian *kanīz* and *parastār* refer to either female servants or female slaves. Guha discusses a similar challenge with the Marathi terms *batik* (etymology unknown) and *kunbini* (derived from the term for “household woman”), used for female “servile dependents” in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Maratha territories; he also notes that familial terminology is also employed, such that in much documentation the words *batik* and *muli* (daughter) are used interchangeably.⁶

These categories have also been redefined at several historical moments, due to attempts to (at least theoretically) curtail or ban enslavement and slavery. During the Mughal period, the Emperor Akbar (r. 1556–1605) took several actions against practices related to slavery. As described by court historian Abū al-Fazl, Akbar first issued an order forbidding the enslavement of the female relatives and children of enemy combatants in his seventh regnal year; other sources record that Akbar subsequently also moved to ban the sale of slaves. It is worth noting, with reference to the above discussion, that enslaved individuals were recategorized as disciples (*chelas*) as a corollary to these measures.⁷ During the reign of Akbar’s successor Jahāngīr (r. 1605–1627), an imperial order was issued banning the castration of slaves in particular, a practice that was highly profitable due to the monetary value of eunuch slaves.⁸ While scholars have noted the absence of reference to formal slave markets (which

had existed in the prior period during the Delhi Sultanate) as a potential sign of the efficacy of such measures, it is clear that such government actions did not mean the end of slavery in practice, even within the service of the emperors themselves.⁹ In fact, there is continued evidence of enslavement and slave trafficking both during the reigns of Akbar and Jahāngīr, as well as thereafter, including those forms putatively banned. In short, as Eaton observes, these decrees ending slavery (at least in some forms) did not actually put an end to slavery, even if they did have an impact in terms of the nature and scope of the slave trade.¹⁰

In the colonial context, we encounter another, better-known moment in which slavery in British India is targeted for curtailment and eventually (again, theoretically) abolition under colonial rule. As is well known, while British merchants dominated the Atlantic slave trade in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the emergence and success of the anti-slavery and abolitionist movement from the end of the eighteenth century led to the banning of the slave trade in 1807 and the passing of the Slavery Abolition Act in 1833. While the 1833 Act excluded British India, it was followed in 1843 by the Indian Slavery Act, which will be discussed at more length below. This Act, generally considered ineffective and toothless, may have been most influential in changing the terminology around practices of slavery rather than abolishing it. This phenomenon has been described by Indrani Chatterjee as “abolition by denial.”¹¹ Despite the erasure of enslaved individuals in public documents such as Parliamentary Papers, examination of documents such as inventories or wills reveals their extensive presence in British colonial households. While the ownership of slaves was acknowledged in the case of indigenous elites (although even this form of slavery was downplayed as being benign, “mild” and familial) the presence of slaves was denied or else they were re-designated as “servants” in the case of British colonial households, despite ample evidence to the contrary.¹² In South India, we see a similar phenomenon, with agrarian slaves referred to post-“abolition” as “agrestic laborers,” without any corresponding change in rights or labor conditions.¹³

Through both denying and camouflaging British involvement in slavery practices on the Subcontinent while refusing comparisons with Atlantic world slavery, any push to bring abolitionist campaigning to bear on British colonial holdings in India was for the most part effectively forestalled. In the process, slavery in British India was redefined contradictorily both as familial, and thus outside of the realm of appropriate official meddling, as well as a matter of choice, and thus falling under the ambit of Master and Servant laws.¹⁴ Further, slavery was sometimes described as having a “positive social function” in times of famine or other moments of desperation. In this context, it was argued, slavery could be seen as a “kind of welfare measure... an acceptable alternative to death by starvation.”¹⁵ Here it should be noted that the trajectory of abolitionism in British India is distinct from that in British-ruled Ceylon (modern Sri Lanka), where slavery began to be dismantled from 1816 onwards. In tracking this gradual process of amelioration and abolition, Wickramasinghe

emphasizes that in this matter Sri Lanka can be considered as much more similar to other crown colonies and entirely different from British India.¹⁶

As the above suggests, attention to the specificities of terminology and historical context is crucial to identifying enslaved peoples in South Asian history. These complicated questions of terminology and identification, alongside the diversity of forms of slavery in this period, underline the need to focus on “locally specific usages, relationships, terms, institutions, and processes as they shifted in time.” In other words, the elusiveness of modes for the easy identification of enslaved individuals, and the refusal of the terms employed to fit easily into the frames provided by comparative contexts, is not just a challenge to be overcome but perhaps reflective of the granular specificity of the practices and people being studied. In practice, acknowledging sometimes blurred boundaries between categories, however frustrating to the modern interest in pinning down precise free/unfree status, should be considered as fundamental to the project of understanding slavery in South Asia.¹⁷

ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

While slavery and the slave trade have a long history in South Asia, from the ancient and medieval periods onward, here we will focus on the early modern and colonial periods. Throughout the period under review, South Asia was both the location of the enslavement of individuals subsequently sold both domestically and abroad, as well as a market for those enslaved outside of the Subcontinent. In other words, the trade was multidirectional; it also occurred locally as well as across long distances. The long-distance slave market operated both overland through Central Asia as well as overseas across the Indian Ocean World.

While the historiography of these trade routes is difficult due to the fragmentation of the archive by language and polity, we can discern some basic facts. The overland trade in South Asian slaves in Central Asia during the medieval and early modern period was carried out by caravan merchants who “either purchased them outright or received them in exchange for other commodities in demand in India, especially horses.”¹⁸ This trade continued into the eighteenth century, although by this time the volume of enslaved South Asians sold in Central Asia seems to have significantly decreased, due to the shift to exchanging textiles (rather than slaves) for horses and/or shifting political dynamics in North India. Nevertheless, there remained small numbers of South Asians sold in Central Asia into the nineteenth century.¹⁹ While there is little scholarship on overland trade in slaves to South Asia, significant numbers of passing references to enslaved individuals identified for instance as Turkish, Qalmaq, and even Russian demonstrate that this trade went both ways.

When it comes to overseas trade in this period, the majority of scholarship has focused on enslaved Africans. The primary trade links between western India and East Africa can be traced either through connections between the

Horn of Africa and the Swahili Coast and Gujarat, or connections via the Hijaz and Hadramaut with Deccan ports such as Chaul and Dabhol.²⁰ For instance, there was a substantial flow of enslaved *habashīs* (northeast Africans) into the Deccan from the fifteenth to the seventeenth centuries, as part of a larger Indian Ocean slave trade. These individuals were enslaved due to a range of factors, including Arab raiding parties, internal war, or voluntary sale by poverty-stricken parents. Thereafter, many of these slaves would have been sold in slave markets in the Middle East; some among them would have reached South Asia via the western port cities mentioned above. It seems that at least in the early modern Deccan, the sale of enslaved Africans served in part to offset the demand for Indian cotton; it also served to supply foreign military slaves to local elites in the Deccan to manage the complex and indeed antagonistic political dynamics there.²¹ Such non-Indian slaves would have been considered luxury items, which perhaps explains in part why Mughal sources are so specific in listing the ethnic identifiers of slaves present in the royal household. However, despite the visibility given to such slaves in the sources, the majority would have been of South Asian origin.²²

Within early modern South Asia, enslavement seems to have occurred most often in war or due to economic hardship. While accounts of military engagements often mention the taking of captives who thereafter live as slaves, we also see lower-level raids or kidnappings leading to enslavement as well.²³ However, it is worth noting that actions to curtail and punish such crimes suggest other sources were a lower risk.²⁴ Enslavement also took place in the wake of famine and other times of economic difficulty, when the desperate sold family members or even themselves. The market value of enslaved individuals could be impacted by a range of factors, as desired traits included physical beauty, professional skill or expertise (for instance, in textile work or engineering), and castrated status in the case of eunuchs.²⁵

While most enslaved peoples in South Asia during this period were most likely enslaved within South Asia itself, enslaved individuals labeled as non-Indian, with identifiers such as northeast African (*habashī*) or Turkish (*turkī*) regularly find mention in the early modern sources. Thus scholars have tracked the life trajectories of individual slaves such as Malik ‘Ambar, who was born in modern-day Ethiopia in the Kambata region in 1548 before being enslaved either in war or due to poverty. After initially being sold in the markets of the Middle East he was later brought to the Deccan in the early 1570s where he constituted one among a thousand *habashī* slaves bought by the *peṣhwā* (prime minister) of the Nizām Shāhī dynasty, himself a formerly enslaved *habashī*.²⁶ ‘Ambar himself is later described as leading an army including ten thousand *habashī* soldiers.²⁷ The eighteenth-century case of Tahmās Khān, who was enslaved as a child in modern-day Turkey before, after multiple transfers and giftings, ending up being raised alongside a number of other Turkish-speaking enslaved boys in the household of Mughal nobleman Mu’in al-Mulk, suggests significant numbers of enslaved Turkish boys in such elite households, even if only the most successful among them emerge fully in our archives.²⁸

The evidence points to both slaves forming a part of tribute and gift exchange, as well as through regular purchase with cash. As was discussed above, we do not find mentions of public slave markets in this period (in contrast to the Delhi Sultanate), but historical records show the gifting of slaves among the elite. Thus in the Mughal context, we see the emperors Jahāngīr and Shāh Jahān receive *habashī* and *qalmāq* slaves as tribute from their elite servitors.²⁹ We also see the emperor Jahāngīr, despite his professed banning of the trade in eunuchs, receive a tribute of dozens of eunuch slaves from the governor of Bengal in 1613, 1621, and 1622.³⁰ In the mid-eighteenth-century Tahmās Khān also recounts being given to Muʿīn al-Mulk, governor of Punjab, shortly after being brought to South Asia by his former owners.³¹

Not all transfers of enslaved individuals were voluntary. In the context of early modern Rajasthan, the transfer of valuable, skilled enslaved performers could also become points of contestation and conflict as “the voluntary transfer of such performers signified a relationship of vassalage to an overlord; in contrast, their forced surrender signified subjugation and the loss of sovereignty.”³² We see a similar situation with the refusal in 1561 of the noble (and foster-brother to the emperor) Adham Khān refusing to hand over the female dancers of Bāz Bahādūr taken into his custody following the defeat of Mandu to the emperor Akbar.³³

While the courtly histories tend to provide more information about the gifting or forced transfer of enslaved individuals, not all slaves were gifted rather than sold. Despite the lack of evidence of public spaces for the buying and selling of slaves during the Mughal period, such transactions do find mention in sources. Elite texts do not generally give details on this, but the occasional (denigrating) reference to individual enslaved people as *zar-kharīda* (gold-bought) as well as sporadic records of sale such as those found in the collection of the National Archive in Delhi points to the regular sale of slaves for cash.³⁴

Before moving on, it is important to acknowledge the role of caste and religious community to enslavement. In the Islamicate context, theoretically one could not enslave Muslims; however, the capacious definition of “non-Muslim” led, for instance, to the enslavement of Iranian Shiʿis in the early modern period, alongside other groups such as Buddhist Qalmaq.³⁵ Here it should of course be remembered that the act of enslavement was not only guided from above, but rather also engaged in illegally and opportunistically, which suggests such proscriptions should not be assumed to be entirely effective.³⁶ With respect to caste, while in some cases (especially agricultural slavery, on which more below), certain communities were particularly vulnerable to enslavement, we find enslaved individuals from a multiplicity of caste backgrounds. For example, we find high-caste slave-owners in eighteenth-century Maharashtra carefully making clear the high-caste status of their slaves.³⁷ Caplan has argued that, at least in Hindu contexts during the colonial period, caste was significant in the kinds of labor or positions assigned, thus making a

distinction between enslaved *sāvārna* (caste) Hindus more often assigned to the domestic sphere versus agrarian labor being assigned to those of lower-caste or Dalit background.³⁸ With reference to the latter category, the case of South Indian colonial-era agrarian slavery is particularly interesting. While the relationship between caste and slavery may shift between the precolonial period and the better-attested colonial context, scholarship on the nineteenth century has underlined that low caste status was a prerequisite of—but not necessarily equivalent to—enslaved status among agrarian slaves.³⁹ The link between caste and enslaved status was such that, at least in Tamil-speaking parts of the Madras Presidency, certain caste names were used interchangeably with the words for slave.⁴⁰

European arrivals in South Asia from the turn of the sixteenth century onwards both participated in, and transformed, the slave trade and local forms of slavery they encountered there. In addition to the presence of enslaved people within colonial households in South Asia itself, along similar lines as indigenous elites, we see Europeans engaging in the slave trade as well. The above-described patterns of entry into slavery through war or financial distress continued into the early colonial period; there are also accounts of Europeans launching slave raids as well. For example, in relation to the slave trade out of the Horn of Africa which formed the primary source of enslaved Africans for Indo-Muslim states, both Europeans and a variety of Muslim traders were actors in this trade, “with shared interests as well as real competition.”⁴¹ More broadly, most European involvement in the slave trade was alongside Indian merchants, similarly profiting off of famine victims from at least as early as the 1620s. Most often slaves were obtained through local suppliers, and thus in many cases, Europeans were in some ways simply inserting themselves into ongoing practices and markets.⁴²

But despite certain clear continuities, other evidence points to dramatic shifts in this period, in particular as the context of empire shaped the market in new ways. We can get a sense for the scope of change from a few examples. For example, the entry of European traders (in particular, the Dutch and the Portuguese) into the Indian Ocean also seems to have increased the trade in enslaved Bengalis in the seventeenth century.⁴³ The disturbance this constituted can be seen in Mughal attempts to suppress Portuguese traffic in slaves in the Bay of Bengal—one of several examples of Europeans not working through local intermediaries.⁴⁴ Although this particular trade began to lessen again in the second half of the seventeenth century, other arenas of the slave trade continued to thrive. Europeans regularly purchased enslaved South Asians in Western India in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries for both local work and export.⁴⁵ French and Dutch colonies such as Mauritius, Reunion, and the Cape in the south-west Indian Ocean were receiving large shipments of enslaved South Asians by the late eighteenth century in famine years.⁴⁶ East India Company records also point to the ongoing trade in enslaved South Asians within the Bengal and Madras Presidencies into the

early nineteenth century.⁴⁷ Furthermore, the circulation of slaves within imperial spaces was not confined to the colonies but also included the bringing of slaves back to the metropole. Thus, we see enslaved South Asians in Britain throughout the colonial period, first only in elite households but subsequently also among middle-class families,⁴⁸ as well as in Portugal, in capacities such as cabinet-makers or workers on river crafts in Lisbon.⁴⁹

Among the significant differences when it comes to colonial attitudes towards and actions in relation to slavery, abolitionism is a particularly notable factor, albeit often in unexpected ways. While the Slavery Abolition Act (1833) legally abolished slavery in most of the British Empire, Indian slavery was not even delegalized until the Indian Slavery Act (1843). This delay was due to several factors including the widespread belief in the relatively “mild” forms taken by slavery in South Asia, as well as concerns about the political costs of antagonizing or alienating local elites. It is for this reason that the legislation produced was not only delayed but furthermore is best described as delegalization rather than abolition. As Major notes, “while masters’ right to legally enforce ownership of human property was removed, no slaves were actively freed.”⁵⁰ As a result, scholars point to the continued existence of slavery in post-1843 British India, even if it was often practiced under another name. In another significant shift, the sudden dearth of cheap labor in many plantation economies in the aftermath of abolition was remedied through the development of a system of indentured servitude, which saw large numbers of South Asians transported to locations such as Guyana and Fiji to make up for this shortfall.

EXPERIENCES DURING SLAVERY

The experience of slavery varied radically depending on both the form of slavery experienced, as well as of course the specific circumstances of the slave. In the South Asian context, while domestic slavery seems to have been the most common form over the period surveyed here, other forms include military slavery, agrarian slavery, and eunuch slavery. The different forms slavery could take depended both on choices made by sellers and owners (to castrate an enslaved boy, to train an enslaved child in particular skills, etc.) as well as by the prior life experience and social identity of the enslaved individual (who may have received education or specialized training prior to enslavement, for instance). So, for example, in the eighteenth century, Tahmās Khān recounts receiving training from his owner Muʿīn al-Mulk over the course of his childhood, representing an investment in this particular slave. In contrast, seventeenth-century Bengal-born poet Ālāol was enslaved as an adult by the Portuguese, but his extensive education in Persian, Bengali, Hindavi, and Sanskrit led to the recognition of his value and a certain privileged standing in Arakan.⁵¹

The most common form of slavery throughout this period is domestic slavery and concubinage. This has led many scholars to emphasize the need

to acknowledge and explore the deep intertwining of slavery with the history of the family in this context. Thus Indrani Chatterjee, in examining the significance of domestic slavery in the royal household of Murshidabad, demonstrates how “kinless” slaves were incorporated into the complex familial political dynamics of elite households. As kinship ties in this context were sources of tension and antagonism due to the open nature of succession, many members of the royal household relied upon adopted, kinless slaves, since their allegiance could be expected due to their dependence on their masters or mistresses alone.⁵² Even aside from the politics of royal households and questions of succession, as Finn notes in discussing the presence of domestic slavery in Anglo-Indian households, the prevalence of domestic slavery in South Asia (versus the plantations of the Atlantic world) necessitates that we consider the significance of the family as the site of slavery and as a consequence the entanglement of these two domains of kinship and servitude.⁵³

The status and life trajectories of enslaved women would have often been impacted by their social status prior to enslavement, their birth, their education or training, as well as their appearance. For instance, we can consider the diverse forms of domestic service in elite Rajput households in the early modern period: at the lowest rung were the *davris*, unskilled female domestic slaves; above these were *patars* (skilled slave-performers, often dancers) and *olaganis* (singers); then come the *vadarans*, the senior female slaves. Above the *vadarans* stood the enslaved women who had become concubines, referred to as *pasvan* or *khavasin*; those given the right to veil themselves were known as *pardayats*. As this terminology suggests, these hierarchical distinctions were formal within such households.⁵⁴

Colonial rule introduced both changes within practices of domestic slavery, as well as the continuation of the practice within Indian and colonial households alike. To the first point, the growing intervention of colonial officials within elite households over the course of the colonial period radically transformed not only the scope of political activity of elite women but also the roles of domestic slaves and concubines as well. For example, the East India Company’s ongoing interference in the functioning of the royal household of Murshidabad eventually effected a dramatic reduction in both the power and status within it of both women and slaves.⁵⁵ At the same time, domestic slaves were also an integral part of British colonial households. As demonstrated by personal wills and inventories alongside public reports submitted to Parliament, there was a profusion of domestic slaves in such households despite their erasure or obfuscation in the official documentation. We see in this context both the treatment of such individuals as property, to be sold or transferred at death, as well as humanized as the recipients of bequests and manumission.⁵⁶

Within the category of “domestic slavery,” those enslaved women who were concubines, as a consequence of the sexual and reproductive labor performed, were often treated differently. In the Rajput context, this is clearly expressed by the domestic hierarchy recounted by Sreenivasan, discussed above. In the

Mughal context, concubines who bore children (*umm walad*) would have most likely possessed certain rights, in particular, the right to not be sold or given away as well as to freedom upon the death of the owner.⁵⁷ According to colonial-era wills, concubines were often left substantial legacies after the death of their masters, at times including not only property and money but also other slaves. While located hierarchically below the legal wives of British colonials, such concubines were often given more rights and resources than other enslaved individuals.⁵⁸ Furthermore, enslaved domestics could also forge relationships with elite women as well to improve their status. Such bonds of dependency, even as they could work to ameliorate and improve the lives of such individuals in certain ways, were put in peril when the elite patrons or masters in question passed away.⁵⁹ However, the majority of domestic slaves would not have achieved such relatively privileged statuses which were, it is important to note, also accompanied by sexual labor which we must understand as non-consensual. While the sources rarely discuss the violence of domestic slavery, stories such as that of Bharati, a domestic slave beaten to death, and other archival traces of slave murders in the colonial period going unpunished, demonstrate “the continued abuse and killing of slaves.”⁶⁰

Professional female performers such as singers and dancers were also often in an enslaved status. This can be seen in the Mughal period, where enslaved female performers are referenced providing entertainment within the harem space, as well as in private assemblies. They also find mention as valuable gifts, for instance, as when Babur sent dancing women (*pāturs*) confiscated from his defeated opponent to his female relatives.⁶¹ We also see a high value placed on female performers in the early modern Rajput context, due to the skilled nature of their labor;⁶² later on, we similarly find the purchase and sale of trained dancing women in late colonial Tanjore, as “ornaments of palace life.”⁶³

Another significant category of slavery in South Asian households and courts during this period was eunuch slavery. While eunuchs—enslaved, castrated men—could perform a variety of functions within the South Asian context, they are worth considering separately due to their unique positionality within elite households. Generally castrated prior to puberty, eunuchs were set apart by their unbroken voices, their inability to grow facial hair, and a host of other physiological consequences of castration which included the inability to have children. This status allowed them to occupy positions in close proximity to elite men and women alike. Thus, in elite households through the nineteenth century, we find eunuchs as harem guards and domestic attendants, albeit they were generally not allowed free access to female spaces. They also at times rose to positions of influence, wealth, and power, like other elite slaves, likely due to the relations of trust forged through such proximate labor.⁶⁴

Another form of slavery that was especially common in the early modern period was military slavery, continuing practices that can be seen in the medieval period. Eaton has described the significance of military slavery in the Deccani Sultanates, while Walker underlines the participation of the

Portuguese in similar practices, albeit with substantial differences. Military slaves were often viewed as valuable due to their outsider status, serving as buffers insulating central authority from the broader webs of kinship and social connection which might imperil that authority. Thus Eaton proposes, drawing on prior work by Wink, that it is the political instability and inadequate centralization of the Deccani Sultanates in this period which makes military slavery appear here, in contrast to the Mughal Empire to the north where, although we encounter individual military slaves, the practice is not ubiquitous in the way it is in the Deccan.⁶⁵ While most commonly associated with Islamicate politics, military slavery also can be seen in Portuguese India, but there are crucial differences between these two contexts. In contrast to the practices discussed above, the Portuguese only ever allowed slaves to temporarily be used in military capacities for emergencies for “defense against external aggression.” This thus differs from the more regular usage of military slavery to provide internal stability. This may reflect, per Walker, both the relative internal stability of the colonial holdings in South Asia, as well as the fear of possible rebellion by enslaved Africans.⁶⁶

Agrarian slavery was also a significant feature of the period under review, although the history of this practice looks different depending on regional context. In the context of North India in Bihar, Gyan Prakash has argued for instance that a group of agricultural laborers called the *kamias*, which had a relationship of dependency but not slavery to local *maliks* (lords) in the precolonial period, were transformed into laborers subject to a form of debt bondage under British colonial rule which essentially amounted to slavery.⁶⁷ In contrast, enslaved agricultural laborers in South India predated the arrival of Europeans in the region, although the evidence of such figures in this period is sparse.⁶⁸ Here coerced labor took multiple forms, with some individuals being viewed as individually transferable, while other landless laborers were tied to the land and viewed as “an integral part of their owner’s landed property.”⁶⁹ Looking at the context of late eighteenth-century colonial Madras, Ravi Ahuja underlines that such different forms of labor relations should not be viewed as “separate” but rather as “divergent tendencies in the development of class relations between dominant peasants and agricultural labourers.”⁷⁰

While the above suggests a relatively tidy division of forms of slavery into domestic, agrarian, military, and eunuch types, in practice there was a great deal of variation within these categories. To date, scholars have emphasized the wide variety of forms of labor enslaved individuals were called upon to complete. Thus, for instance, other assorted slave occupations for the colonial period include construction work, food cultivation, animal herding, work as sailors or fishermen, various artisanal occupations such as weaving or distilling, and dockwork.⁷¹ There was furthermore much movement between categories of labor. As Andrea Major puts it, discussing the colonial context, “domestic slaves often performed limited agricultural labor, while the women of agrestic slave castes might be subject to sexual exploitation.”⁷² Thus the blurring of lines between different “forms” of slavery should be expected in examining the South Asian context.

EXITS FROM SLAVERY

Prior to the colonial period, there is very little information about subjects such as manumission or escape from slavery. For instance, while Tahmās Khān tells us of his manumission in his memoirs, sources yield little information about the manumission (or lack thereof) for other slaves in this period, regardless of their status and prominence. To give another example, the manumission of Malik ‘Ambar is only mentioned by a Dutch writer named Van den Broecke, even as Indian sources remain silent on this point. Eaton argues that such apparent disinterest on the part of Persian chroniclers can be attributed to different understandings of the distinction between enslaved and free.⁷³ In a context in which an enslaved man could be wealthy, powerful, and a member of the ruling class, how should we understand the meaning of manumission?

Eaton’s argument on elite slavery—that it needs to be seen as a question of “starting points” rather than ongoing status—suggests that the focus on formal manumission may be beside the point for some high-status enslaved individuals. In this model, military or other “elite” slavery can be viewed as a “self-terminating process,” rather than an “enduring condition.”⁷⁴ This could of course be countered by examining examples of elite slaves who become the subject of criticism or abuse for their very status as slaves, as we see in the Mughal context, at least with respect to eunuchs who may not have had the same ability to achieve social incorporation. For example, during the reign of Jahāngīr, the forcible seizure of the eunuch Hilāl Khān’s mansion by another Mughal noble, as well as the public criticism of eunuchs building mansions at all in front of this same eunuch, points to a social position within the Mughal elite that is ambivalent at best.⁷⁵ In any case, arguments about elite slavery would not apply to the majority of lower-status enslaved individuals.

From the eighteenth century onwards we have more information on questions of manumission. Shamita Sarkar describes for instance a series of sale documents in Bengali that specify in one case that manumission can occur when the enslaved girl in question (eleven years old at the time of sale) reaches the age of seventy; it also provides the option of purchasing her freedom earlier at a set price.⁷⁶ Guha mentions a few cases of enslaved people in eighteenth-century western India gaining their freedom through either outright cash payments, or else through providing replacement slaves for themselves. He also notes that occasionally children sold into slavery during famine were freed or resold for a small amount to their families once grain had become cheap again, as well as how in this context marriage could annul enslavement, and thus be a form of emancipation.⁷⁷ Within British colonial households, as was mentioned earlier, manumission was often granted at the death of the master, although other outcomes included the transfer of ownership or outright sale.⁷⁸ In addition, in the early colonial period conversion was at times a strategy for Indian slaves in British households to obtain manumission; we also see at least

one example of a slave in the Deccan escaping to Portuguese territory similarly and converting in hopes of attaining freedom, although in this case these hopes of manumission are not realized and he remains enslaved.⁷⁹

We occasionally see mentions of escaped slaves in the Mughal period, for instance, in Tahmās Khān's memoirs or the *Travels* of Peter Mundy.⁸⁰ In eighteenth-century Dutch colonial Cochin, there are examples of fugitive slaves sometimes successfully escaping to neighboring sovereignties, although we also see their prosecution alongside those who aided them.⁸¹ We also have accounts of enslaved people escaping Portuguese territories. While from the sixteenth century onwards, the Portuguese authorities had agreements with local rulers (both Muslim and Hindu) for fugitives to be either returned or compensated for, the expansion of British India and its delegitimation of slavery in the nineteenth century meant that British authorities refused to return such individuals or to offer compensation.⁸² Vatuk also describes numerous cases of fugitive slaves in nineteenth-century records from the Presidencies (i.e. in British India), although the violent death of one such female slave suggests the potential costs of such attempts as well as the difficulty of resistance more generally.⁸³ While theoretically, anti-slavery sentiment and increasing legislation to protect slaves/servants can be seen as providing a tool for enslaved individuals to seek redress for such abuses in British India, such laws "were frequently ignored or evaded in practice and the courts were not always sympathetic to those slaves who sought relief through resort to the legal system, especially if the perpetrators were people of high social standing."⁸⁴

Here, it is important to not interpret events such as running away or manumission in terms of a simplistic opposition between enslaved and free status. Guha emphasizes that flight cannot always be read as an attempt to escape slavery and achieve freedom, but rather as often a way to find better circumstances in which to live as a slave. For instance, a fugitive slave might seek a place within a larger, wealthier household for protection from the claims of prior owners. Furthermore, manumission may not have always been experienced as positive, as in some instances the manumission of older slaves can be seen as a cost-saving measure that made the former slave more vulnerable, rather than a longed-for transition to freedom.⁸⁵

The status of the children of enslaved women varied dramatically depending on context. In Mughal households, the children of concubines were not viewed as "disenfranchised" and enslaved but rather as members of the royal family; thus the sons of enslaved women were viewed as legitimate heirs to the throne.⁸⁶ In the case of military slavery, such as that occurred in the early modern Deccan, slave status does not seem to have been heritable, but was on the contrary "one-generational."⁸⁷ This was not true for the Rajput context, where "slave progeny" was understood to be similarly enslaved as well as relatively restricted in terms of their ability to raise their social statuses. The children of concubines were not generally bought and sold, although they could be exchanged in political negotiations. In fact, the decreasing opportunities for enslavement via war or raiding in the nineteenth and early

twentieth century led to the need to “reproducing servility among themselves,” reshaping gifting practices in Rajput households to ensure enslaved women were provided with male mates. This of course also demonstrates the importance of the heritability of enslaved status.⁸⁸ Guha’s work on the Maratha context suggests that the children of slaves were similarly born into the enslaved condition,⁸⁹ as does the documentation from eighteenth-century Bengal.⁹⁰

CONCLUSION

The period reviewed here offers a broad range of practices and vocabularies related to slavery in the early modern and colonial periods in South Asia. Depending on the context, the language used to describe enslaved status could intersect with the language used for service, kinship, or discipleship; it could also be intentionally vague and veiled. While this provides productive ground for beginning to think through the meaning (both real and metaphorical) of slavery in a variety of South Asian contexts, it also constitutes a challenge to identifying the enslaved themselves for modern researchers. Despite these complications, a significant body of work employing a wide range of evidence has described the many forms of slavery which existed in this era in South Asia, from military slavery to concubinage to agrarian slavery. Having entered slavery due to war, slaving raids, or economic hardship, enslaved individuals might remain close to their place of origin, or in contrast be traded through interregional, regional, and local markets. On this basis, it is clear that there was no single, prototypical form or experience of slavery either prior or subsequent to colonialism. Rather, as numerous South Asianists have noted, this topic needs to be approached and understood in a highly contextualized, localized manner. Even ostensibly similar categories of enslavement such as concubinage or military slavery could appear and be experienced in radically different ways depending on, for example, possession of education or specialized training, biological reproduction, and the specificities of particular locations and historical moments. Just as we find dramatic differences in how individuals entered into and experienced slavery, so too exits from slavery could vary quite widely, from effective and formal manumission to escape to conversion. Similarly, depending on context slave status could be inherited by children or quite the opposite. While a synthetic essay cannot do justice to or provide a simple schema for approaching this topic, this chapter has sought to provide a map to the rich and growing scholarship in this field.

NOTES

1. Richard Eaton, “Introduction,” in *Slavery and South Asian History*, eds. Indrani Chatterjee and Richard Eaton (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006), 1.

2. Nira Wickramasinghe, *Slave in a Palanquin* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020), 7.
3. See for instance Gyan Prakash, *Bonded Histories* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 1–12.
4. John Richards, “Norms of Comportment Among Imperial Mughal Officers,” in *Moral Conduct and Authority*, ed. Barbara D. Metcalf (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 264.
5. Jessica Hinchy, “Between Slave and Disciple in South Asia,” in *Slavery and Bonded Labor in Asia, 1250–1900*, ed. Richard B. Allen (Leiden: Brill, 2022), 49–76; Vijay Pinch, “Gosain Tawaif: Slaves, Sex, and Ascetics in Rasdhan, c. 1800–1857,” *Modern Asian Studies* 38, no. 3 (2004): 567–8.
6. Sumit Guha, “Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India, 1700–1800,” in *Slavery and South Asian History*, 164.
7. Irfan Habib, “Akbar and Social Inequities,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Conference* (1992): 300–2.
8. Gavin Hambly, “A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 94, no. 1 (1974): 125–30.
9. Shadab Bano, “Slave Markets in Medieval India,” *Proceedings of the Indian History Conference* 61 (2000): 368–9.
10. Eaton, “Introduction,” 11. See also Scott Levi, “Hindus Beyond the Hindu Kush: Indians in the Central Asian Slave Trade,” *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 12, no. 3 (2002): 283–4.
11. Indrani Chatterjee, “Abolition by Denial: The South Asian Example,” in *Abolition and Its Aftermath in Indian Ocean Africa and Asia*, ed. Gwyn Campbell (London: Routledge, 2005), 137–53.
12. Margot Finn, “Slaves Out of Context,” *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (2009): 181–203.
13. Rupa Vishwanath, *The Pariah Problem: Caste, Religion, and the Social in Modern India* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2014), 25.
14. Finn, “Slaves Out of Context,” 202.
15. Sylvia Vatuk, “Bharattee’s Death: Domestic Slave-Women in Nineteenth-Century Madras,” in *Slavery and South Asian History*, 222.
16. Wickramasinghe, *Slave in a Palanquin*, 5–8.
17. Indrani Chatterjee, “Renewed and Connected Histories: Slavery and the Historiography of South Asia,” in *Slavery and South Asian History*, 19.
18. Scott Levi, “Hindus Beyond the Hindu Kush,” 280.
19. *Ibid.*, 285–6.
20. Sanjay Subrahmanyam, “Between Eastern Africa and Western India, 1500–1650,” *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 61, no. 4 (2019): 808.
21. Richard Eaton, “The Rise and Fall of Military Slavery in the Deccan,” in *Slavery and South Asian History*, 117–21.
22. Bano, “Slave Markets in Medieval India,” 366–7.
23. Guha, “Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India,” 165–8.
24. See for example Musta’idd Khān, *Ma’āsir-i ‘Ālamgīrī* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1871), 75.
25. Levi, “Hindus Beyond the Hindu Kush,” 278–81; Gavin Hambly, “A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal,” 126–7.
26. Eaton, “The Rise and Fall of Military Slavery in the Deccan,” 115–6.
27. *Ibid.*, 126.

28. Indrani Chatterjee, "A Slave's Quest," *Indian Economic Social History Review* 37, no. 1 (2000): 53–86.
29. 'Abd al-Hamīd Lāhorī, *Pādshāhnāma* (Calcutta: Asiatic Society of Bengal, 1867–1868), 1:473 and 2:193; Nūr al-Dīn Muhammad Jahāngīr, *Tūzūk-i Jahāngīrī* (Lucknow: Nawal Kishore, 1863), 1:81.
30. Hambly, "A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal," 129.
31. Chatterjee, "A Slave's Quest," 79.
32. Ramya Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines: Female Slaves in Rajput Polity, 1500–1850," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, 141–3.
33. John Richards, *The Mughal Empire* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 14–5; Shadab Bano, "Marriage and Concubinage in the Mughal Imperial Family," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 60 (1999): 354.
34. Shivangini Tandon, "The Liminals in Mughal Households," *Proceedings of the Indian History Conference* 78 (2017): 382.
35. Jeff Eden, "Slavery in Islamic Central Asia," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
36. For example, we see illegal enslavement occurring within the Mughal context, for instance in Musta'idd Khān, *Ma'āsir-i 'Ālamgīrī*, 75.
37. Eaton, "Introduction," 8; Chatterjee, "Renewed and Connected Histories," 33.
38. Lionel Caplan, "Power and Status in South Asian Slavery," in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. James Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 192.
39. Leslie Orr, "Slavery and Dependency in Southern India," in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, Volume 2, eds. Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, and David Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021); Malarvizhi Jayanth, "Abolishing Agrarian Slavery in Southern Colonial India" (PhD Dissertation, University of Chicago, 2020), 44–7.
40. Vishwanath, *The Pariah Problem*, 23.
41. Subrahmanyam, "Between Eastern Africa and Western India," 815–6.
42. Marina Carter, "Slavery and Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean," *History Compass* 4, no. 5 (2006): 800–4.
43. Carter, "Slavery and Unfree Labour," 801.
44. Eaton, "Introduction," 13.
45. Guha, "Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India," 168–9.
46. Carter, "Slavery and Unfree Labour," 802.
47. Andrea Major, "Unfree Labour in Colonial South Asia," *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
48. Michael Fisher, "Bound for Britain: Changing Conditions of Servitude, 1600–1857," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, 191.
49. Carter, "Slavery and Unfree Labour," 804.
50. Major, "Unfree Labour in Colonial South Asia."
51. Thibaut d'Hubert, *In the Shade of the Golden Palace* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2018), 6–7.
52. Indrani Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999), 42.
53. Finn, "Slaves Out of Context," 183.
54. Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines," 143–4.
55. Chatterjee, *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*, 34–77.

56. Finn, "Slaves Out of Context," 186–9.
57. Shadab Bano, "Marriage and Concubinage in the Mughal Imperial Family," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 60 (1999): 353 and 356.
58. Finn, "Slaves Out of Context," 190–2.
59. Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines," 148–52.
60. Vatuk, "Bharattee's Death," 221.
61. Katherine Schofield, "The Courtesan Tale: Female Musicians and Dancers in Mughal Historical Chronicles, c. 1556–1748," *Gender & History* 24, no. 1 (2012): 156.
62. Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines," 140–3.
63. Davesh Soneji, *Unfinished Gestures: Devadasis, Memory, and Modernity in South India* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2012), 36–37.
64. Hambly, "A Note on the Trade in Eunuchs in Mughal Bengal," 125–30; Ruby Lal, "Harem and Eunuchs: Liminality and Networks of Mughal Authority," in *Celibate and Childless Men in Power*, eds. Almut Höfert, Matthew Mesley, and Serena Tolino (London: Routledge, 2018), 92–108; Emma Kalb, "Slaves at the Center of Power: Eunuchs in the Service of the Mughal Elite, 1556–1707," (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2020), 1–46.
65. Eaton, "The Rise and Fall of Military Slavery in the Deccan," 120–2; Andre Wink, *Al-Hind: The Making of the Indo-Islamic World*, vol. 2 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1997), 180–1.
66. Timothy Walker, "Slaves or Soldiers? African Conscripts in Portuguese India, 1857–1860," in *Slavery and South Asian History*, 235–7.
67. Prakash, *Bonded Histories*, 140–83.
68. Orr, "Slavery and Dependency in Southern India," 313–32; Malarvizhi Jayanth, "Abolishing Agrarian Slavery in Southern Colonial India" (PhD diss., University of Chicago, 2020), 11–40.
69. Major, "Unfree Labour in Colonial South Asia."
70. Ravi Ahuja, "Labour Relations in an Early Colonial Context," *Modern Asian Studies* 36, no. 4 (2002): 798–800.
71. Carter, "Slavery and Unfree Labour," 805.
72. Major, "Unfree Labour in Colonial South Asia."
73. Eaton, "The Rise and Fall of Military Slavery in the Deccan," 130.
74. *Ibid.*, 121 and 129.
75. See Kalb, *Slaves at the Center of Power*, 244–51.
76. Shamita Sarkar, "Slavery in Late Mughal Bengal," *Proceedings of the Indian History Conference* 55 (1994): 603–4.
77. Guha, "Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India," 175–82.
78. Finn, "Slaves Out of Context."
79. Fisher, "Bound for Britain," 190–1; Ananya Chakravarti, "Mapping 'Gabriel': Space, Identity, and Slavery in the Late Sixteenth-Century Indian Ocean," *Past and Present* 243 (2019): 24–8.
80. Tahmas Khan, *Tahmas Nama: The Autobiography of a Slave* (Bombay: Popular Prakashan, 1967), 82; Shadab Bano, "Women Slaves in Medieval India," *Proceedings of the Indian History Congress* 65 (2004): 318.
81. Matthias van Rossum, "On the Run: Runaway Slaves and Their Social Networks in Eighteenth-Century Cochín," *Journal of Social History* 54.1 (2020): 66–87.
82. Walker, "Slaves or Soldiers?" 245.
83. Vatuk, "Bharattee's Death," 222.

84. Ibid., 226.
85. Guha, "Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India," 180–1.
86. Tandon, "The Liminals in Mughal Households," 383; Schofield, "The Courtesan Tale," 156.
87. Eaton, "Introduction," 8.
88. Sreenivasan, "Drudges, Dancing Girls, Concubines," 152–5.
89. Guha, "Slavery, Society, and the State in Western India," 167–8.
90. Sarkar, "Slavery in Late Mughal Bengal," 604.

FURTHER READINGS

- Carter, Marina. "Slavery and Unfree Labour in the Indian Ocean," *History Compass* 4, no. 5 (2006): 800–13.
- Chakraborty, Titas, and Matthias van Rossum. "Slave Trade and Slavery in Asia—New Perspectives." *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 1 (Fall 2020): 1–14.
- Chatterjee, Indrani. *Gender, Slavery and Law in Colonial India*. New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1999.
- Chatterjee, Indrani and Richard Eaton. *Slavery and South Asian History*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2006.
- Finn, Margot. "Slaves Out of Context: Slavery and the Anglo-Indian Family, c. 1780–1830." *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 19 (2009): 181–203.
- Major, Andrea. "Unfree Labour in Colonial South Asia." In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Asian History*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.
- Orr, Leslie. "Slavery and Dependency in Southern India." In *Cambridge World History of Slavery, Volume 2*, edited by Craig Perry, David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, and David Richardson, 313–334. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Patnaik, Utsa and Manjari Dingwaney. *Chains of Servitude: Bondage and Slavery in India*. Madras: Sangam Books, 1985.
- Prakash, Gyan. *Bonded Histories: Genealogies of Labor Servitude in Colonial India*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990.


Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in Southeastern Europe

Viorel Achim 

INTRODUCTION

There were two areas in Southeastern Europe where slavery was present continuously from the Middle Ages until the nineteenth century: the Ottoman Empire on the one hand, where slavery existed from its foundation in the thirteenth century until the beginning of the twentieth century, and on the other hand Wallachia and Moldavia, the two Romanian principalities. These two territories had slaves from their establishment at the beginning and in the middle of the fourteenth century, respectively, until 1856, when the last category of slaves was emancipated. There were significant differences between slavery in the Ottoman Empire and the Romanian principalities, but some common elements relating to the essence of the institution existed as well. Slavery evolved independently in the two spaces even though the political and economic relations between them were close. Between the middle of the sixteenth century and 1877, the Romanian principalities were under the suzerainty of the Ottoman Porte, but their social organization did not change as a result of this dependency.

Slavery in the Ottoman Empire was an extremely complex phenomenon given that very different forms of strong dependency coexisted there—a result of social, political, and legal legacies from the earlier Islamic states, the Turkish world, and the Byzantine Empire along with the social transformations that the

V. Achim (✉)

Nicolae Iorga Institute of History, Romanian Academy, Bucharest, Romania

e-mail: viorelachim@hotmail.com

Ottoman Empire itself and its provinces on three continents had experienced. Many practices in Ottoman society can be viewed as falling into the category of “slavery,” prompting some historians to speak not of “slavery” but instead of “slaveries” in the Ottoman Empire: domestic slaves, agricultural slaves, the *kul* system, eunuchs, *devşirme* (the child tribute), galley slaves, and many other forms of slavery coexisted through the centuries up to and including the age of emancipation. At all times, however, the most numerous were the domestic slaves.¹

In the Romanian principalities—despite the highly varied landscape of the slave population that included dozens of groups differing significantly in terms of their occupations, habitats, ways of life, relations with the authorities and the free population, degrees of integration into the majority society, as well as in terms of their language, ethnic origin, and religion—the legal status of slaves was the same for all, and the countries’ laws were very clear in this respect. Compared to the Ottoman Empire, we can say that there was only one form of slavery in the Romanian principalities. This does not mean, however, that the “Gypsy issue”—as the policy of the Wallachian and Moldavian authorities towards slaves was termed at the time of emancipation—was not a highly complicated one.

In a way, the systems of slavery in the Ottoman Empire and in the Romanian principalities intersected during the decades of the mid-nineteenth century, when the important historical process of abolition occurred in both regions. Here we find common elements as well as differences relating not only to the previous history of slavery but also to the different political and cultural situations in the two regions.

The restriction of slavery in the Ottoman Empire began during the period of reforms known as *Tanzimat* (1839–1876) and continued beyond it, with the last related measures taken by the Young Turks in the early twentieth century. Legal slavery was ultimately ended by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk in the Turkish Republic. This occurred under considerable pressure from the European powers—especially England—and in the absence of a genuine anti-slavery campaign within Turkey, which explains the difficulties and the sinuous course of the process. External pressure was applied especially with regard to the suppression of slave trading into the Ottoman Empire. The most important events in the process of abolition were the *Firman* of Sultan Mahmud II freeing white slaves (1830), the disestablishment of the Istanbul slave market (1847), the suppression of the slave trade in the Persian Gulf (1847), the prohibition of the Circassian and Georgian slave trade (1854–1855), the prohibition of the black slave trade (1857), and the Anglo-Ottoman convention for the suppression of the slave trade (1880).²

In Wallachia and Moldavia, the abolition of slavery was achieved through a complex legislative process beginning in 1831 and ending in 1856, which successively led to the emancipation of the different categories of slaves. The modernizing current in the two principalities after 1830, with the political class

and Western-educated intellectuals seeking to renew the countries and dissociate them from the Ottoman world, was decisive in this context. Regarding the abolishment of slavery, the Romanian elites acted somewhat synchronously with the countries of Western Europe, whose example they followed. The abolitionist movement and public discussion on enslavement and emancipation during the 1840s and 1850s contributed to the passing of anti-slavery laws.

There was thus a certain temporal overlap between the Romanian principalities and the Ottoman Empire. In both regions, the process of abolishing slavery began in the 1830s, but it proceeded somewhat more resolutely in the Romanian principalities, ending as early as 1856 there while extending until the beginning of the twentieth century in the Ottoman Empire.

This chapter will provide an overview of slavery in Southeastern Europe (especially the Romanian principalities) on the eve of emancipation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Specifically, it will examine the changes to the institution occurring during this period, the nature of slave labor, and the final exit from slavery in the period from 1831 to 1856. While the study of Ottoman slavery in the nineteenth century benefits from a rich bibliography, the history of enslavement in the Romanian principalities during the era of emancipation is a little-known chapter of the global phenomenon of slavery.³

SLAVERY IN THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES: BASIC CHARACTERIZATION AND ENTRY INTO SLAVERY

Slavery was present in the Romanian principalities from the fourteenth century, when Wallachia and Moldavia were founded at the beginning and in the middle of the century respectively, until the middle of the nineteenth century, when slavery was abolished as part of a set of social and institutional reforms and slaves were legally emancipated and integrated—at least formally—into the rural and urban population of the country.⁴

Slaves constituted a social class, the lowest tier among the subjugated classes. All aspects of slavery (legal situation, relations between master and slave, slaves' obligations, slave administration, etc.) were regulated by customary law, respectively by legal codes beginning in the seventeenth century. Enslaved individuals lacked personal freedom as did serfs (called *rumâni* in Wallachia and *vecini* in Moldavia), but unlike the latter, slaves did not possess legal personality. The legal situation changed to a certain extent in the early nineteenth century when, under the influence of the Enlightenment, a reconsideration of the status of the slave took place. A slave was now considered a human being when it came to relations with others besides his or her master; in relation to the master, however, the slave remained an object.

In the Romanian principalities, enslaved persons constituted a relatively large population group. The censuses of 1859 in Wallachia and Moldavia recorded approximately 250,000 “emancipated” former slaves, accounting for around seven percent of the total population.⁵

Slaves from the Romanian principalities also stood out in that, from the fifteenth to the sixteenth century, most of them were ethnic Roma—a population originally from India that arrived in the territory of present-day Romania from the Balkan Peninsula beginning in the second half of the fourteenth century. There was by no means complete overlap between slaves and Roma, however, as not all Roma were slaves and not all slaves were Roma.

Until the sixteenth century, there were also Tatar slaves—chronologically the first slaves in the principalities—alongside the Roma slaves. The Tatar slaves were soon far outnumbered by Roma slaves, however, and the word *țigan* (“Gypsy”) thus began to develop into a generic term for *rob* (“slave”) from the seventeenth century onwards. In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, including during the age of emancipation, the two words were used synonymously. Even in the administrative language of the principalities, *țigan* primarily had a social-juridical meaning as a reference to “slave,” carrying ethnic meaning only secondarily.⁶

Some groups of slaves were actually ethnic Romanians who had willingly or unwillingly acquired the slave status under specific circumstances of social history when it was more advantageous from a financial point of view to be enslaved than to be a serf or corvée peasant. The status these peasants acquired was of course inherited by their descendants. There were also people of other ethnicities who became *țigani*. The relation between ethnicity and social status is a complex problem, but it can safely be said that even under the mentioned conditions, the vast majority of persons referred to as *țigani* (in the sense of “slaves”) were in fact members of the ethnic minority of the Roma.

Slaves held in the Romanian lands can be classified into three categories: princely slaves, called “state slaves” in the nineteenth century; monastery slaves (owned by monasteries and other religious and social establishments, for example, hospitals); and slaves owned by boyars, also known as “private slaves” in the nineteenth century.

The status of enslavement was acquired by birth, but there were other ways of becoming a slave as well, for example, marriage or enslavement to repay debt.

As in previous times, some free individuals joined the group of slaves in the nineteenth century, so that we can speak of entrances into slavery during this period as well. This occurred either by marriage (a free man marrying a slave also became a slave), at least until the cessation of this phenomenon—the last legislative measure in this context is dated 1839—or as part of a tax evasion practice through which, with the help of corrupt Treasury officials, certain boyars and monasteries were able to have peasants working on their estates placed on the list of slaves. These individuals no longer had to pay taxes, since slaves had obligations only to their masters and were exempt from public fiscal duties. Some peasants also preferred to have the status of slave, because of the tax exemption.

By law, nomadic Roma from neighboring countries—the Ottoman Empire, the Habsburg Empire (specifically the regions of Transylvania and Bukovina),

and the Russian Empire (specifically Bessarabia)—arriving in Wallachia and Moldavia and settling there permanently became slaves of the state. They provided a statement confirming that they willingly accepted this condition. Until the laws of 1843 and 1844 that freed the state slaves, the authorities managing them (the Prison Authority in Wallachia and the Authority for State Slaves in Moldavia) registered a (small) number of foreign Roma joining the category of state slaves every year. They generally moved to the Romanian principalities for economic opportunities.

Most of the foreign persons joining the group of state slaves during this period were so-called “Turkish Gypsies” (*țigani turciți*)—that is, Muslim Roma from the Ottoman Empire who crossed the Danube in several waves after 1800. The largest group among them was the *Spoitori* (tinsmiths), who moved to Wallachia around 1830. Because the Wallachian authorities considered them economically valuable, they were allowed to practice their Muslim faith—an exception to the law generally banning this religion in the country. The *Spoitori* practiced their craft itinerantly, meaning they moved from village to village and were therefore considered “nomads.”

At the same time, there were exits from slavery, meaning that individual slaves or enslaved families became free through manumission or ransom. The emancipation laws of 1843–1856 along with several other measures taken by the Wallachian and Moldavian authorities eventually freed specific categories of slaves altogether.

It should also not be overlooked that in the first half of the nineteenth century, a considerable number of slaves from the Romanian principalities migrated to other countries. They left the principalities’ territories due to travel restrictions and/or because they refused to accept the condition of *corvée* peasantry offered by the emancipation laws.

CHANGES IN THE INSTITUTION OF SLAVERY FROM THE MID-EIGHTEENTH TO THE MID-NINETEENTH CENTURIES: POLICIES REGARDING SLAVES

In the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, there were several changes to the institution of slavery in the Romanian principalities. The status of slaves had originally been regulated entirely by custom, but the seventeenth century had seen the passing of several collections of laws detailing the status. Beginning in the eighteenth century, a number of changes to the institution of slavery were introduced—initially for fiscal reasons, and then under the influence of the Enlightenment towards the late 1700s. These changes concerned marriage by slaves (several regulations between the mid-eighteenth and the mid-nineteenth century) and the slave status itself (early nineteenth century).⁷

The first regulations affecting the lives of *țigani* concerned the area of slave marriage. Matrimony between slaves was strictly regulated. In Moldavia, the

“Settlement of the Country of Moldavia” issued by Prince Constantin Mavroordat in 1743 forbade the separation of marriages between slaves belonging to different masters. For such situations, compensatory exchanges between the owners respectively the sale and purchase of affected slaves at a price established by a judge were stipulated. In 1766, the separation of children and their severance from their parents were forbidden (charter by Prince Grigore Ghica). These regulations, along with several others, were included in the *Sobornicescul hrisov* (Ecumenical Charter) of 1785, the law that governed marriage between slaves in Moldavia until the abolition of slavery. Similar legislation existed in Wallachia.

The most numerous and complicated regulations—and the ones subject to the most political back and forth depending on the interests of the political class and the resistance of the slaveholders—concerned marriages between a free husband and a slave. Legislation efforts in this area were complex and tedious, but a significant change was eventually made to the custom previously applied for centuries.

In Moldavia, the aforementioned 1743 “Settlement” by Constantin Mavroordat established that Moldavian men and women who married a slave could no longer be turned into slaves themselves. Instead, they continued to maintain their pre-marital status while their wife or husband remained a slave. Children born to such couples were considered free as well. This represented a reversal of the customary rule stating that a free husband marrying a slave assumed his wife’s social status, as did any children born from the union. However, the lawmakers backed down under pressure from the protesting slaveholders, and the new law was amended several times. The *Sobornicescul hrisov* of 1785 completely prohibited marriages between free and enslaved persons and declared such marriages invalid; children born into them were considered *țigani*. This effectively meant a return to the “old custom” and an abrogation of the previous reform. These provisions remained in force until 1844, when Article 15 Section Z of the *Sobornicescul hrisov* referring to marriages between slaves and free individuals was amended: It was now forbidden to dissolve a marriage between a slave and a free person. In such cases, the respective slave became free and was obligated to redeem himself or herself, paying the master for his or her personal freedom. Slaves unable to pay the required amount were to be lent money from the Church’s charity fund. Children resulting from such marriages were automatically free. The ban on new marriages between Moldavians and slaves was thus maintained, but existing marriages were not dissolved. An initial amendment to the *Sobornicescul hrisov* had been made in 1839, abolishing the proscription against *țigani* who had been freed by their masters marrying Romanians.

In Wallachia, too, in the middle of the eighteenth century, the custom that made it possible to enslave Romanians was abolished. While Romanians falling into the legal category of *țigani* by evading the law or through abuse by certain authorities remained a relatively common phenomenon in Moldavia during the nineteenth century, there were only a few such cases in Wallachia.

The most important novelty in the legislation on slavery was the partial modification of the slave status enacted in the *Codul Calimach* (Calimach Code), which entered into force in Moldavia in 1817. In this collection of laws—considered the most modern legislation in the Romanian principalities up to that time and exhibiting influences of the Enlightenment and natural law—slaves are acknowledged as persons with regard to their relations to others besides their master: While a slave remained an object in relation to his or her master, he or she obtained the status and rights of a person vis-à-vis others.

This new view of slaves, which was also adopted by Wallachia, governed the legislation regarding *țigani* in the Romanian principalities during the age of emancipation. This is important because, once possessing the status of a person, a slave was under the protection of law—meaning slaves could defend their rights in court against anyone other than their owner and were allowed to conclude contracts, make statements, do business, buy and sell property, and so on.

The Organic Regulations, a kind of constitution adopted in two versions by the Extraordinary Public Assemblies of the two principalities in 1831 during their occupation by the Russian military, entered into force on July 1, 1831, in Wallachia and on January 1, 1832, in Moldavia.⁸ They did not alter the status of slaves in any way, instead prolonging the institution of slavery as regulated by the laws of the two countries. While the documents included several provisions regarding state slaves, they did not deal with slaves owned by monasteries and boyars, where the state could not interfere.

In the age of the Organic Regulations, the authorities intervened in master-slave relations in unprecedented fashion. Although the assemblies had not dared to legislate with regard to monastery slaves and privately owned slaves in the initial law document, they eventually issued rules concerning these two categories as well.

The Organic Regulations paved the way for the social and institutional modernization of the Romanian principalities. Beginning in 1831, despite being ruled by a conservative regime led by the great boyars, the Romanian society evolved in the direction of Western modernization, breaking many ties with the Ottoman world under whose influence it had stood for several centuries. The document determined the fundamental coordinates of the policy towards slaves: regulation of taxation by imposing the same taxes on slaves as on free people, indicating a policy of gradually bringing slaves closer to the status of free persons, and sedentarization of *țigani* who still led a nomadic life, tying them to agricultural occupation and betokening the intention to integrate them into Romanian society.

The Regulations were immediately followed by two further documents adopted by the Extraordinary Public Assemblies in 1831: the *Regulation for the Improvement of the Conditions of State Gypsies* in Wallachia and the *Regulation for the Settlement of Gypsies* in Moldavia. They expressed the respective authorities' view of the "Gypsy problem." The Wallachian act was published

independently while the Moldavian one became an annex to the principality's Organic Regulation. In a way, these two documents represent the political program with regard to slaves pursued by the regime of the Organic Regulations in the early 1830s.

The key goal was the sedentarization of slaves of Romani origin. Cornerstones of this settlement policy included the abolishment of nomadism by settling the *țigani* in villages and houses and accustoming them to work the land. Appropriate paths of action were envisaged for each slave category, since the sedentarization policy was not limited to state slaves: The regulations called on monasteries and boyars to take similar measures with regard to the nomadic *țigani* under their possession. The intention of the authorities was to turn slaves into taxpayers and transfer them to an occupational status similar to that of the vast majority of the population. At that point, there was no doubt about the imminent abolition of slavery.

The greatest concern, the most intense legislative and administrative efforts, and the largest share of employed resources related to the sedentarization of "Gypsies" still pursuing a way of life that the Organic Regulations and the authorities referred to as "vagrancy." The permanent settling of nomadic groups was the most important social transformation experienced by the *țigani* during the age of emancipation.

Mobility meant frequent movement from one place to another in order to perform the economic activity that ensured their existence. This itinerancy was actually a type of economy in itself—hence the labeling of these people as "nomads" beginning around 1830 even though they were far from the profile of proper nomads. Very few *țigani* were nomads in today's sense of the word; one such group in 1830s Wallachia was the *Netoți*.

The policy of settling "nomadic" slaves was pursued with considerable consistency by the Wallachian and Moldavian authorities, as evidenced by a series of regulations, laws, decrees, and orders aimed at restricting the movement of *țigani* and encouraging their settlement on estates. Legislation as well as various administrative, economic, police, and other measures aimed at preventing nomadism and settling the still nomadic "Gypsies" were enacted. Such measures included accustoming them to agricultural work, "civilizing" them, and so forth.

Obviously, from the very beginning, the elimination of nomadism and promotion of permanent settlement was not conceived as being strictly related to a specific type of habitat; instead, they related to the country's (respectively individual villages') economic needs. At the same time, the authorities linked the issue of sedentarization to the topic of integrating the *țigani* into Romanian rural society. The corresponding legislation explicitly addressed this aspect as well, and ethnic assimilation of Roma was also discussed.

In fact, during the entire age of emancipation, the policy of sedentarization was a mix of measures designed to encourage estate owners to settle slaves on their estates and use them in agriculture, along with constraints placed on the mobility of *țigani*.

There were numerous obstacles to the sedentarization efforts, including the establishment of large settlements of people with the same craft, preventing them from finding enough customers in the vicinity. It was often said at the time that sedentarization killed the “Gypsy” crafts.

The laws for settling the nomadic *țigani*, as well the six laws regarding the actual abolishment of slavery passed between 1843 and 1856, effectively offered slaves only a single alternative: to assume the status of *corvée* peasant. However, the uncertain status of *corvée* peasants, who were at risk of exploitation and essentially at the mercy of the owner of the estate they worked on, did nothing to stimulate the now emancipated slaves to respond to the authorities’ requests. The governmental programs aimed at the sedentarization of *țigani* in the 1830s and 1840s were seriously hampered by the *corvée* system, since some itinerant “Gypsies” refused to settle in villages, fearing they might become *corvée* peasants.

Nevertheless, most *țigani* with itinerant occupations did settle in villages and houses as a result of the sedentarization measures. While around half of the approximately 200,000 slaves in the Romanian principalities had been living a “nomadic” life around 1830, by 1900 there remained only around 30,000 nomadic and semi-nomadic “Gypsies.” However, some of them settled only during the era of the Organic Regulations and returned to their former itinerancy later.

CHANGES IN SLAVE LABOR: EXTRACTION OF LABOR IN THE FINAL PERIOD OF SLAVERY

For centuries, slaves in the Romanian principalities had a distinct economic specificity engendered by their occupations as well as by the fact that many of them worked itinerantly. They traveled from village to village with their goods and crafts, stopping for a few days in each location to sell wares and fill the orders of the locals.⁹

This characteristic of the slave economy in the Romanian countries was the result of a large influx of Roma with their nomadic way of life into the slave category during the Middle Ages. The occupations and territorial mobility practiced by slaves of Roma origin responded to the needs of the Romanian villages until the first half of the nineteenth century when, in a new demographic and economic context, a “sedentarization” of some of the crafts practiced by this group occurred.

During the period of emancipation from the 1830s to the 1850s, and especially in its early years, there was a large number of enslaved or emancipated *țigani* practicing crafts. Itinerant Roma essentially monopolized certain crafts in the rural areas of Wallachia and Moldavia. Regardless of whether they were state, monastery, or boyar slaves, there were many craftsmen among the *țigani*: ironsmiths, blacksmiths, coppersmiths, tinsmiths, etc. These professions, which were regularly practiced itinerantly, were important for the rural economy.

However, the number of people practicing trades in this fashion declined in the decades in question not only due to overall developments in the economy and competition from industrial goods but also owing to the rigid sedentarization policy, which did not take the specificity of different Roma groups into account. People who had formerly earned a living by practicing a craft were forced to engage in agriculture, which they were not good at and had no interest in. The result was that many of them gave up their crafts in part or entirely and turned to other activities.

The occupational structure of the (former) slave population thus changed significantly during the age of emancipation. Some older professions shrunk or disappeared completely: *Aurari* (gold washers), for example, who collected gold from river sand, gradually vanished in the first decades of the nineteenth century due to the depletion of gold resources.

One category that was maintained was that of domestic slaves working as servants, cooks, tailors, coachmen, and the like in the houses, mansions, courts, and other localities where their masters resided. Many monasteries also continued to employ slaves in their households. Slave owners tended to reduce their numbers of domestic slaves during the period of emancipation, however, as hiring paid servants often cost less than sustaining slave families. They preferred to use slaves for work on their estates or to collect *dajdia* (taxes) from *țigani* traveling the country plying various trades.

There were also several new occupations in which slaves were used in large numbers in the first half of the nineteenth century. They included brick production, labor on construction sites as unskilled workers, logging work in forests, and seasonal labor on large estates. In particular, many slaves were employed in public construction works like roads, churches, schools, and other public buildings.

But the most significant transformation that took place in the slave economy was the involvement of a massive number of *țigani* in agricultural activities. This was primarily due to the mass settlements during the 1830s–1850s resulting from the consistent enforcement of sedentarization policies for three decades. Itinerant slaves were settled—sometimes by force—on estates that needed additional manpower. The aim was not to make the Roma agricultural workers or day laborers, although there were such proposals as well, but rather to transform them into farmers like the *corvée* peasants. In other words, they had to have a small farm with tools, animals, and so on, working the plot of land they received from the estate owner autonomously in the same regime of obligations as the *corvée* peasants and performing all the requisite agricultural work during the entire farming cycle. Following their sedentarization, the slaves thus became *de facto* *corvée* peasants—and the emancipation from slavery that occurred later assigned that status to them *de jure* as well.

This outcome was not achieved everywhere, however, as there was strong resistance from Roma forced to abandon occupations that were often more lucrative than plowing. Many of them stubbornly refused the status of *corvée* peasantry and preferred to do other work, including seasonal agricultural labor

on estates. But even in the 1830s, the vast majority of slaves in the Romanian principalities worked on estates in one form or another, and this percentage would increase further over the following decades.

A precise numerical ratio between different professional categories of slaves is difficult to establish, since no statistics of the *țigani* in the country by profession were kept at the time. In a statistic published in 1849 by Nicolae Suțu, a scholar and politician involved in the government's emancipation project, we find the following numbers for the distribution of the *țigani* population (current and emancipated slaves) by economic branches in Moldavia, listing a total of 12198 families: (1) farmers—6518 families (3018 monastery and private/3500 state); (2) craftsmen and merchants—2603 families (2000 monastery and private/663 state); (3) “employees and other classes”—3017 families (monastery and private).¹⁰ The third category includes *țigani* (slaves or emancipated) working for wages (servants, day laborers, etc.) as well as other groups. Beyond the inaccuracies of this statistic, which underestimates the number of *țigani* and uses several rounded figures, it is to be noted that out of the total of registered persons, 53 percent were farmers, 22 percent were craftsmen and traders, and 25 percent worked for a salary or subsisted by other activities. The share of craftsmen had certainly been higher in 1830, as the subsequent developments had reduced the number of *țigani* practicing itinerant crafts while increasing the number engaged in agriculture.

The exploitation of slave labor in the Romanian principalities featured two components throughout all periods: (1) the tax that slaves paid to their master, which resulted from their subaltern status and (2) the obligations slaves had towards the owner of the estate on which they stayed and earned their living, who could be their own master or another person. Like serfs and corvée peasants, slaves also had to pay for their right to use the agricultural land and live in a village situated on an estate.

In the case of state slaves, the main form of exploitation was the tax they paid to the state, called *bir* respectively *capitația* (capitation, head tax) after the introduction of the Organic Regulations in 1831–1832. Likewise pursuant to the Organic Regulations, state slaves working in guilds within towns paid *patenta* (trade tax), as did the free craftsmen. The capitation amounted to 30 lei, as it did for free individuals, with the exception of the *Aurari* in Wallachia, who paid 50 lei. Ten percent of this sum (3 lei respectively 5 lei) was added on top to cover the expenses incurred in collecting the tax. The *patenta* differed depending on the craft and the situation of the respective guild. The Organic Regulations thus raised the taxes for state slaves to the same level as those for free people, which explains why they protested these new tax obligations. The level of capitation for state slaves was not considered excessive at the time; one leu was the lowest pay for a day's work by an unskilled worker, free or enslaved. But there were nevertheless slave families who could hardly afford to pay the tax.

The monastery and boyar slaves owed nothing to the state; instead, they had obligations to their masters. The individuals in these two categories who

earned their living working in the country paid their owner a sum of money called *dajdia*. Domestic slaves who lived in their master's house, mansion, or court, as well as those who worked in monasteries, hospitals, and the like did not pay this tax, for they were always at the disposal of their master. Their only obligation to the master was their work.

In the period of the Organic Regulations, more and more slave owners—boyars as well as monasteries—were preoccupied with making as much profit as possible from their slaves. They used the *Țigani* on their estates as agricultural workers or craftsmen, in workshops and factories, or they rented them out to other boyars or tenants for use on their estates, respectively to entrepreneurs who needed workers for construction sites. In this way, slave owners were able to make more profit than they could from *dajdia*.

The level of *dajdia* varied greatly from one master to another, whether boyar or monastery. There were situations in which masters demanded very large payments, which were then collected by resorting to violence or the appropriation of their slaves' animals and property. This naturally provoked protests from affected slaves, who appealed to the authorities. In reaction to such protests in Wallachia in 1840, the state intervened and limited the *dajdia* to be paid by monastery slaves to the capitation paid by free people: 30 lei per year, to which the customary collection tithe (3 lei) was added. Future leases had to take this law into account.

The state did not intervene on behalf of the private slaves, however. This may explain why numerous owners abused their power by demanding and collecting excessive *dajdia* from their slaves, especially in the 1850s. Evanghelie Zappa (Greek name: Evangelos Zappas), one of the richest businessmen in Wallachia and owner of almost 500 slaves, collected a *dajdia* of 10 ducats (314 lei) per person from two of them in the 1850s—an exorbitant amount and perhaps the largest *dajdia* paid by a slave at the time. Ten ducats were the usual price at which a slave was traded, as well as the amount for which the state-redeemed slaves put up for sale. The two slaves in question were fiddlers living in Bucharest and certainly earned significant amounts of money with their performances, but they nevertheless found it difficult to pay the demanded sum, as they complained in a petition to the Wallachian Treasury in February 1855.¹¹

As in the case of the *corvée* peasants, the harshest exploitation of slaves was affected by estate owners and tenants. The obligations to the estate owner were regulated by law, with the most important of them being *claca* (*corvée*), a quantity of work that each peasant (and each slave working under a similar regime), had to perform for the estate owner as payment for the right to live in a village on the estate and cultivate a plot of land. On many estates, the *claca* regulations were not observed, with owners forcing their peasants and slaves to work more than 12 days a year in Wallachia respectively 24 days in Moldavia as stipulated by the Organic Regulations.

The most severe situation of this kind seems to have occurred on the Sutești estate in the county of Brăila in Wallachia, which was owned by Costache

Suțu, another major landowner and slaveholder. He did not collect *dajdia* from his slaves but instead used them on his estates, which produced large quantities of grain for export. Suțu and his tenant at Suțești subjected the *țigani* to ruthless exploitation, which came to light after the publication of the emancipation law in February 1856. The investigation revealed the existence of written agreements between the boyar and the slaves by which the latter were in fact deceived. According to these agreements, each slave had to work 153 days for the boyar in 1853 and 1854 and only 80 days in 1855. However, few slaves were able to provide this much work, and most of them thus accumulated arrears, which were converted into money owed. On account of the days not worked in 1853, 1854, and 1855, the slaves had total debts of 7076 lei and 37 para—a very large amount. The situation in Suțești may constitute the worst instance of exploitation of slaves on a private estate in Wallachia during the age of emancipation.¹²

Nevertheless, the exploitation of slaves in the Romanian principalities during the nineteenth century should not be exaggerated. The revenue generated by a slave (whether employed at the boyar's residence or wandering the country) for their master was generally small, and the income produced by slaves working the land on estates was usually lower than that generated by *corvée* peasants. Slaves were not always profitable from an economic point of view, which was reflected in their generally low selling price.

EXIT FROM SLAVERY: ABOLITION OF SLAVERY IN THE ROMANIAN PRINCIPALITIES, 1831–1856

In the period from 1831 to 1856, the final and definitive abolition of slavery occurred in the Romanian principalities. It was the result of a long and protracted legislative process and required a huge administrative effort, with around 250,000 people changing their status. The abolitionist movement initiated by Romanian intellectuals who had studied in the West played an important role in preparing the reform: They introduced the issue of abrogating slavery in public discourse, created a current of opinion in favor of abolition—including in some conservative circles, especially after 1848—and directly or indirectly influenced the emancipation-related legislation.¹³

The abolition of slavery in the two countries was a complex process not least because multiple different categories of slaves existed. For this reason, the abolishment was enacted through a series of three laws in each principality, each of which ensured the emancipation of a particular category of *țigani*, between 1843 and 1856: state slaves were freed in Wallachia in 1843 and in Moldavia in 1844; monastery slaves in Moldavia in 1844 and in Wallachia in 1847; and privately owned slaves on 10/22 December 1855 in Moldavia and on 8/20 February 1856 in Wallachia.¹⁴

There was also a further act of liberation in Wallachia in 1848: During the revolution in the principality, the provisional government issued a decree freeing private slaves on 26 June 1848, and a Commission for the Liberation

of Slaves was established to implement it. The defeat of the revolution by the Ottoman army in September 1848 put an end to this transformation, however, and the *țigani* were returned to slavery.¹⁵

The liberation of state slaves was comparatively easy and occurred without any resistance. The state did not lose anything, since the slaves transferred to the category of free people remained taxpayers. Nor did the Orthodox Church oppose the laws for the emancipation of slaves belonging to monasteries. There were only specific requests from some monasteries that demanded (and obtained) compensation without which they could not perform their public services. The elimination of private slaves was more difficult to achieve due to the opposition of slave owners who considered their *țigani* private property. When the abolitionists renounced their radical position demanding that the emancipation of private slaves was to occur without any compensation, as had been the case during the revolution in 1848, and accepted the principle of compensation at market price for the losses suffered by slave owners, a consensus on the complete abolishment of slavery was reached among the ruling class. The notion of the need to liberate slaves was embraced by almost all of Romanian society including slave owners, who acquiesced to the measure under the condition of financial compensation. The laws of 1855 and 1856 provided generous compensations to slave owners, to be paid in stages or in bonds.

The final abolition of slavery was a matter of time in this period, and the right moment came in the context of the Crimean War, when the Romanian principalities and their project of unification into a single nation state came to the attention of Europe. It was no surprise when, in December 1855 and February 1856 respectively and under favorable international circumstances, with the European powers expecting proof of the Romanians' orientation towards the West, the political factors in Iași and Bucharest—that is, the Moldavian and Wallachian rulers and assemblies—decided to completely abolish slavery in the two principalities.

Despite borrowing to some degree from the philanthropic tradition of the Orthodox Church early on in the 1820s, Romanian abolitionism was essentially a phenomenon of acculturation: The model it followed was that of French abolitionism. The emergence of this cultural and ideological phenomenon and the activity of the abolitionists show that the Romanian society was ready for a discussion on the important topic of slavery and that the policies regarding slaves developed in the Romanian principalities after 1831, beginning with the sedentarization of “nomadic” slaves and ending with the final law of emancipation in 1856, were generated in an intellectual and administrative environment open to foreign news and attentive to slavery-related developments in other spaces.

The vast majority of slaves in the Romanian principalities obtained their personal freedom based on the six emancipation laws mentioned above. However, the liberation of individuals and groups from slavery also occurred in both principalities by way of government programs for the redemption of

slaves put up for sale by private owners. In Wallachia, the legal framework for redeeming privately owned slaves was established in Articles 12 and 13 of the *Act for the Correction of the Organization of State Gypsies* (1832), and the first redemptions were performed in 1833. In Moldavia, the mechanism was only introduced in 1844 together with the laws for the emancipation of monastery slaves. In Wallachia, the necessary funds were provided by using part of the capitation tithe collected from the state slaves. In Moldavia, the taxes collected from the monastery slaves emancipated in 1844 were placed in a special fund designated for redemptions.¹⁶

Redemptions under the 1832 Wallachian law were difficult, however. The number of slaves purchased by the state was small, as it was conditioned by the sum in the ransom fund and the number of announced sales. In the years from 1833 to 1845, 989 individuals and 10 families were redeemed, amounting to a total of around 1034 persons if the average family is considered to have 4.5 people. In 1846 and 1847, no redemptions were made. In 1848 (the year of the revolution), 2219 slaves were redeemed, and later around 1000 a year.¹⁷ In Moldavia, too, redemptions were relatively few.

There were also situations in which private individuals redeemed slaves for one reason or another by buying them from the owner and giving them their freedom. Some rural communities redeemed slaves who lived and practiced a craft in the community, respectively *țigani* craftsmen they wished to permanently settle in their village, with money collected from the peasants (“ransomed by the villagers” or “redeemed by the village” in the period documents). Some slaves were able to redeem themselves (“redeemed by himself” or “emancipated by himself”), paying their master the required price and thus obtaining freedom for themselves and their families.¹⁸ The state encouraged such transactions.

Finally, the phenomenon of voluntary manumission by slave owners also existed. Both ransom and manumission meant little in terms of their total numbers, however.

The emancipation laws enacted between 1843 and 1856 along with the several thousand individual liberations by ransom and manumission from 1831 to 1856 transformed the slaves in the Romanian principalities into free people. Their legal emancipation placed them in the social category in the middle of which they already lived, or were intended to live, by the effects of the emancipation law. If not the fundamental laws, then at least the secondary legislation dealt to some extent with the future of the emancipated, but in general, the material aspects of emancipation were left to the owners of estates.

The fates of the former slaves varied: Some became *corvée* peasants and eventually, through the land reform of 1864, small landowners; others settled in villages and continued to practice crafts; some became craftsmen in towns, with a few from this group later asserting themselves as entrepreneurs; a minority returned to itinerancy and earned their living by traveling from village to village plying crafts or mobile trade; others remained entirely in the nomadic lifestyle. In many villages, former slaves unable to adapt to agriculture formed

a new type of poor with marginal occupations. Naturally, not all emancipated *țigani* achieved an improvement of their economic and social status over their previous life as slaves.

CONCLUSION

Slavery in the Romanian principalities in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was a very complex institution. The dynamics it experienced from the 1830s to the 1850s were related to the economic, social, and other transformations Wallachia and Moldavia underwent at the time, as well as to interventions by the state, which after 1831 constantly sought to restrict slavery and liberate the different categories of slaves from their status in turn. The territorial dynamics of slavery in its final stage of existence determined by the policy of sedentarization were accompanied by an extraordinary professional mobility of this population. The reduction of the share of crafts practiced by “Gypsy” slaves and the transition of many of them to agricultural work meant a major change in the slave economy. There has been an extraordinary economic diversification, with groups, much more numerous, that have lost their crafts and thus have become de-professionalized and impoverished. However, the predominant evolution was in the direction of losing the economic and social specificity and the integration of (former) slaves in the country’s population, this being the goal pursued by the policy of sedentarization, but also by the laws of emancipation.

If in previous centuries slavery in the Romanian principalities evolved somewhat independently of what was happening in the rest of the world, the last stage of the existence of slavery in the Romanian principalities exhibited a certain synchronicity with developments in other slavery systems. The pressure that abolitionists and governments in Wallachia and Moldavia, as in the West, exerted on slavery was likely to highlight the common elements of this global phenomenon.

NOTES

1. On the full spectrum of Ottoman enslavement, see Ehud R. Toledano, “The Concept of Slavery in Ottoman and Other Muslim Societies: Dichotomy or Continuum?” in *Slave Elites in the Middle East and Africa: A Comparative Study*, ed. Miura Toru and John Edward Philips (London: Kegan Paul International, 2000), 159–76.
2. See Michael Ferguson and Ehud R. Toledano, “Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth-Century,” in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 4, ed. David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, David Richardson and Seymour Drescher (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016), 197–225.
3. On slavery in the Ottoman Empire, see the chapter by Hayri Özkoray in this handbook.

4. On slavery in the Romanian principalities, see in particular Viorel Achim, *The Roma in Romanian History* (Budapest, New York: Central European University Press, 2004), 27–69, 87–127.
5. Venera Achim, “Statistica țiganilor în Principatele Române în perioada 1830–1860,” *Revista Istorică* 16, no. 3–4 (2005): 97–122, here 118.
6. See Achim, *The Roma*, 27–28, 34–35.
7. On changes to the institution of slavery, see Achim, *The Roma*, 39–42, 103–112.
8. The two Organic Regulations have been republished in *Regulamentele Organice ale Valahiei și Moldovei*, vol. 1, *Textele puse în aplicare la 1 Iulie 1831 în Valahia și la 1 Ianuarie 1832 în Moldova*, ed. Paul Negulescu, George Alexianu (Bucharest, 1944).
9. Some information on the slave economy in the Romanian principalities in Achim, *The Roma*, 45–58, 88–93.
10. Nicolas Soutzo, *Notions statistiques sur la Moldavie* (Jassy, 1849), 64–65.
11. Arhivele Naționale Istorice Centrale (hereafter: ANIC), fond Vistieria Țării Românești, dosar 51/1854, f. 263, Nicolae Șerban and Petre Șerban, slaves of Evanghelie Zappa, to the Minister of Finance, February 1855.
12. ANIC, fond Ministerul de Interne—Direcțiunea Rurală-Comunală, dosar 28/1856, f. 89–90.
13. On the process of emancipation from slavery, see Achim, *The Roma*, 95–112; Viorel Achim, “The Gypsies in the Romanian Principalities: The Emancipation Laws, 1831–1856,” *Historical Yearbook* 1 (2004): 109–120.
14. See Achim, *The Roma*, 108–111.
15. Achim, *The Roma*, 109–110.
16. Achim, *The Roma*, 105–106, 108–109.
17. Statistics on redemptions of slaves in Venera Achim, *Țiganii din principatele române în epoca dezrobirii (1830–1860): Aspecte economice și statistice*, PhD dissertation, Academy of Economic Studies, Bucharest, 2005, 57.
18. Several examples of redemption in Venera Achim, “The Policy of Settling Gypsy Blacksmiths in the Wallachian Villages, 1831–1848,” in *Identity Projects and Processes in the Romanian Space, 19th–20th Centuries*, ed. Viorel Achim (Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy, Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2010), 37–49.

FURTHER READINGS

- Achim, Viorel. *The Roma in Romanian History*. Budapest: Central European University Press, 2004.
- Achim, Viorel. “The Gypsies in the Romanian Principalities: The Emancipation Laws, 1831–1856,” *Historical Yearbook* 1 (2004): 109–120.
- Achim, Viorel. “Romanian Abolitionists on the Future of the Emancipated Gypsies,” in *Identity Projects and Processes in the Romanian Space, 19th–20th Centuries*, edited by Viorel Achim, 23–36. Cluj-Napoca: Romanian Academy, Center for Transylvanian Studies, 2010.
- Achim, Viorel. “Considerations about the Territorial Distribution of Slaves in the Romanian Principalities,” in *Slaving Zones: Cultural Identities, Ideologies, and Institutions in the Evolution of Global Slavery*, edited by Jeff Fynn-Paul and Damian Alan Pargas, 70–93. Leiden – Boston: Brill, 2017.

- Erdem, Y. Hakan. *Slavery in the Ottoman Empire and its Demise, 1800–1909*. Houndmills—Basingstoke—Hampshire: Macmillan Press; New York: St. Martin's, 1996.
- Ferguson, Michael, and Toledano, Ehud R. "Ottoman Slavery and Abolition in the Nineteenth-Century," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery*, vol. 4, edited by David Eltis, Stanley L. Engerman, David Richardson, and Seymour Drescher. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016. pp. 197–225
- Petcuț, Petre. *Romii: Sclavie și libertate. Constituirea și emanciparea unei noi categorii și sociale la nord de Dunăre 1370–1914* [The Roma: Slavery and freedom. Establishment and emancipation of a new ethnic and social category north of the Danube 1370–1914]. Bucharest, 2015.
- Toledano, Ehud R. *The Ottoman Slave Trade and Its Suppression, 1840–1890*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982.
- Toledano, Ehud R. "Late Ottoman Concepts of Slavery (1830s–1880s)," *Poetics Today* 14/3 (1993): 477–506.
- Toledano, Ehud R. *Slavery and Abolition in the Ottoman Middle East*. Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1998.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Injection: The Global Spread of Abolitionism

William Mulligan 

INTRODUCTION

In 1808, the British anti-slavery campaigner, Thomas Clarkson, represented the origins of the abolitionist movement as a metaphorical map of streams, “joining and swelling the torrent which swept away the Slave Trade.” The tributary streams represented the great men, who developed the moral case, derived from their Christianity and enlightened thinking, against the slave trade. Drawing on deep-rooted traditions of liberty and acting in a “free country,” these men were able to furnish the “light and information,” which mobilized public opinion and shaped government action.¹ Clarkson’s account, with its neatly drawn narrative of a moral revolution, sustained by public opinion, provided an enduring framework for understanding the rise of abolitionist movements in the nineteenth century. It has remained a point of departure, even for scholars, who have dismantled Clarkson’s assumptions and who have demonstrated the contingency and variety of sources of abolition, its political travails, and the limits of abolitionist movements’ successes over the course of the nineteenth century. This injection essay examines the origins of abolitionist movements, the development of transnational networks, and the effects of those movements on the ending of slavery. It argues that anti-slavery thinking proved capacious and flexible, achieving a global reach while taking account of local conditions. Movements and networks arose from coalitions,

W. Mulligan (✉)

School of History, University College Dublin, Dublin, Ireland

e-mail: william.mulligan@ucd.ie

based on shared, but contingent, interests. The effect of their campaigns often proved limited, particularly after the initial triumph of the passage of a law or military conquest. Yet despite the compromises, abolition achieved one of the most significant transformations in modern history, so that slavery was no longer considered a justifiable practice in the vast majority of societies by the turn of the twentieth century.

THE RISE AND DEVELOPMENT OF ABOLITIONIST THOUGHT

What were the sources of abolitionist thinking that condemned slavery *tout court* rather than the enslavement of specific groups? If Clarkson located the roots of abolitionist thought in the eighteenth-century British North Atlantic, more recently historians have debated whether slaves were the original abolitionists. Slave resistance was a feature of all slaveholding societies, but historians have distinguished between slaves revolting against their own enslavement and slaves' role in abolitionism. Slaves and abolitionists interacted to bring about the end of slavery. There is evidence of increasing numbers of slave revolts from the mid-eighteenth century, including revolts on slaving ships crossing the Atlantic. Newspapers in Britain devoted increasing attention to slave revolts on ships, widening public sympathy for slaves, preparing the context for the popular anti-slave trade campaigns of the early nineteenth century. Abolition in Philadelphia offers an example of a pincer movement in which slaves pressured their masters for emancipation, while abolitionists shifted public attitudes to slavery.

Slave revolts contributed significantly to the development of a wider abolitionist agenda. They placed slaveholding regimes under pressure and widened the opportunities for other slaves to resist or escape slavery. The most significant slave revolt in modern history started in Haiti in 1791. Historians remain divided about the causes of the Haitian Revolution, the motivations of leaders Toussaint Louverture and Jean-Jacques Dessalines, the use of coercive labor practices by the rebel leaders, and relations between Haiti and the leading powers in the Atlantic world. The Haitian revolution had exemplary effects, ones that both strengthened the conviction of slaveholders in repressing any sign of resistance and prescribing a script of resistance for slaves in other societies, who heard about the revolt through mobile networks of slaves and travelers. Toussaint Louverture's example confirmed for many slaves in the Caribbean that only rebellion could end slavery, whereas they viewed Wilberforce as a "constrained ally," reliant on the goodwill of the monarch and only committed to the suppression of the slave trade.² Although the violence of the Haitian Revolution shocked some abolitionists, it also confirmed their criticisms of slavery. Studies of the ideology of revolting slaves in Haiti demonstrate a wide range of ideas. Not only did they draw upon French revolutionary debates and Enlightenment thinkers but also upon other political traditions, such as debates about political authority in the Congo.

The rise of abolitionist thought in the late eighteenth-century North Atlantic drew upon diverse sources, including natural rights, evangelical concerns about sin and national virtue, and arguments about the greater efficiency of free labor. Crises—such as the impact of the French Revolution on Haiti—provided the occasion for the fusion of these long-standing and diverse intellectual traditions into an abolitionist agenda. For example, Brown has shown how the American Revolution and loss of colonies created a new context for anti-slavery ideas in Britain. Bitter polemics during the American Revolution saw colonial and British politicians, thinkers, and officials accuse each of being responsible for the iniquities of slavery and the slave trade. The rhetorical demands of liberty on both sides of the Atlantic raised the issue of slavery into a yardstick against which rival moral claims to virtue could be measured. Following American independence, British campaigners argued that the loss of the colonies was a divine punishment on Britain for its role in slavery. These campaigners tended to come from evangelical groups, such as the Clapham Sect, and dissenting religious denominations, such as Quakers and Baptists. They shared a commitment to “practical Christianity” and their arguments appealed to concerns about British national interests. National renewal and the maintenance of the empire required atonement. British honor and salvation were at stake, according to the accounts of anti-slavery activists, who sometimes saw their proposed measures as a means, not an end in themselves.

On the other side of the Atlantic, Arthur Benezet, the Philadelphia Quaker and early abolitionist campaigner lamented in the early 1770s “that unfeeling disposition for the miseries of others, which so much prevails, in this age.”³ Lynn Hunt, however, argues that a revolution in sensibilities occurred during the eighteenth century, promoting an awareness of the suffering of others. The expansion of empathy derived from various sources: from compassion, born out of religious practice (as in the outward turn of Quakers, evident in Benezet’s own life), and from varieties of natural rights thought in the Enlightenment. In turn, this sensibility impelled reforms, which underpinned the modern conception of human rights. The claims set out in the American Constitution and the French Declaration of the Rights of Man drew on this sensibility and provided a language of universal humanity that slaves and abolitionists could draw to stake claims.⁴

The universalist claims of some abolitionists gave rise to a complex relationship with imperial projects and thinking over the course of the nineteenth century. The context was important in shaping the relationship between imperialist thinking and anti-slavery politics. In the British empire, by the 1840s imperialists, colonial officials, and settlers argued that humanitarian policies risked destabilizing the economic underpinnings of colonies and their internal and external security. The economic arguments about the greater efficiency of free labor persisted in abolitionist writings, but supporters of slavery claimed that the poor economic performance of former slave colonies justified coercive labor regimes.⁵ On the other hand, British and French liberals supported

imperial expansion as a civilizing project that went beyond the material interests of empires. The civilizing mission, in its various iterations, aimed ultimately at the transformation of other societies. The eradication of slavery was central to liberal imperial thought. It became an important justification for imperial expansion, particularly in the latter part of the nineteenth century. Many anti-slavery activists supported European territorial conquests in Africa in the 1880s, culminating in the Brussels Conference of 1890. That said, the relationship between abolitionism and imperialism was often contingent. In 1882, Liberals in Britain suddenly adopted anti-slavery rhetoric, seeking to justify the invasion of Egypt.

William Gervase Clarence-Smith has argued that Islamic abolitionism was an autonomous force, which “played a vital role in turning the shadow of legislation into a lived reality.” Debates within Islamic societies had their own roots, as ulama scholars sought to rework the Koranic codes about slavery. Abolishing slavery in the Ottoman province of Tunis in 1846, the Governor General, Ahmad Bey, deployed arguments against Koranic injunctions about demonstrating compassion and against the enslavement of fellow Muslims. Lofkrantz’s chapter in the present volume shows that anti-slavery jihads in West African societies aimed to protect freeborn Muslims.⁶ Other scholars have been more skeptical about anti-slavery thought in Islamic societies. While acknowledging the prescription of the Koran to treat slaves well, while remarking that manumission was seen as an act of mercy, and while noting that slavery in Islamic societies was sometimes less severe than on large plantations in the Atlantic world, historians have doubted the existence of significant anti-slavery traditions in Islamic societies. They argue that the ending of slavery was largely due to European, especially British, pressure. Debate about the existence of slavery, rather than the treatment of slaves, was stimulated by encounters with European and American thinkers. In Tunis, Ahmad Bey was well-informed about abolitionism in the British empire. Ahmed Shafik, an Egyptian law student in Paris, heard the opening salvo of Cardinal Lavigerie’s campaign against the slave trade in 1888. After this, he wrote a book, which defended the practice of Islamic slavery and rejected comparisons with plantation slavery. However, he also condemned the practice of the slave trade and kidnapping of slaves. His arguments drew on Koranic traditions and the circumstances of slavery in Egypt. The interweaving of justifications and intellectual encounters renders it impossible to identify a single *fons et origo* of abolitionist thought; indeed, the success of abolitionist networks required adaptation across different social contexts.

THE MOBILIZATION OF ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENTS

How did abolitionist movements spread and mobilize throughout the nineteenth century? Specific local conditions shaped anti-slavery movements, but they also developed transnational connections and networks. In many cases, these connections were contingent and transitory, people are often thrown

together by circumstances, who shared a common but momentary purpose in challenging slavery. Slaves had to organize their networks of resistance away from the surveillance of slave owners and officials. Slaves and their allies in abolitionist movements organized underground networks, not only to support fugitives and organize resistance but also to circulate information. On the other hand, anti-slavery campaigners had to sustain a popular campaign. They developed international anti-slavery networks and movements. Varied in depth and breadth, these networks sustained the globalization of anti-slavery politics, spread information, promoted mobilization, and magnified the local significance of abolitionist groups. These transnational networks produced a backlash, as opponents denounced abolitionists for fomenting sedition among slaves and for harming national interests. This section describes some of these networks to provide a sense of the diverse social and geographic connections.

Julius Scott's *The Common Wind* is a pathbreaking analysis of the networks of slaves, fugitive slaves, deserters from the army, sailors, higglers, peddlers, and musicians that sustained the circulation of news and gossip in the Caribbean.⁷ The expansion of plantation society and its associated commercial and social networks produced opportunities and sites for resistance by slaves and others. Port cities, such as Havana, Kingston, and Cap Français, became "capitals of Afro-America," where fugitive slaves formed associations to preserve their freedom and organized resistance to slavery. News traveled back and forth between countryside and city, as slaves attended markets and social occasions, while sailors and maroons sailed short distances, recounting events in one colony to slaves living in another colony. Information spread through gossip, song, and emblems, as well as texts. Through these channels, news of the Haitian revolt and other slave revolts spread, while slaves discussed the principles of liberty and equality, which they used to stake claims to freedom. What Marcus Rediker calls the "strategic application" of news played a critical role in mobilizing anti-slavery resistance among slaves. Slaves also formed alliances with others, including free blacks and European immigrants. These networks of intelligence spread far beyond the Caribbean. For example, in 1808, 300 slaves in the Cape Colony revolted. The leaders included Louis, a slave in Cape Town, Jephta, born in Indonesia and a slave on a rural plantation, and James Hooper, an Irish vagabond, who had left Ireland in 1799, and who informed others that in the United Kingdom, "every person was free."⁸ The context of the Abolition of the Slave Trade Act of 1807 was a critical impetus in spreading information about changes in imperial policy, while news of revolutions throughout the Atlantic world had long circulated in the Cape colony.

The rise of anti-slavery politics in Britain and North America owed much to the circulation of people and texts, broadening popular coalitions on both sides of the Atlantic. Anti-slavery sentiment at Cambridge University, which played a formative role in Thomas Clarkson's life, has been traced to the writings and influence of early black abolitionists, such as Phyllis Wheatley, Ignatius

Sancho, and Olaudah Equiano, which shaped the thinking of the radical abolitionist, Peter Peckard, Master of Magdalene College. Wheatley, born in West Africa, had visited Britain with her slave owner in 1773 and met campaigners, who supported the publication of her poetry. In the midst of the turmoil of the American Revolution, religious networks bound anti-slavery activism in Britain and the colonies. Quakers were particularly prominent on both sides of the Atlantic and delivered the first petition to the House of Commons in 1783.

Britain became the fulcrum of global anti-slavery politics throughout the nineteenth century, from the mass petitions against the slave trade in the early nineteenth century to the popular mobilization against the “new slaveries” in Africa in the late nineteenth century, particularly in the Belgian Congo. Britain’s own pre-eminence in the slave trade, its dominant position in the global economy, and its imperial reach informed the distinctive character of its anti-slavery politics. In addition, domestic political and social conditions, including constitutional government, centered on parliament, expanding suffrage, a largely free press, and varied religious denominations also shaped British abolitionist movements. Popular anti-slavery campaigns in Britain often formed part of campaigns for broader political and social reform.

By the middle of the nineteenth century, the increasing ease of communication enabled abolitionists to deepen and institutionalize their networks. The World’s Anti-Slavery Convention met in London in June 1840, attracting 500 delegates, including former slaves, and 5000 visitors, mainly from Britain and the United States. Women were not permitted full membership of the Convention, a subject of criticism at the time. The Convention was part of a new way of conducting international politics that accelerated from the 1840s, as gentlemanly networks of a reforming bent gathered to focus on a particular aspect of transnational relations. William Ellery Channing, a leading Unitarian preacher from the United States, alluded to this: “Great men, as they are called, have seldom been *moved by a higher impulse, than a narrow, unjust patriotism*. It is time that the principles of universal justice and love should be recognized as the lawful sovereigns of the world.”⁹ In 1843, anti-slavery activists organized a second Convention. Tours by charismatic American personalities, such as Frederick Douglass and Harriet Beecher Stowe, supported anti-slavery activists in Britain during the 1840s and 1850s, at a time when claims about the failure of abolition in the British empire put humanitarians on the defensive.

The campaign of Cardinal Charles Lavigerie, primate of Africa and a leading French Catholic missionary, against the slave trade in central Africa in the 1880s illustrates the momentary confluence of interests that sustained a transnational abolitionist coalition. Each of the constituent elements of this coalition had its own interest. In part, Lavigerie became interested in anti-slavery politics as a means of reconciling divisions between the Catholic Church and the French Third Republic. His primary aim within Africa was the expansion of Catholic missionary reach, which he framed in public as a struggle between Christian civilization and Islamic slave traders. In a speaking

tour of Britain, France, and Belgium, Lavigerie appealed to distinct national and political traditions. In France he cast anti-slavery as a shared Christian and republican project, reaching out to anti-clerical leaders. Owing to Franco-German tensions in the late 1880s, he did not travel to Germany, but German Catholics mobilized to support Lavigerie's campaign, while the German Colonial League argued that anti-slavery policies were an essential characteristic of being a European imperial power. In 1888 and 1889, the German Chancellor, Otto von Bismarck, and the British Prime Minister, Lord Salisbury, drew on the popularity of the anti-slavery campaign to justify conquest in East Africa on the grounds of a military intervention against powerful local slave traders. The popular anti-slavery campaign concluded with the Brussels Conference of 1889 and Brussels Act of 1890. Though European colonial practices made a mockery of the proclaimed humanitarian goals of the Brussels Act, it also reinforced the normative claims against slavery. The 1926 League of Nations Slavery Convention cited the Brussels Act.

These networks could also shift from opposition to slavery to campaigning against new forms of coerced labor. The Anti-Slavery Society denounced "blackbirding"—the recruitment of Pacific islanders to work in Fiji and Queensland—as the revival of the slave trade, although colonial officials and planters protested that labor traders in the South Pacific never purchased nor sold slaves. Transnational networks provided an impetus for the protection of indentured labor. For example, the Chinese Educational Mission in Connecticut linked with American humanitarian groups to highlight the vulnerability of Chinese "coolie" laborers in Peru and Cuba.¹⁰

THE EFFECTS OF ABOLITIONIST MOVEMENTS

Abolition was a slow, halting, even reversible process. The success of abolitionist movements often relied on accepting a gradual process that slowed emancipation. The Pennsylvania law that emancipated slaves meant that slaves born in 1780 lived in captivity, so that there were still slaves in that state as late as 1847. The abolition of slavery in the British empire in 1833 required a period of apprenticeship of up to eight years, but this ended in 1838 following further popular pressure. Brazil offers another example of a gradualist approach. In 1851, Brazil banned the importation of slaves. This was followed in 1865 with a ban on punishments, and then a free womb law in 1871. Only in 1888 did Brazil finally abolish slavery, following intensive popular campaigns, involving local manumissions, abolitionist disruption of slave markets, and slave resistance. One obvious exception to the gradualist approach was the Emancipation Proclamation in January 1863 as part of the Union's strategy during the American Civil War. In this instance, the Union compromised by retaining slavery in loyal states but had no need to negotiate about slavery with the Confederacy. The history of emancipation, its reversal, and the re-introduction of emancipation in the French colonial empire shows

the reversibility of abolitionist measures. Abolition served revolutionary political agendas, imperial geopolitics, and military strategy in Paris in 1794 and 1848, while Napoleon re-instituted slavery in 1802 as part of his strategy following the peace of Amiens.

Local conditions and global connections shaped the exit from slavery. As historians have broken away from the “container box” of national histories, they have traced the effects of abolition in one country on the political economies of other societies. The elimination of slavery in one part of the world sometimes led to the rise of slaveholding and coercive labor regimes in other parts of the world. Ada Ferrer has shown how the collapse of the sugar plantation economy during the Haitian revolution led to a boom in sugar plantations in Cuba, entrenching slavery in the Spanish colony. Between 1790 and 1825, Havana doubled in size and 325,000 slaves were imported.¹¹ The American Civil War, which eventually destroyed slavery in the United States, led to a surge in slavery and coercive labor regimes in other parts of the world, driven in large part by European manufacturers’ and consumers’ demand for cheap cotton supplies. The promotion of “legitimate trade,” such as the cultivation of crops in west Africa for export, as an alternative to the transatlantic slave trade resulted in the demand for labor—and the retention of slaves in regions of West Africa.

Emancipated slaves experienced their freedom differently. The moment of liberation posed difficult questions of employment, shelter, and food. Following emancipation, slaves in thinly populated British colonies with access to land were able to secure property. In other colonies, officials rigged the labor market and denied former slaves access to land. This drove former slaves back to plantation work. Members of the American Missionary Association learned about the importance of providing economic support and opportunities during their work in Jamaica in the 1840s, but they and other abolitionists were unable to institute wide-ranging reforms in the United States after 1865. Instead, in the southern states during Reconstruction, planters and state officials stifled the labor market, restricted mobility through wide-ranging vagrancy laws, and instituted share-cropping, a strategy to restore as far as possible the conditions of slavery. In many parts of the world, Sven Beckert has argued, the use of legal codes and rigged labor markets from the mid-nineteenth century replaced “war capitalism,” the overtly violent extraction of labor, with industrial capitalism.¹²

The relationship between the expansion of indentured labor regimes and the abolition of slavery remains a subject of debate. The expansion of global demand for commodities increased the demand for labor, irrespective of the ending of slavery. Global consumption of cotton doubled between 1860 and 1890 and doubled again by 1920. A fundamental condition of slavery—ownership of a human being—did not exist in indentured labor regimes. Nonetheless, following abolition British colonial officials began to systematically arrange the importation of labor from Africa and India to the Caribbean. The rotting of the sugar crop in Jamaica in 1838 was an early signal of

the economic shock caused by the ending of slavery. West Indian planters recruited Chinese labor, while 120,000 Indians went to Mauritius to work on sugar plantations. The move from slavery to indentured labor regimes provided a model for the importation of labor to regions where plantations were established only in the later nineteenth century, such as Queensland and Fiji. European migration to Brazil in the late nineteenth century changed labor market conditions and limited economic opportunities for liberated slaves, another example of how a global labor market and migration shaped the exit conditions for liberated slaves.

European naval crews liberated slaves from slave trading vessels in the Atlantic and Indian oceans but then brought those liberated slaves to European colonies. It was difficult to return liberated slaves to their homes, which were often deep inland, but European colonies profited from the supply of labor. These freed slaves found themselves working alongside coolie labor, sometimes in conditions barely distinguishable from plantation slavery. Some 2550 liberated slaves on vessels bound for Brazil were taken to work in the British West Indies between the 1830s and 1860s. In the western Indian Ocean, a Royal Navy officer condemned French vessels for importing indentured labor to plantations and viewed *engagés* as a synonym for slaves.¹³

The significance of European imperial expansion in the abolition of slavery has long been controversial. The work of Suzanne Miers in the 1970s established the view that the abolition of the slave trade served as a justification for imperial expansion and disguised economic and geopolitical considerations.¹⁴ Colonial security also led European powers to cooperate in the suppression of the slave trade on occasion, as British and Dutch forces intervened to suppress the slave trade in the Sulu Sultanate in the 1860s. As we have seen, leaders such as Salisbury and Bismarck exploited anti-slavery rhetoric, but imperialists had a large stock of ideas with which to justify their moves. Anti-slavery policies complicated imperial expansion and colonial governance. “Philanthropy decidedly costs money,” complained Edward Goschen, the Chancellor to Gladstone, in 1871, as the Liberal administration sought to cut expenditure.¹⁵ The economic benefits of colonies to the metropole remain contentious, but European leaders were dubious about those benefits. In addition, anti-slavery measures often alienated elites, on whom colonial rulers relied.

Britain’s anti-slavery policies were significant in reshaping the geopolitics of slavery. As the world’s most expansive empire, Britain’s anti-slavery moves immediately put pressure on slaveholding societies. First, British abolitionist measures had an exemplary effect, though the example cut both ways. In the 1830s, for example, the abolition of slavery in the British empire alarmed slaveholders in the American South and enthused abolitionists throughout the United States, but the stuttering economic performance of former slave colonies fed slaveholders’ claims. Second, there was a “soft power” effect of British imperialism. States and groups, such as liberal movements in Spain and Portugal or reformers in the Ottoman empire, sought to secure British support by demonstrating reformist credentials through anti-slavery measures.

In 1872, the Meiji government implemented the Yūjo Release Act, following British support for Japanese coolie labor in Peru. Yūjo were girls, sold into prostitution. Although the equivalence between slave status and yūjo is a matter of debate, British humanitarians made the equation, creating the context for the 1872 Act. Third, British naval power enforced anti-slave trade measures, in the Atlantic in the aftermath of the Congress of Vienna and later in the Indian Ocean, with measures such as the 1873 anti-slave treaty with the Sultan of Zanzibar. There were countervailing pressures. France and the United States resisted mutual rights of search in the first half of the nineteenth century, on the grounds that the dominance of the Royal Navy would enable Britain to exploit anti-slavery measures to bolster Britain's commercial and naval power. French and American leaders also considered the mutual right of search as a humiliation and denigration of national honor. Later in the century, imperial and naval competition, such as Anglo-French rivalry in east Africa from the 1860s, led states to push back against British anti-slavery policies and assert their sovereignty.

Deceit, inefficiency, and a lack of commitment, Hopper has argued, ensured that British anti-slavery measures had limited effect in ending the slave trade and slavery in the Persian Gulf. Hopper's criticism can be applied more widely to abolitionist movements and policies throughout the nineteenth century. And yet, slavery was abolished in law and in practice across much of the globe by 1900. It is difficult to imagine that this transformation would have occurred in the absence of abolitionist movements' campaigns. Those movements eliminated slavery within their own societies and shaped foreign and imperial policies that put pressure on slaveholding societies elsewhere. The transformation of British politics towards slavery in the late eighteenth century transformed the global conditions for the slave trade and slavery over the following century. Given the entrenchment of slavery in many societies and its economic importance, the halting, compromising character of the abolition of slavery reflects the challenges that abolitionists, often starting from positions of weakness, faced. Slaves, always the property of another human and legally dead in some societies, had no or very limited rights. The abolition of slavery was one of the "greatest human rights advances of the modern era," creating new possibilities for the further expansion of social and political rights.¹⁶

NOTES

1. Thomas Clarkson, *The History of the Rise, Progress, and Accomplishment of the Abolition of the African Slave Trade by the British Parliament* (London: J. N. Parker, 1839), 1:164–7.
2. Hilary McDonald Beckles, "The Wilberforce Song: how enslaved Caribbean blacks heard British abolitionists," *Parliamentary History* 26 (2007): 118–20.
3. Cited in Christopher Leslie Brown, *Moral Capital. Foundations of British Abolitionism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 406.
4. Lynn Hunt, *Inventing Human Rights. A History* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2008).

5. Seymour Drescher, "Free labor vs Slave Labor: the British and Caribbean Cases," in *Terms of Labor: Slavery, Serfdom, and Free Labor*, eds. Stanley Engerman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 50–86.
6. William Gervase Clarence-Smith, *Islam and the abolition of slavery* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006); Ismael M. Montana, *The Abolition of Slavery in Ottoman Tunisia* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2013), 96–104.
7. Julius S. Scott, *The Common Wind. Afro-American Currents in the Age of the Haitian Revolution* (New York: Verso, 2018).
8. Nicole Ulrich, "Abolition from Below: The 1808 Revolt in the Cape Colony," in *Humanitarian Intervention and Changing Labor Relations: The Long-term Consequences of the Slave Trade*, ed. Marcel van den Linden, (Leiden: Brill, 2010), 204.
9. Cited in Maurice Bric, "Debating Slavery and Empire: The United States, Britain, and the World's Anti-Slavery Convention of 1840," in *A Global History of Anti-Slavery Politics in the 19th Century*, eds. William Mulligan and Maurice Bric (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2013).
10. Steffen Rimner, "Chinese Abolitionism: The Chinese Educational Mission in Connecticut, Cuba, and Peru," *Journal of Global History*, 11, no. 3 (2016): 344–64.
11. Ada Ferrer, *Freedom's Mirror. Cuba and Haiti in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).
12. Sven Beckert, *Empire of Cotton. A Global History* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2014).
13. Raphaël Cheriau, *Imperial Powers and Humanitarian Interventions. The Zanzibar Sultanate, Britain, and France in the Indian Ocean* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2021), 71; Beatriz G. Mamigonian, "In the Name of Freedom: Slave Trade Abolition, the Law, and the Brazilian Branch of the African Emigration Scheme (Brazil-British West Indies, 1830s-1850s)," *Slavery & Abolition*, 30, no. 1 (2009): 46.
14. Suzanne Miers, *Britain and the Ending of the Slave Trade* (London: Longman, 1975).
15. Cited in William Mulligan, "British Anti-Slave Trade and Anti-Slavery Policy in East Africa, Arabia, and Turkey in the Late Nineteenth Century," in *Humanitarian Intervention. A History*, eds. Brendan Simms and David Trim (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 263.
16. Eric Weitz, *A World Divided: The Global Struggle for Human Rights in the Age of the Nation State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2019), 124.

FURTHER READINGS

- Drescher, Seymour. *Abolition. A History of Slavery and Anti-Slavery*. Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009.
- Drescher, Seymour, and Pieter C. Emmer. *Who Abolished Slavery? Slaves Revolts and Abolitionism: a Debate with João Pedro Marques*. New York: Berghahn, 2010.
- Dubois, Laurent. *Avengers of the New World. The Story of the Haitian Revolution*. Cambridge MA: Belknap, 2005.
- Fradera, Josep M. and Schmidt-Nowara, Christopher, eds. *Slavery and Anti-Slavery in Spain's Atlantic Empire*. New York: Berghahn, 2013.

- Gaffield, Julia. *Haitian Connections in the Atlantic World. Recognition after Revolution*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015.
- Grenouilleau, Olivier. *La révolution abolitionniste*. Paris: Gallimard, 2017.
- Harms, Robert, Bernard K. Freamon, and David W. Blight, eds. *Indian Ocean Slavery in the Age of Abolition*. New Haven: Yale UP, 2013.
- Rugemer, Edward. *The Problem of Emancipation. The Caribbean Roots of the American Civil War*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2008.
- Suzuki, Hideaki, ed. *Abolitions as a Global Experience*. Singapore: NUS Press, 2016.
- Toledano, Ehud. *As if Silent and Absent. Bonds of Enslavement in the Middle East*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



Contemporary Societies (1900–Present)

PREFACE

The final part of this handbook examines the development of “modern slavery” and related practices of human trafficking and extreme labor exploitation from the turn of the twentieth century to the present day. This period can in fact be divided into two distinct parts. In the first half of the twentieth century, slavery and slavery-like practices continued to be openly accepted and employed—with full knowledge and approval of the state or state-like institutions—in some parts of the world. Despite the fact that by 1900 the global abolitionist movements that emerged in the modern period had achieved formal abolition across much of the world, legal slavery persisted in some remote communities. Moreover, the rise of totalitarian regimes in places like Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union during this period witnessed the emergence of slavery-like practices that were designed and applied by the state itself. Finally, the first half of the twentieth century witnessed the morphing of slavery into other forms of extreme dependency and exploitation—“slavery by another name”—in societies where slavery was formally abolished.

By contrast, the second part of the contemporary era, roughly spanning the post-World War II period, has been characterized by the universal condemnation and legal prohibition of slavery, human trafficking, and forms of extreme labor coercion around the world. The transformation from modern abolitionist movements into contemporary international agreements between states that aimed to collectively ban slavery and related practices can in fact be traced to the League of Nations’ 1926 convention to “suppress the slave trade and slavery.” The adoption and amendment of the 1926 protocol by the United Nations in 1953, however, can be seen as the final culmination of global abolitionism and the beginning of an era of near universal abolition. In the decades

following World War II, only a handful of holdouts remained until Mauritania became the last state to abolish slavery in 1981. For the first time in history, we now live in a world in which slavery is legally prohibited in every corner of the globe.

And yet slavery and slavery-like practices continue to exist. Although statistics vary widely depending on the definition of slavery, several prominent NGOs and UN agencies estimate that tens of millions of people in the world today can be considered to be living in a state of slavery or conditions similar to slavery. The amount of people who are subjected to human trafficking each year likewise number in the millions. This is despite national and international legislation that prohibit virtually all forms of extreme labor coercion.

One of the most pressing challenges to scholars, activists, and governments in dealing with modern slavery is simply identifying it. Important differences exist between most cases of slavery in the contemporary era with historical forms of slavery. Most forms of modern slavery—from debt bondage to child soldiering to captive domestics to coerced factory labor—are not permanent, for example. Nor are they hereditary or entail the same extent of ownership of the body that characterized most historical forms of slavery. Most importantly, most cases of modern slavery and extreme labor coercion are clandestine and disguised as relatively legitimate practices, in order to evade legal prohibitions. Modern slavery and related concepts of human trafficking and extreme exploitation have been catapulted to the forefront of the global human rights agenda, but in a post-abolition world such shadowy and poorly defined practices present formidable challenges to effective enforcement. They also present challenges to scholars of global slavery, who continue to open up new lines of inquiry in their attempts to understand the nature and persistence of slavery throughout human history.



American Slaveries Since Emancipation

Catherine Armstrong

INTRODUCTION

This chapter challenges the notion that, in the United States, slavery ended with the ratification of the thirteenth amendment to the Constitution in 1865, which declared slavery illegal. Despite its changing legal status, I argue that slavery-like labor forms continued to be part of the story of the United States and of many other places in the world in which the United States had an imperial interest, such as the Hawaiian Islands. While these forms of labor may not have been called “slavery” and, indeed, managers of these laborers often went to great lengths to deny enslavement, in several ways, the lived experiences of those working within these contexts were similar to those of enslaved people. Another way in which slavery had a long and enduring legacy was in the impact that the chattel slavery practiced in the United States prior to the Civil War had on formerly enslaved and their descendants. After the war, the memorialization and remembrance of slavery were politicized and used to prevent African Americans from claiming their civil rights. In effect, after the nation’s traumatic and fratricidal civil war, this was a ritualized forgetting of slavery’s pain and horror, in favor of a reframing of a nostalgic storytelling of a golden age, with the aim of uniting the white population. This re-invention of what American slavery was like then fed into the structural inequalities of the Jim Crow era, which allowed such labor forms as sharecropping and convict

C. Armstrong (✉)
Loughborough University, Loughborough, UK
e-mail: c.m.armstrong@lboro.ac.uk

labor to perpetuate. Politically, the aftermath of the Civil War, then, far from providing a lasting moment of jubilee, failed the African American population, offering them, and other abused racial groups such as the Chinese, no true and full exit from slavery at that time.

Simultaneously, while the continental United States failed to rid itself of slavery-like labor forms, such forms were adopted and adapted in places such as Hawaii. The newly bonded workers there were not of African descent, but, nonetheless, their experiences of disenfranchisement, coercion, and abusive labor shared similarities with chattel slavery and its aftermath. Their working lives revolved around the cultivation, harvesting, and processing of staple crops such as sugar, and their recruitment into the workforce sometimes involved long transoceanic journeys, including an element of deception on the part of those who convinced them to board the ship. In both contexts, antebellum chattel slavery and the bonded labor of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, industrial relations of the period were defined by resistance by workers and the fear of such resistance among the planter class. In the early twentieth century, the fight for an end to coercive practices such as convict labor, and for the rights of workers to be recognized, was gradual and ongoing, led by the workers themselves and achieved with the support of allies such as Mary Grace Quackenbos, whose pioneering work helped to bring to an end the abusive southern system of agricultural peonage, which trapped many freedmen and women into working for their former slave master or mistress.

THE AFTERLIFE OF CHATTEL SLAVERY

We begin by examining how “legal” chattel slavery made way for slavery-like labor practices, and how people (including the formerly enslaved) entered into such practices. The American Civil War damaged the psyche of the people of the United States to such an extent that, without first unpicking the distorting impacts of the war, it is very difficult to understand the transition from chattel slavery to labor systems involving a mixture of bonded, coerced labor and wage labor. Slavery was a tragedy enacted upon the minds and bodies of the African American population of the United States, but white Americans had no time to understand and acknowledge this because they were consumed with the process of trying to rebuild after the war and mitigate its devastating impact on individuals and communities across the country. In the end, much of the effort of Reconstruction, partly designed to give freedmen and women a secure footing within the nation, came to naught because unifying the disparate sections of white America took political priority. This erroneous prioritization, underpinned by increasingly entrenched pseudo-scientific racist and eugenicist theories, had the effect of allowing free rein to those who, for reasons of economic gain or for racial control, had an interest in seeing bonded labor continue. Abolitionists, exhausted after the struggle to end slavery and disappointed by the entrenchment of the former slaveholding power in the South, were unable to prevent these slavery-like labor forms from flourishing.

At the same time, a reframing of the story of chattel slavery that denied its abusive nature, which emphasized its reliance on a consensus between benevolent, paternalistic white planters and contented enslaved people, essentially robbed the horrific system of antebellum slavery of its power to shock and bring about change. It prevented the emergence of a civil rights discourse that treated black Americans with justice and aimed at reparation and, instead, metaphorically trapped them in subordinate positions from which there was no escape, in the words of Steven Dubin, a “symbolic slavery.”¹ The failure to provide safe and financially secure future for freedmen and women also literally trapped them in their former places of work so that, as nominally free individuals, they continued to work for former masters under much the same labor conditions as before the war. Sharecropping was a labor relationship in which no wages were paid but, instead, part of the profit from the year’s crop would go to the laborer. In the meantime, before the harvest was sold, in order to buy tools and to subsist, the laborer became indebted to their master. Debt bondage of this kind rendered it illegal for laborers to leave their employer and seek work elsewhere while still owing money, which their illiteracy and lack of experience with contracts ensured was almost always the case. For many freedmen and women, leaving their plantation to search for work was part of their new-found freedom, and moving elsewhere did come to represent a symbolic freedom for the African American community, if not an actual one, facing pernicious racism in all parts of the country. But their freedom of movement was curtailed by local laws designed explicitly to keep the African American population working on their old plantations. Vagrancy laws and curfews were deployed successfully to achieve that end during this period, showing the systemic rather than ad hoc nature of the entrapment of African Americans.

Another example of systemic “slavery by another name,” in Douglas Blackmon’s famous phrase, is convict labor.² The entrapment into convict labor of many hundreds of African American men and women (as well as a few of other ethnicities) was a collaborative effort by legislators, law enforcement, the justice system, and industrialists. These groups shared two interests, the need for cheap and disposable labor, and the desire to control the movement of the black population and maintain the supremacy of the whites. Black men and women were wrongly accused of minor offenses such as curfew violations, and in sham trials without legal representation were told that a local plantation owner or industrialist who paid their fine required them to work off their debt. Prisoners, who were usually illiterate, were coerced into signing contracts which essentially bound them almost continually to these employers. The working conditions endured by the prisoners were often unspeakable, with no protection against injury, heat or cold, and no healthcare should they fall sick. The accommodation provided was inadequate and exemplary punishments amounting to torture were administered for the most minor refractions. Convict laborers were variously used for private contracts such as in mines, factories, or agriculture, to the benefit of the state who leased them to the

contractors. Given the considerable labor unrest in the last quarter of the nineteenth century, an important attraction of convict laborers was that they were much cheaper than wage laborers and that they might be used to strike break. Convict laborers might also work for the state directly undertaking public works such as forest clearance, or road or railway building. In other cases, as now, prisoners worked inside state penitentiaries undertaking work akin to slave labor. Classic examples are Angola, the Louisiana State Penitentiary, and its equivalent, Parchman, in Mississippi. Angola was situated on an operational plantation, which during the antebellum period had been staffed by enslaved people, and in the post-emancipation era was then simply adapted to use convict laborers. Parchman was built later, but nonetheless was modeled on a slave plantation, down to the neo-classical architecture of the superintendent's residents. I argue that this labor form should be considered to be the moral and experiential equivalent of slavery. This is because of the way that the laborers were treated, but also because of the structural continuities of economic purposes and of its foundation upon notions of white supremacy, all of which intimately connect convict labor to the world of chattel slavery that had gone before.

The cultural continuities with the slavery of the antebellum period are also marked. In the post-civil war era, the United States was keen to define itself as an antislavery world power, rivaling the British and the French on the world stage, espousing their view that slavery was a marker of incivility and of backward societies. However, this rhetorical maneuver which was taking place at the elite political level masked the equally powerful tendency in American cultural life to romanticize "old slavery days" and to render the slave system as benign and harmless, causing to this day lasting pain to African Americans. To understand the reason why this happened, we must acknowledge the significant psychological trauma that the American Civil War caused some sections of white American society. The fratricidal violence caused white Americans to reconsider the entire foundation of their national, regional, and racial identities. Over the course of the Reconstruction era, the priority for white Northerners became reunifying the nation, welcoming white Southerners back into the fold as Americans and, in doing so, the priorities and needs for citizenship and equality of black Americans from all parts of the country were first neglected and then abandoned. White unity took precedence over black equality, as has arguably been the case ever since. One way in which white unity was achieved was through the assertion of a pseudo-scientific white supremacy, justified with ideas of Social Darwinism about the hierarchies of races and about racial purity.³ Another way in which white unity was achieved, and this is most relevant here, is through the assertion that the Civil War was not fundamentally caused by differences over slavery, that the Southern way of life was an honorable and chivalrous one, that Southerners had acted properly in respect to their slaves and treated them with care and duty, and that, white Southerners were experts in regard to race relations in the country and should be respected as such.

Such assertions about the validity of the values of the southern plantocracy were immortalized in the culture of the United States. Veterans' organizations representing both Union and Confederate armies became less partisan in their memorialization of fallen comrades and spoke less frequently about the cause for which they had fought. Instead, the speeches delivered at Memorial Day parades to remember the Civil War fallen emphasized shared masculine and nationalist values of the soldiers from both sides, with them even, at times, having unified commemorations. Women often led the way in fundraising and in the memorialization of the Civil War dead and, especially in the South, were fundamental to the valorization of not only the individual soldier but the values of the entire section of the nation. As is finally being acknowledged in the twenty-first century, the erection of Civil War statuary was not merely a mark of respect for the veterans and their deceased comrades but, rather, a claiming of territory in southern cities by those who lauded and shared the attitude of their antebellum predecessors towards slavery. Statues became yet another indication that the heritage of chattel slavery, when raised in public discourse, must be disarmed by the reification of the plantocracy. While statues carried this message into the towns and cities of the United States, the agricultural landscape of slavery reflected similar denials. Some plantations continued to function exactly as under chattel slavery, with freedmen and women undertaking the same work tasks under the oversight of the same white family, but now legally having the status of sharecroppers. Other plantations were abandoned and left to decay after the Civil War and, over a few generations, became part of the romanticization of slavery as poignant gothic ruins speaking about the golden age enjoyed by their ancestors to descendants of white slave owners. By the early twentieth century, some intact plantations were already being converted into heritage sites, with the stories of the enslaved people who had lived and worked there diminished or silenced altogether, in favor of a narrative about the aristocratic white families and the beauty of their luxurious possessions and manicured homes and gardens.

The denigration of the horrors of slavery into a marginal cultural concern, and the accompanying emphasis on the paternalistic, benign nature of the plantation system, and the happiness of enslaved people within it, not only served to skew and misrepresent the history of chattel slavery, although this was destructive enough. It also had two other even more painful legacies. First it denied the nation, and African Americans in particular, the opportunity to face, grieve, and express the truth about the pain and trauma that they suffered under slavery. This legacy of the denial of painful pasts continues to be felt to this day and has resulted in the cultural norm derived from the stereotype that any black person who speaks out and complains about their situation is seen as troublesome or, in the language of the Jim Crow era, "uppity." In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the horrific impact of this was racist violence such as targeted lynching and so-called race riots, properly massacres, designed to intimidate and silence black people who had spoken out or had been overtly financially or politically successful. It has also contributed

to the normalization of the histories of white Americans and the denial of the role of African Americans in the nation's past. Second, the notion that black men and women had been happy and content under slavery, and that enslavement or servitude was their proper state, was soon deployed as part of the white supremacist doctrine which claimed the inability of African Americans to fully achieve intellectual or political parity. Thus, there existed a continuity of representation of African Americans as servile, from happy plantation enslavement to honorable servitude in the Jim Crow era, with stereotypical depictions in advertising such as Aunt Jemima and Uncle Ben, still deployed into the twenty-first century, reflecting the cultural continuity of the "happy slave." This depiction is one which white Americans, whether descended from slave owners or not, still find comforting. Psychologically, assimilating the happy slave is far easier and safer for white Americans than acknowledging the true systemic horrors of plantation slavery.

Although this model of memories of a happy, passive enslaved population was ubiquitous, there were a few exceptions that did not display such willful ignorance of slave discontent and resistance. During the late nineteenth century, stage productions of *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, Harriet Beecher Stowe's antebellum novel about runaway slaves, were incredibly popular.⁴ Every small-town theater company put on a version of the show, and there were many imitators who produced similar novels and plays. In many of these plays, the use of sensationalism and melodrama served to distract and distance the audience from the shocking reality of the human drama as it played out. For example, the occasional use of live bloodhounds on stage in scenes in which the hunted runaways were dramatically pursued created a vivid excitement in the audience but gave no space to the audience to reflect on both the treatment of enslaved people before the Civil War or the similar treatment of freedmen and women who dared to speak out afterward.

This cultural *milieu* worked in sync with economic inequalities, violence perpetrated by the criminal justice system, and indifference at best from the federal government to render the years following emancipation as a period of missed opportunity to provide justice to the African American community. Although many older narrators telling their stories during the Depression era proudly and vividly remembered the moment of jubilee, when the enslaved were told for the first time that they were to be free, their stories of resistance and rebellion which had contributed to the eventual downfall of the system of slavery had to be suppressed. The need to conform to the white narrative of the happy slave, in order to ensure their safety, denied the formerly enslaved opportunity to tell the stories with their agency centered, and instead it was safer for them and their descendants to assimilate and repeat stories of benevolent masters and compliant slaves. In the years after the Civil War, while initially grassroots activists, as well as some politicians, hoped to drive forward a radical agenda that did acknowledge a new role for the freedmen and women, activists and politicians soon became focused on new issues as, in the South, old hegemonic power brokers regained control. In doing so, they

did not perpetuate chattel slavery, but the systems of debt bondage, convict labor, and “symbolic slavery” that followed it were built firmly on its foundations, mirrored its intentions, and dismissed any consideration of the trauma that it had caused.

After the war, for many in the political hierarchy, slavery became a toxic subject. The United States, when looking outwards, wished to ally itself with, and define itself in competition with, the antislavery powers of Europe, who, by the late nineteenth century, were talking about slavery in very particular ways.⁵ Often hypocritically, for European powers slavery became a labor form deployed by the ethnic other as, on a global scale, slave owners were no longer “us, but “them,” whether Muslim, or African, or other indigenous group’. This had an impact on the way that coercive labor such as debt bondage and convict labor was described in the United States. In this period to name something as slavery was a rhetorically powerful thing to do. Those wishing to challenge the deployment of abusive or coercive labor compared it unfavorably to chattel slavery. In the late nineteenth century, there was also an important strand of African American thought which attempted to address the traumatic aftermath of enslavement and began considering race and racism in a global context, but much of this debate did not receive mainstream attention, and it was a discourse of men such as Booker T. Washington, emphasizing racial harmony, that reached white ears and found favor. Both Washington and W.E.B. DuBois were interested in the variety of labor forms used across the world, and their discussions of them contributed to the growing understanding of slaveries since emancipation.⁶

WHAT WERE POSTBELLUM AMERICAN SLAVERIES LIKE?

Now, we move on to examine the experiences of enslaved people and their attempts to resist their enslavement. In this period, the study of slavery is complex because the word “slavery” becomes an umbrella term, used for many labor forms with diverse ways of coercively recruiting laborers, a wide range of methods for the extraction of labor, and many different forms of resistance resulting from that. I will focus on two types of slavery-like labor practices that existed in the United States and its territory of Hawaii at the turn of the twentieth century and beyond: convict labor in the southern United States and indentured labor in the sugar plantations of Hawaii. Both types of slavery-like practices shared important continuities with the antebellum period, but also important differences when compared to chattel slavery.

Convict labor and sugar industry indenture are similar in that they provided economic solutions to a labor shortage. Convict labor filled some of the gaps left by the ending of chattel slavery in the South and also, in the New South and especially in Florida, responded to increasing industrialization and need for labor for public works. Similarly, the potentially lucrative sugar industry of the Hawaiian Islands would not be viable without a large labor force to undertake the growing and milling. In the racist ideology of the time, indigenous

Hawaiians were dismissed as a potential labor force because of their perceived innate characteristic of laziness, and their low birth rate and susceptibility to disease. In both regions, rejecting free wage labor also allowed the power of population control to reside in the hands of the white political elite because of a fear of unrest and flight from work where freer forms of labor permitted. In other ways, the two were significantly different. As shown above, convict labor was built on the foundations of chattel slavery and it treated prejudicially an already persecuted group of people. However, to stay on the right side of the law and to distance themselves from a discredited system, it was in the interests of perpetrators to deny its similarity to chattel slavery. In the Hawaiian Islands, sugar planters also denied that they treated their workers as though they were slaves but, nonetheless, racist discourse of the time connoted the workers as slaves or slave-like. Many of the sugar plantation laborers were, in fact, voluntary migrants, willingly signing contracts for a number of years. But they were often depicted as slaves in an attempt to remove their agency, to stereotype them as passive and “other” and to link them racially in the minds of a white audience with African Americans. The term often used for Chinese, Japanese, and Korean migrants to Hawaii, and to other parts of the Pacific World, was “coolie,” a derogatory term that had the equivalence of “slave” because it referred not only to a person’s work or migration status but also negatively to their class, education status, character, and morality. Racial theory underpinned this othering, arguing among other things, that coolies were predisposed to working for lower wages because their inferiority required them to need fewer provisions and poorer accommodation. Attitudes like this also allowed plantation owners to segregate workers by race and to treat Asian American workers less well.

The recruitment of workers into these slavery-like systems was by very different routes, although both might involve an element of coercion and abuse. Convict laborers had sometimes committed minor criminal offences but, in most cases, had been accused of trumped-up charges and were innocent. They were entrapped into this form of slavery through their illiteracy and ill-preparedness to counter the racist criminal justice system. They were often led to believe that a period of work as a convict was their only option. Indentured migrants to Hawaii sometimes traveled entirely voluntarily but sometimes were tricked by labor agents who promised them lucrative, safe, and secure work in the United States. Once onboard ship, they were unable to change their minds and, certainly on arrival in America, had few options other than to work to pay off the cost of their passage. Changing employer was very difficult, if not impossible; wages were incredibly low or non-existent and so, for all intents and purposes, this was unfree labor. Indentured labor was not solely used in the sugar plantations of Hawaii. Since the early nineteenth century, in response to the end of the slave trade and chattel slavery in their colonies, this labor form had become popular in British and other European empires. In the eyes of imperialists, it filled a labor need and represented a pragmatic redistribution of manpower. They saw in India, for example, famine

and under-production as a problem that might be solved by the emigration of a considerable number of workers. The movement of these workers was perceived by white hegemony in a racialized way, very different to the campaigns aiming to encourage white settler movement. Similarly, convict labor was also a response to acute labor demands, and the need to control a supposedly errant population of the racial "other."

The lived experiences of these two groups illustrate how like chattel slavery these emergent systems really were. In both cases, white power brokers gave detailed consideration to how to structure living and working arrangements in order to extract from those ensnared within the systems the most productive labor. In both cases, a veneer of respectability was given to the labor forms by those who claimed how benign they were and, indeed, how beneficial to the laborers. Exactly as chattel slavery had been depicted as a form of education for the ignorant African, in order to justify its violent and coercive aspects, the same rhetorical maneuvers were deployed in depictions of convict labor and indenture within the sugar industry. Contemporary descriptions of these forms of slavery-like labor were expressed simultaneously with the rise of a new history of slavery in the United States, with scholars such as Ulrich B. Phillips, descended from slave owners, crafting a powerful narrative about the benefit of slavery to the enslaved that, for half a century and more, infected the historiography of the subject.⁷

The working conditions in Hawaii's sugar industry were challenging in their long hours, the hard physical labor, and the dangerous working conditions. Outside of work, leisure time was often controlled by the plantation's owners, with the movement of workers restricted. In many cases, outside of work time, laborers were confined to segregated barracks, segregated so that the workers of one nationality might not stir up others in solidarity and industrial unrest. As with chattel slavery, plantation owners in Hawaii feared such worker uprisings more than anything, ranging from a loss of revenue, caused by workers systematically downing tools, to a violent response from aggrieved laborers. Workers' behavior was controlled in both Hawaii's sugar industry and in convict labor in the Southern United States by the provision of minimal food rations and poor housing. Convict laborers were frequently treated little better than animals, confined for many days in trucks in which it was barely possible to move. Lack of energy and ill health among the convict labor population, as well as the fear of exemplary punishment often rendered attempts to resist this horrific treatment less frequent than they may otherwise have been.

In both contexts, overseers working on behalf of the white owners were instrumental in instilling control and fear in the workers. As under chattel slavery, rather than those in power themselves, it was these representatives of white power who inspired the most hatred in workers. Overseers nominally had supervisory responsibility during the working day but, in reality, they usually lived alongside the workers and could also impose restrictions on their personal and leisure time. On Hawaiian sugar plantations, work was monotonous, physically challenging, and, at times, dangerous. In the heyday

of chattel slavery, sugar milling processes had been among the most dangerous in the Atlantic world, with thousands of enslaved people working on sugar plantations seriously burned, maimed by machinery, or killed. Outdoor work in the tropical Hawaiian heat proved difficult for many in the Pacific as it continued to do in the Atlantic context. Convict labor in the Southern states was often deployed for work in the harshest conditions. In agriculture, sugar and cotton cultivation was common, as was turpentine harvesting from pine forests to make naval products. Convict laborers also often found themselves doing the challenging work of clearing overgrown land ready for cultivation and, in an era before power tools, this work was arduous. Climatic conditions again exacerbated these pressures, with laborers put to work in Florida regularly facing temperatures exceeding 80 degrees Fahrenheit. Industrial laboring was also common, with convict laborers required to construct roads, lay railway tracks, and work in factories. Among the more notorious uses of convict labor was in the coal fields of Tennessee and Alabama to replace regular wage laborers who, during the 1890s and 1900s, were frequently striking over pay and conditions. In 1891, in Coal Creek, Anderson County, Tennessee, the mine owners replaced striking miners with laborers leased from the local prison, leading to violent conflict between miners and mine owners. The miners themselves were fighting for the right to be paid in cash, rather than “scrip,” which could only be spent at company stores.

The prejudicial situation in which indentured sugar workers and convict laborers found themselves was exacerbated by the racial ideology. Sugar industry workers in Hawaii who migrated from Japan, China, and Korea were marked out as inferior and “slavish” by this ideology, which was used by those in power to prevent cross-ethnicity solidarity and support for these workers by poor whites and Hawaiians. Similarly, the appalling treatment of convict laborers in the Jim Crow south was possible because almost all these laborers were African American. Allies did try to prevent labor abuses by publicizing and challenging them but seeking change both in law and in practice was an extremely slow process. This was partly because non-white laborers were depicted as inherently suitable for mindless and difficult work, and therefore these were individuals on whom a higher education to better themselves would be wasted. But ironically, highly controlled coercive labor forms were thought appropriate for these groups because of the educationally and morally beneficial properties of hard work, although these benefits might not be immediately apparent to the workers themselves, and so therefore coercion was required. Thus, arguments over racial predisposition served both to explain and justify these labor conditions which were deployed to fulfill a need for laborers, from they would leave if free to do so. We should not be shocked at how similar to slavery these succeeding forms of labor were but, rather, recognize that, from the point of view of the white hegemony, slavery had worked economically and for population control, and therefore similar systems evolved allowing power brokers to remain within the law, but to build on these positive aspects of chattel slavery. Such a move, therefore, was deliberate and not accidental.

Finally, we will now explore the limited possibilities of exit from these types of enslavement. Scholars of comparative slavery studies have identified common features experienced by enslaved people across time and place. One of these is the difficulty with which enslaved laborers can extricate themselves from their bondage. For many in the antebellum United States who were living in chattel slavery, opportunities for beginning a new life as a free laborer were severely limited. Yes, some enslaved people were manumitted by their master, although this was rarer in the United States than in systems of slavery found elsewhere. Other enslaved people freed themselves by undertaking a variety of types of resistance, such as running away and living in maroon communities, or fleeing across borders and seeking refuge with allies, for example, in Canada, or with Native Americans in the far south. But for many who were able to escape their immediate place of enslavement, the life they found afterward was one of curtailed freedom, in which they lived in constant fear of persecution or of re-enslavement. To differing extents, the challenges of extricating oneself from enslavement, and the limited opportunities for true freedom afterward, were elements of both the indentured sugar industry in Hawaii and convict labor in the Deep South.

The nature of the convict labor and indentured labor systems meant that once bonded within them, the financial opportunities for “freedom” were limited. For convicts, those in positions of authority within the criminal justice and the agricultural or industrial sectors conspired to extend their contracts and terms of work, and the illiterate convicts did not understand the contracts they signed and had no legal representation, so were trapped into promising to serve ever longer terms as punishment for the slightest infraction while a convict, or in exchange for goods that they received during that time. For indentured laborers, in theory, their term of work was limited to a handful of years but, for many, being able to establish oneself after the term of indenture was complete, as either a self-sufficient entrepreneur or a wage laborer, was out of reach, and often at the end of their term indentured laborers signed new contracts with the same or rival employers.

However, those indentured laborers who managed to escape the perpetual indenture contracts did have an opportunity to establish themselves through the support and sense of community provided by free migrants of the same ethnicity. Small and tightly-knit groups of recent immigrants provided loans and other forms of support to subsequent arrivals, even providing them with places to stay. Many Chinese, Japanese, and Korean migrant families who arrived in Hawaii as indentured sugar workers had, within a few generations, moved away from the cane fields and established themselves as business owners and workers, often in urban areas of the islands such as Honolulu.⁸ As a substantial community became established growing in wealth and resources all the time, those who had found financial success were able to help more of their fellow countrymen and women. This is not to suggest that these workers did not suffer racism and violence, and this challenging situation continued throughout the twentieth century to the World War Two era when global

politics affected the ways that Asian Americans were perceived. But, nonetheless, for migrants working in the sugar industry, indentured labor was often only a temporary trap. Conditions were very different for convict laborers. Those who did complete their sentences and were freed experienced severe racism, including violence. Many workers in this position returned to work as sharecroppers, another form of bonded labor in which the white man or woman was the master. There was always the risk that once known to their local law enforcement officials, a former convict would be trapped again on trumped-up charges under the black codes of the Jim Crow era and taken back into custody and forced labor.

As in the case of antebellum slavery, there was a considerable amount of resistance to the injustices found within both of these labor systems. Resistance came from those trapped in unfree labor in the form of internal struggle against the system itself, and also from allies outside, attempting to dismantle the abusive structures with awareness raising and other forms of activism. The internal struggle of convict laborers was rarely successful because of the restrictive nature of the regime in which they lived, controlled by harsh punishments and poor provisions, borrowed from the system of slavery which preceded it. For convicts, physically surviving the demanding work, while malnourished and experiencing physical and mental ill health and traumatic and demeaning racism meant that, while they were trapped within it, the opportunities to challenge the system were limited. However, as under slavery, written accounts of those who were enslaved but then became free were fundamental to force a reconsideration. Robert Burns, a white man tricked into robbing a store in Chicago, and sentenced to hard labor in 1920s Georgia, wrote one of the most famous of these accounts. There were few prisons in Georgia at this period, and so, instead, prisoners were leased out to local businesses. His book, *I am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang*, widely credited with mobilizing activism around the abolition of the chain gang system, was turned into a Hollywood film.⁹ There were some limited acts of resistance by workers within the convict leasing system that mirror those by chattel slaves in the earlier system, including attempts to run away, breaking tools, working slowly, and other forms of sabotage. If caught, prisoners faced harsh exemplary corporal punishments, such as the notorious torture of being hog-tied and bound to a stake in the full sun, unable to move for many hours.

Conditions in the sugar fields of Hawaii were marginally less brutal, and the workers were less frequently brutalized. They often worked and lived in family groups and therefore had some sense of support and community, as enslaved people had, which was not immediately shared by convict laborers. However, in Hawaii in the early twentieth century, considerable resistance to poor conditions led to Asian workers in the sugar industry becoming notorious as labor troublemakers. Striking was the weapon of choice for the indentured laborer, and Japanese workers soon developed a reputation for resorting to striking to get their own way. Racist commentators in Hawaii suggested that this was an inherent trait and that this “blood unionism” as they called it, was

not a rational decision but an emotive one. But, rather, the industrial action of indentured laborers was targeted and deliberate, designed to highlight injustices and improve conditions around a specific set of issues. Japanese workers were routinely treated worse and paid lower wages, than workers of other nationalities. Many strikes were peaceful although there was also some use of violence when overseers known as “lunas” were attacked. In 1909 more than 1500 workers from the Aiea plantation near Pearl Harbor, Honolulu went on strike for more pay and many were imprisoned and tortured by guards. But the strike spread throughout Oahu’s sugar industry until 7000 workers had downed tools and, within a year, Hawaii’s planters had paid Japanese workers the wages they had demanded.

In these situations where slavery-like conditions endured, discontented workers were not the only source of resistance, and others challenged employers and their persistent use of unfair labor forms. In the twenty-first-century terminology, “activists” and “allies” also highlighted frequent abuses and developed their use of newspapers and other forms of cheap print and, later, radio, to spread the word, as well as using other tactics such as challenging poor treatment of workers in the courts. Two vocal opponents of convict labor who did a great deal to change the perceptions of those in power and bring an end to this pernicious system were Frederick Douglass and John Spivak, using very different approaches but, nonetheless, sharing empowered visions of what a post-slavery world might look like.¹⁰ In 1893 Douglass, the famous abolitionist campaigner, delivered a speech about the convict lease system, from typed notes with handwritten amendments, the manuscript copy of which is now archived in his family papers in the Library of Congress. The extensive speech documents state by state the criminal justice system and its racist abuses perpetrated through the use of convict labor. Although by the end of the second decade of the twentieth century, many states had abolished convict leasing, the process of leasing workers to private companies, it had been replaced by a coercive system of prison labor built around the labor camp chain gang. In 1932, based on his experiences traveling round the South in the early years of the decade, photographing labor camps, left-leaning writer and investigative journalist, John L. Spivak, wrote a novel that highlighted these abuses. It was these photographs as much as the prose which rallied opponents against the violent treatment of the prisoners depicted therein. Spivak’s approach to the cause received support from artists and writers of the Harlem Renaissance, such as Countee Cullen, despite Spivak’s notorious use of the n-word in the title of his novel.

In the sugar industry of Hawaii, the majority of the resistance to the indentured labor system came from within because workers were able to organize and then, by the early twentieth century, fully unionized. Sometimes they received active support from politicians and commentators in their countries of origin in order to further their own political agendas. For example, around the turn of the twentieth century, Puerto Rican workers sent reports home of the abusive working conditions on Hawaii’s sugar plantations and these were

reported frequently in the print media of Puerto Rico with a view to stemming the tide of outward migration and exposing the negative treatment of their countrymen overseas in Hawaii. In the United States, those who were opposed to the migration of “Asiatics” to Hawaii for reasons of racial purity also made rhetorical use of accounts of bad treatment and unrest on the sugar plantations. The blame was not solely laid at the door of the plantation owners and their “luna” but also, in language motivated by racial ideology, described the workers’ slavish personalities and their tendency to tolerate poorer working conditions and their ability to subsist on the food of lesser quality and quantity. Since the 1870s, this anti-Chinese and Japanese rhetoric had become common in the West Coast newspapers, as native-born American workers organized against the influx of immigrants from China into ports such as San Francisco. In these cases, highlighting the poor treatment of workers and labeling them as akin to slaves, did not aim at humanitarian relief or at social justice but, rather, at the exclusion of these workers, marking them out as different from the white American. These more reactionary responses to abusive labor conditions show that, even where laborers struggled to claim the rights afforded to free wage earners, the rhetoric of slavery was used to subjugate and alienate.

CONCLUSION

This examination of American slaveries since emancipation has revealed that after the Civil War, those in the United States had a complex relationship with the notion of slavery itself. Many struggled to come to terms with the aftermath of the destructive war and to acknowledge the place of the abolition of slavery in that war. Throughout the country, but especially in the South, formerly enslaved people found it almost impossible to assert their rights in the light of racism and exertions of white supremacy, leading to the perpetuation of abusive and coercive labor forms for decades to come. In many laboring contexts, the abolition of slavery did not remove the need for cheap labor, with the development of the New South and the sugar plantations of Hawaii being just two examples among many seen around the world. Workers themselves resisted injustice and claimed legal rights, and they were often supported in this by allies, neo-abolitionists who wished to bring industrial harmony to their country or, more ambitiously, aimed at equality and social justice. However, highlighting labor abuses was not always a progressive act, and for some reactionary commentators, the purpose was to discourage the immigration of workers from certain racial or ethnic groups. There is clear evidence of the use of persistent slavery-like labor systems following slavery’s abolition in the United States but, during this period, there is also clear evidence of the continued and controversial rhetorical power of naming a labor form as slavery.

NOTES

1. Steven C. Dubin, "Symbolic Slavery: Black Representations in Popular Culture," *Social Problems* 34, no. 2 (1987): 122–40.
2. Douglas Blackmon, *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of African Americans from the Civil War to World War Two* (New York: Anchor Books), 2008.
3. For more on this see Thomas C. Leonard, *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era* (Princeton: Princeton University Press), 2016.
4. Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (London: J. Cassell, 1852).
5. Ian Tyrrell, *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010) further explores the ways the United States refashioned itself on the world stage during this period.
6. The bibliographies of works by both men are extensive, but these items address questions of black labor most fully: Booker T. Washington, *Working with the Hands* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1904); W.E.B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America* (New York: Harcourt Brace, 1935).
7. Ulrich B. Phillips, *American Negro Slavery* (New York: D. Appleton & Co., 1918).
8. For more on the Asian American immigrant experience, see Yukiko Kimura, *Issei: Japanese Immigrants in Hawaii* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988); Wayne Patterson, *The Korean Frontier in America: Immigration to Hawaii, 1896–1910* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988).
9. Robert Burns, *I am a Fugitive from a Georgia Chain Gang* (New York: Grosset & Dunlap, 1932).
10. Frederick Douglass, "Speech on Convict Leasing System (1893)," in *Frederick Douglass Papers, Library of Congress*. <http://hdl.loc.gov/loc.mss/mfd.01008>. Accessed 11 February 2022; John Spivak, *Georgia Nigger* (New York: Brewer, Warner & Putnam, 1932).

FURTHER READINGS

- Blackmon, Douglas. *Slavery by Another Name: The Re-enslavement of African Americans from the Civil War to World War Two*. New York: Anchor Books, 2008.
- Cooper, Frederick, Thomas Holt, and Rebecca Scott. *Beyond Slavery: Explorations of Race, Labor and Citizenship in Post-Emancipation Societies*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000.
- Daniel, Pete. *The Shadow of Slavery: Peonage in the South, 1901–1969*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1972.
- Dubin, Steven. "Symbolic Slavery: Black Representations in Popular Culture." *Social Problems* 34, no. 2 (1987): 122–40.
- Kimura, Yukiko. *Issei: Japanese Immigrants in Hawaii*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.
- Leonard, Thomas C. *Illiberal Reformers: Race, Eugenics and American Economics in the Progressive Era*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016.
- Patterson, Wayne. *The Korean Frontier in America: Immigration to Hawaii, 1896–1910*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1988.

Tyrrell, Ian. *Reforming the World: The Creation of America's Moral Empire*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slavery in Francophone West Africa

Benedetta Rossi 

INTRODUCTION¹

Slavery gives slaveholders totalizing power over every aspect of the life of enslaved persons. For this reason, slaves have often been the workers of choice in labor systems that employed disposable workers in order to maximize the slaveholders' profits. This accounts for the deadly combination of slavery and capitalism, which authors with different political and intellectual agendas generally agree upon.² But we should be weary of generalizations. In the West African Sahel slavery has been both widespread and resilient. And yet this is not because slave labor lent itself to the harshest form of exploitation by profit-maximizing capitalists. Instead, here slavery has been resilient precisely because slavery is more than control over the labor of the enslaved. In the Sahel coercing workers made little economic sense, as there were neither cash crops nor large profits to be made by either private or public employers. Even colonial administrators refrained from committing substantial resources and efforts to the extraction of local labor. This does not mean that they were not violent—they were, in fact, extremely brutal at moments. But punctual explosions of punitive violence cost less than capillary forms of continued policing and control. Colonial violence functioned as a deterrent to revolt in desert-edge territories where the close monitoring of labor was not seen as a reasonable use of resources.

B. Rossi (✉)
University College London, London, England
e-mail: b.rossi@ucl.ac.uk

This chapter focuses on Ader, an area roughly overlapping with what today is the administrative Region of Tahoua of the Republic of Niger, located at the Southern edge of the Sahara Desert, where slavery has been peculiarly resilient up until today, when Nigerien abolitionist NGOs are still fighting for its suppression. The French colonial regime abolished slavery in this region in 1905. It introduced forced labor between the 1920s and the 1940s. Wage labor never developed: never has there been a time in the twentieth century when a sizeable proportion—let alone the majority—of Tahoua’s population made a living by earning wages. Since the 1930s, the majority of Tahoua’s poor have been dependent on revenues from seasonal labor migration to earn a living and send remittances to family members who remain in Tahoua’s hinterland villages and struggle with poverty. In general, would-be employers in this region cannot rely on “a combination of favourable soil characteristics and low transport costs [...] sufficient to enable them to pay wages and still make a profit.”³ During droughts, the poorest persons of slave descent seek to work for persons of formerly slave-owning classes to be fed. Asked why, in her view, slavery continues today, a woman who had been sold as a child and freed herself a few years ago, answered: “poverty” (hausa: *talauci*).⁴ With slavery still an option and no paid employment opportunities, poor people must find someone to feed them or die of hunger, someone who’ll agree to act as a paternalist master.⁵

The circumstances of Ader are particular. The rural Sahel is one of the poorest inhabited areas of West Africa. Other, less poor, areas of the sub-region have been studied more extensively. Gareth Austin has discussed cash-crop producing West African regions where after the legal abolition of slavery stable profits allowed employers to pay wages to workers. The latter, in turn, had bargaining power because they knew that their refusal to work would produce significant losses for employers who could not legally force them to work.⁶ In other economically dynamic regions, Frederick Cooper showed that the strikes of African workers galvanized the colonial administration into improving the workers’ conditions.⁷ By contrast, in Ader those who do not migrate have hardly any alternative but to accept the bitter legacies of slavery and appeal to a master’s charity and generosity—attributes that local hegemonic ideologies portray as signs of nobility and piety that will be rewarded in the afterlife.

By comparing slave labor and state-imposed coerced labor in Ader, this chapter shows that in a context where coercion was determined by considerations different from profit maximization, wage labor never developed; forced labor was hard to justify in economic terms and therefore largely ineffective; and slavery remained viable not as a form of extreme labor exploitation in connection to agricultural commercialization, but because it increased safety in the face of environmental adversity. Slavery provided honor, safety, and material advantages to slaveowners and protected enslaved persons from the threat of hunger and extreme destitution. The chapter relies on Marcel van der Linden’s “three moments” framework that dissects coercion into the stages of entry, extraction, and exit. This framework was developed to avoid the biasing

influence of the slavery–freedom dichotomy with all the assumptions implicit in the notion of “slavery” as understood and used today.⁸ After summarizing the main processes of labor coercion in twentieth-century West Africa, the chapter compares slave labor and state-imposed forced labor in the Ader region. The conclusion advances some reflections on what this comparison reveals about Sahelian slavery, and how understanding slavery in the Sahel might help us understand slavery as a global-historical phenomenon.

LABOR COERCION IN TWENTIETH-CENTURY WEST AFRICA

In 1905 France abolished indigenous slavery in its West African territories. More or less simultaneously, it introduced a regime of compulsory labor for the building and maintenance of colonial infrastructure. In spite of French legal abolition, indigenous slavery did not die out in 1905, but merely started being more effectively resisted and contested.⁹ Those formerly enslaved to local slaveowners (and their descendants) were the first to be forcibly recruited to carry out construction work on colonial worksites. In the first half of the twentieth century, colonial administrators controlled the work of statutorily free (non-“slave”) workers. Although the forms and intensity of coercion varied across colonial empires, in the first third of the century forced labor was the most common form of employment of native workers across European colonies. Contracts were exceedingly rare. In 1928 government figures showed that less than 1 percent of workers in French West Africa were wage workers.¹⁰ In British colonies, too, various forms of coercion enabled the recruitment of African workers for colonial projects.¹¹

In 1930 the ILO’s Force Labor Convention imposed restrictions on the use of forced labor.¹² It was adopted by the ILO on 28 June 1930 and ratified by Britain on 3 June 1931 and France on 24 June 1937. Under pressure from representatives of colonized societies, France abolished forced labor in the colonies also by national legislation in 1946.¹³ Following the end of colonial rule, Convention 29 was ratified by independent West African countries in the 1960s. The Republic of Niger, where the case study discussed in this article is taken from, ratified it on 27 February 1961.¹⁴ While the ILO’s Forced Labor Convention reduced the coercive potential of labor recruitment, certain clauses in it allowed colonial empires to continue extracting labor coercively. Colonial developmentalism enabled the continued recruitment of unpaid native workers in the name of “community development” and “human investment” into local development.¹⁵ Rather than going from the abolition of forced labor to the introduction of free wage labor, colonial development schemes outsourced the coercive elements of labor recruitment to African chiefs and continued to mobilize African workers for free, or at a cost below the market value of labor. The use of developmentalist rhetoric to justify coercing people into volunteering their work lingered on after decolonization and was a well-documented strategy of the first African independent governments.¹⁶

The first decade that followed decolonization was characterized by a political discourse focused on nationalist and anticolonial modernization.¹⁷ It soon appeared that Africa's economic development would not go through the same "stages" that some development economists saw as characteristic of Euro-America's history.¹⁸ By the 1970s Africa started being seen as deviating from global trends toward proletarianization as defined in classical Marxist theory.¹⁹ Free wage labor had not become the norm in most African societies. Instead, small-scale self-sufficient peasants and herders, and workers involved in mutualist labor relations, remained prevalent.²⁰ Although throughout the twentieth century the proportion of wage workers grew in West Africa, when compared to other world regions it remained small. It decreased further following structural adjustment and the collapse of the formal sector in favor of an expansion of the so-called informal economy.²¹

Concurrently, the legacies of slavery continued to influence employment relations and hampered the formation of working-class consciousness. Abolitionism had not established itself as a dominant ideology in all regions of West Africa. In some West African societies, pro-slavery ideologies continued to exist and the biological descendants of slaves continued to be subordinate to slaveowners.²² By the early 1980s all West African countries had abolished slavery legally. By the first decade of the twenty-first century some West African countries had also criminalized it. But the official state law was slow to penetrate all areas and groups. It was particularly slow in the Sahara–Sahel, which contains scarcely populated regions minimally controlled and policed by underfinanced states. Legal pluralism and hybrid legal systems are the norm in West Africa. Contemporary state law evolved from legislations introduced under colonialism that imposed European legal concepts and institutions. Unsurprisingly, pre-existing norms and legal frameworks continued to influence the regulation of justice. Moreover, in some West African countries, the majority of the population is Muslim, but state law is non-religious.²³ Following independence most West African Muslims saw abolitionism as legitimate and supported the laws passed by their states to abolish slavery.²⁴ But some groups followed particular interpretations of Islamic law that were incompatible with both state law and Islamic law as interpreted by official Islamic authorities. They included terrorist groups that raided, kidnapped, and enslaved people, especially girls and women.²⁵ These have been publicly condemned by both Muslim and inter-faith religious leaders.²⁶

Since the 1970s slavery has been effectively undermined thanks primarily to the work of national anti-slavery activists.²⁷ And yet, ideologies that see slavery as legitimate in certain circumstances influence not only so-called terrorists, but also other groups. Descendants of slaveowners anachronistically classify persons of slave descent as "slaves" and occasionally force the latter to work for them or behave as their enslaved forebears.²⁸ These phenomena are impossible to quantify with the data available at present. But in areas where slavery continues to exist some employers never ceased to have a choice between employing enslaved or free workers. In the 2010s the Kayes region of Mali

has been in the news for the violence and abuses perpetrated by descendants of slave-owning classes against persons seen as slave descendants, who resisted the former's claims on their property and work.²⁹ In Islamic contexts female slavery is peculiarly resilient in the form of concubinage.³⁰ This, sometimes referred to as the "fifth wife" or "wahaya" phenomenon, is particularly well-documented for the Tahoua region of Niger, where the NGO Timidria has been supporting the female victims of a trade in girls whose mothers are considered "slaves."³¹ Such girls are treated as the property of the mother's owner by descendants of slaveowners and sold to wealthy men wishing to acquire sexually accessible women (concubines) beyond the four statutorily free wives legally permitted in Islam. Concubines are expected to provide domestic labor in the households they join. Testimonies by victims emphasize harsh working conditions and brutal treatment.³²

TAHOUA: SLOW DEATH OF SLAVERY, SLOW BIRTH OF WAGE LABOR

Slave and forced labor co-existed in Ader since the beginning of the twentieth century. Farming was possible, but did not generate important marketable surpluses. Hausaphone settled villagers farmed valleys and sold any surpluses; Tuareg pastoralists and their dependents owned and sold camels, cattle, and livestock. But, unlike further south in the Sokoto Sultanate, there were no major plantations farmed by slaves.³³ Why hold slaves at all if the profits promised by the fruits of slave labor were marginal? Stephen Baier, Paul Lovejoy, and myself have provided interpretations of the peculiar functions of slavery at the edge of the Sahara: self-sustaining villages of slave status provided grain, herding, and hospitality required by semi-nomadic slaveowners in the course of their movements.³⁴ Slaves provided the labor necessary to feeding local populations and, if possible, producing a surplus in years of abundant or normal rainfall. They themselves were exchanged for cereals during droughts. The exchange of people, who needed to be fed, for rare and costly grains at times of drought, was an important safety net in a place constantly exposed to the threat of famine. Even outside famines, relatively small numbers of persons enslaved in Tahoua were sold across the sub-region. Tahoua was not a "slave reservoir," like the Mandara mountains in what today is Northern Cameroon or the Guera region of Chad.³⁵ But particularly within Tuareg segmentary lineage systems, the sale and exchange of slaves across allied and collaborating units facilitated trans-Saharan connectivity.³⁶ In the 1920s and 1930s, relatively small numbers of enslaved women and their children were sold across commercially allied groups in what today are Mali and Niger.³⁷ Enslaved persons also worked in axes of long-distance trade controlled by Ader-based traders, such as the Agalawa studied by Abdulkarim Umar Dan Asabe.³⁸

Entry

At the beginning of our period, when the control of the French administration was not yet firmly established, entry into slavery took multiple forms. van der Linden's classification distinguishes between two modalities of entry: physical compulsion and constrained choice. The former can be mediated through money, or not. Among examples of entry into slave labor mediated through money (or through other currencies and goods), the sale of enslaved persons is well attested in Ader. Slaves were exchanged for goods such as cereals or livestock. Seima and her daughter were sold "for some oxen" in 1913; Seidi, a ten-year-old girl, was sold for three heads of cattle and two donkeys in 1917; Elgeme was sold with her two children for thirty sheep and one donkey in 1921; Rhali, the ten-year-old son of an enslaved mother, was sold for 12,000 measures of millet in 1920; two Fulani boys were purchased for seven camels and put to work as herders in the mid-1930s.³⁹ I have interviewed one elderly lady who remembered having been kidnapped as a child and then sold for six male camels and one female camel at the market of Bilma in the 1930s.⁴⁰ I have not recorded cases of slaves-for-hire or slavery incurred for the payment of a debt. Tahoua's respondents stated specifically that the former did not happen. However, both forms of entry (slaves-for-hire and debt-slavery) are attested in regions located south in the Sultanate of Sokoto.⁴¹

Among the forms of entry *not* mediated through money, people entered into slavery via abduction and birth to an enslaved mother, the most frequent modalities of entry into slavery in the first quarter of the twentieth century. Punctual kidnaps primarily targeted children, who were easily abducted if left unguarded by adults:

Once two Iwellemmeden [Tuareg] came to Charingué riding their camels. One of them grabbed a little child. But the child's mother saw this, so she ran and grabbed the hand of the child. The man who held the child hit her on the head with his sword [*takoba*] but she wouldn't let go. So the other [...] told him to leave the child. He did... the child grew up here and died a few years ago.⁴²

Raids and kidnaps were frequent:

if [the Tuareg nomadic warrior elites] raided cattle, they took it away, then they stopped somewhere and every [participant in the expedition] could take some animals; if they raided captives, they did the same; if they raided a free man, he would ransom himself [by giving] money, cattle, or slaves.⁴³

Noteworthy in this quote is the distinction between persons of slave ("captive") and free status. Communities considered to be of slave status, reproducing themselves biologically as slaves and living in hamlets owned collectively by particular individuals and families formed a social stratum at the bottom of Ader's society. Tuareg warrior elites could raid, kill, pillage, or abduct people from their own slave groups or, more frequently, from

slave groups tied to other Tuareg elites. While also free persons could be enslaved (and possibly ransomed), groups designated collectively as “slave” were frequent targets of re-enslavement. If slaveowners wanted to punish their enslaved dependents they could sell them; but they stood more to gain by acting as protectors toward their own slaves and kidnapping those enslaved to enemy groups.

Weaker, poorer, and more vulnerable than free-status groups, “slave” groups commonly sought the protection of those acting as their masters. Self-enslavement is attested, especially for enslaved persons known as *bayun yunwa*, slaves of famine or slaves of hunger, who were acquired in two ways: “If you had slaves but had nothing left to eat, you could sell one. Or some people who had nothing to eat could go to a rich person and offer themselves as slaves in exchange for food. Then these people would have to pay a ransom if they wanted to marry and be free.”⁴⁴ Persons threatened by famine, poverty, or facing wars, placed themselves under the protection of groups they thought of as powerful and thereby accepted a state of dependence equated with slavery. Self-enslavement is occasionally portrayed as a completely free choice. Even today there are persons who argue that they believe that it is God’s will that they serve a master whom they portray as quintessentially superior to them.

As official anti-slavery measures became progressively more effective, slave labor became a less common form of coerced labor throughout the twentieth century. But it did not die out entirely. From the perspective of persons who hold pro-slavery ideologies, the children of slave mothers who have not been manumitted by former masters can be legitimately enslaved.⁴⁵ In these circumstances, slavery is not only an illegal condition, but also a social status inherited across generations.⁴⁶ The descendants of slaves are classified as slaves. Classificatory slavery does not imply the presence of actual conditions of enslavement.⁴⁷ But the status of a slave is not inconsequential. Some classificatory slaves can choose how to live their lives, they are discriminated against and at risk of being coerced into conditions of actual enslavement. This possibility is concrete and explains why anti-slavery activists in the Sahel distinguish between active and passive slavery.⁴⁸

The notion of “passive slavery” may appear meaningless from the perspective of international law that identifies slavery with the presence of *actual* control tantamount to coercion.⁴⁹ But it is not meaningless in a society where classificatory slavery can be activated anytime. This happens, for example, when the children of statutory “slaves” are taken away by persons considering themselves their rightful owners and either sold or put to work as herders or, for girls, domestic workers. The most common form of entry into slavery in Tahoua today is the *wahaya* phenomenon.⁵⁰ The daughters of slave mothers are sold to men who seek a slave concubine. This form of entry into slave labor has continued to exist throughout the twentieth century. It is not until the famous case of Hadijatou Mani, who in 2008 won the case *Hadijatou Mani vs République du Niger*, that legal trials started taking place featuring victims of slavery denouncing enslavers with the support of anti-slavery NGOs.⁵¹

Let us turn to entry into forced labor. Under the six forms of entry by physical compulsion (sale, slaves-for-hire, payment of debt, birth, abduction, labor tax) only labor tax played a major role in the entry of Ader's workers in colonial forced labor. Of the three sub-types of "constrained choice" (self-sale into slavery, money taxes, "free" wage labor), money taxes played a role. No one, to my knowledge, enrolled in colonial forced labor as a free choice. This is different from voluntary enslavement, because low-ranking persons expected greater returns from the protection of a loyally served master than from a colonial officer satisfied with the performance of native (forced) workers. Forced labor recruitment involved compelling workers to join worksites under threat of punishment. The colonial state organized public works. Needs in labor were identified and District Officers provided quotas to "traditional chiefs" (*chef-ferie traditionnelle*), who recruited laborers. Often those selected were slaves and slave descendants.⁵²

In the 1920s–1940s the *Indigénat* served as the disciplinary mechanism for enforcing the administration's orders.⁵³ "Prestations" referred to a specified number of days of unpaid labor that able-bodied men had to contribute to the administration of the Cercle. In the 1920s the French administration distinguished between prestations and the head tax. Prestatory labor was not expected to exceed 12 days per man, per year. When worksites were located further than 30 km away from the workers' village, workers were fed or reimbursed the cost of their meals. The number of workers recruited varied depending on the cercle's programme of works. Should there be no need to carry out public works, subjects would not be expected to contribute their labor in the form of prestations. Similar exemptions could not occur in the case of taxes, which were an obligation for all French subjects.

When France ratified Co29 in 1937, it had to modify the regime of prestations in conformity with the new legislation on forced labor. In the reasoning of colonial bureaucrats, a "radical solution" would have led to the abolition of prestations and the substitution of prestatory labor with voluntary workers paid with funds made available by "a new tax added on to the [head] tax." But in the Colony of Niger, which was one of France's poorest colonies, this would have resulted in excessive fiscal pressure. To avoid the impression that this was forced labor by another name, prestations continued as before, but now had to be regarded solely as a tax. Turning the earlier rhetoric on its head, official communications now argued that "The prestation must now be seen as a direct canton tax (*impôt direct cantonal*), while we wait for the political and economic evolution of these regions to allow us to turn it into a direct communal tax. In principle, it is payable in one of two options, in cash or in labor, during the three months of tax collection."⁵⁴ Seven years later, these points were still being reiterated in circulars:

The *préstataires* are men paying their taxes. They have no right to a salary. The only cost they should give rise to should be related to the provision of their meals when they work far from their village. . . . The levying of prestations is

of a fiscal order The notion of forced labour imposed arbitrarily, which wrongly informs the conception that badly informed colonial [subjects] have of prestations, must be replaced by the notion of a just charge, proportional to the means of each and every person, and against which there can be no preconceptions.⁵⁵

In 1938, in the Cercle of Tahoua 14 percent of taxable men cleared their fiscal charges in cash, while the rest opted for prestations in labor, which amounted to between 2 and 10 workdays per man.⁵⁶ This central data suggests that coerced labor was not a heavy burden. However, correspondence from the cercles suggests otherwise. Locally based District Officers complained that prestations were onerous and that paying one's taxes in kind (prestatory labor) or cash (the *rachat* option) was in competition with meeting subsistence needs. It is likely that a disproportionate amount of prestations were actually done by a small section of the taxable population, former slaves and poorer commoners, who were also the most vulnerable to famine, because their farms were smaller and on less productive land than those of people of free descent.

When in 1946 France abolished forced labor, it mobilized developmentalist rationales to justify paying indigenous workers half the market rate for their labor. Entry into colonial development projects followed two avenues: men who had limited opportunities to succeed as seasonal labor migrants or in other, more desirable, occupations, volunteered to join these initiatives. Others were forced by local chiefs and elites, themselves under pressure by colonial officers. Following independence in 1960 the regime of President Seyni Kountché, who had seized power through a coup, championed nationalist development projects and participants had no choice but to volunteer in the projects of the "Development Society." Some men continued to migrate and farm for themselves, or work in the main axes of trade. But the national development worksites recruited workers through a mix of ideological and physical pressure.

The 1970s and 1980s were years of famine in the Sahel, and international development projects intervened in the Tahoua region. The Keita Project was a case in point. This Italy-funded, FAO-executed project started working at the time of Kountché's regime and initially struggled to mobilize labor on its anti-desertification worksites. Men did not come forward, as a large proportion of the adult male population had migrated away from their famine-stricken villages. It was women who became the Keita Project's workforce, remunerated in one ration of food per day of work.⁵⁷ By van der Linden's criteria, these women counted as coerced labor. They freely chose to enroll into project work. But their choice was constrained by a lack of alternatives. Poor women of slave descent averted hunger and fed their children by working on the project.

Extraction

van der Linden conceptualizes extraction in terms of the incentives that employers provide to motivate coerced workers to work well and hard. He divides incentives into three sub-categories (compensation, coercion, and commitment), each of which is further internally subdivided into eleven sub-types.⁵⁸ I will only discuss forms of extraction relevant to Tahoua. The slave category was stratified internally into gradations of dependence. In theory if not always in practice, masters were responsible for their slaves' basic needs. The most marginal slaves could be sold. These were recently captured slaves, who had not been integrated into the society of the masters. The two main slave categories were domestic slaves and allotment slaves. These two groups had different functions.⁵⁹ Domestic slaves, in Hausa *bayun murfu* ("slaves of the hearth"), took care of the everyday domestic needs of masters and followed their owners along their incessant travels, building their tents, looking after their cattle, taking care of their goods and families in their absence, and attending to the needs of their guests.⁶⁰ Allotment slaves lived in settled or semi-nomadic camps where their lives were relatively autonomous from those of their owners. While domestic slaves were fed and clothed by the masters, allotment slaves had to provide their own food, clothing, and shelter. The masters could take them away or appropriate their resources at any time. Domestic slaves could not move independently, for their residence and activities were tied to those of their owners. Allotment slaves, on the other hand, led a quasi-autonomous existence. Yet their mobility in space was restricted to the camp and its vicinities.

Also, various types of royal slaves existed, but domestic and allotment slaves were both the most common and most numerous categories of slaves, together with slave concubines, who were only female. Domestic slaves never received "wages" in the English sense of this term, but masters were obliged to support their domestic slaves' basic needs in terms of food, clothing, and healthcare. This was the case even though domestic slaves were poorly fed and it was thanks to the collective work of slaves that masters were able to acquire food and wealth. Ideologies of slavery encouraged slaves to derive pride and a sense of self-worth from their loyalty toward masters and to serve the latter willingly. It is impossible to overestimate the pressure of these ideologies and, vice-versa, the fear that failing to serve a master might result in the latter's curse and in God's punishment.⁶¹

Extraction of slave labor also took the form of physical violence and torture. Beatings, castration, harassment, rape, taking away the enslaved's most prized possessions and hurting their children, forcing the enslaved to carry out undignified tasks, and humiliating them in public: there is no category of violence that is not attested in regional research on slavery. Throughout the twentieth century all these forms of extraction continued, but violence became less common, both because slavery shrank as a form of employment and because violence was the behavior most likely to lead to official complaints. With the

passing of anti-slavery legislation and with the criminalization of slavery, slave-owning could not be defended anymore. But especially in poorer hinterland regions, pro-slavery ideologies lingering on.

Turning to forced labor, minimal wages were provided to those forced to work far from their villages. These wages, while minimal, were valued by the formerly enslaved as a source of income that allowed them to start autonomous economic activities—from funding one's own travels as labor migrants to purchasing goods that could be resold at some profit. The memory of forced labor is still alive in many villages and adds important details to the information available in colonial archives. Men from one village said they started migrating at the times of forced labor.⁶² The French made them cut down trees in Ader and carry them on foot to Tahoua, a two-day trip. They remained in Tahoua overnight and returned on the following morning. Sometimes nothing else was required from them for a long period until the village chief announced that he had to recruit more workers. Tasks varied. After carrying trees, they had to collect chalk from quarries. Those recruited spent a month working in the mines next to Bermo. When they were released, they were given a little money.⁶³ Some of them used it to finance their migration to Jos in Nigeria. This is how some elders remembered the organization of colonial worksites:

The French introduced taxation ('*ampho*', from the French '*impôt*').... also forced labour (*aikin dole*), which consisted in taking people to worksites for 10–20 days. Workers were fed, but not paid [another speaker added: they were not fed either, they had to bring their own food!] They worked toward Tahoua, Gaya, even outside the country. The Lissawan [Canton chiefs] collaborated with the French, arranging the forced labour worksites. Each sector in the Canton had a supervisor, who worked for the Lissawan. . . . Alkassoum supervised the area of Tinkirana/Loudou. Attauri supervised the area of Waddey/Tabofat. Abuzeidi supervised the area of Tegueleguel. He had a helper in the village, who was designated by the village chief, but he came alone from Keita, he had no other assistants. [...] Lissawan sector chiefs supervised forced labourers. They also collected taxes (*bodu*). On top of forced labour, people worked on the chief's fields (*gandun sarki*) for one day at the heaviest stage of the farming season. For this they received a meal of porridge (*fura*). Abuzeidi could not speak Tamasheq, but the village chief (of Tegueleguel) spoke Hausa. Communication was not a problem. The Lissawan supervisor would just sit and oversee the works. He would select local people to check each worksite. There were no Frenchmen present, but soldiers visited to make sure that work proceeded smoothly. Workers grouped spontaneously with others like them: the Hausa with the Hausa, the Tamasheq with the Tamasheq. People from different villages tended to form separate work parties, if they could.⁶⁴

The Code de l'Indigénat was the legal instrument devised specifically to endow the colonial administration with arbitrary power to punish, and even execute, natives who did not perform according to their expectations. A letter

from the Commandant of the Cercle of Tahoua written in 1940 exposes the administration's attitudes toward ex-slaves (*Bellah*):

The Cercle's populations are still far from a degree of evolution in which this regime [the Code de l'Indigénat in its 1887 form] would be considered excessive, and immediate sanctions are always more effective against primitives than penalties that sometimes may not occur until after a fortnight has passed [from the perpetration of an infraction of the code] . . . infractions are extremely frequent particularly amongst the ex-slaves (*Bellah*) who have become very independent now that they are not enslaved anymore and, having escaped the stick of the master, would pretend to evade all authority.⁶⁵

With the spread of developmentalist discourses, which gradually replaced previous forms of labor extraction, wages, and commitment became more prominent incentives, replacing coercion and violence. Pride in the results of work carried out in the name of local and national development is central to developmentalist ideologies, as is shame for failing to perform successfully. However, failure to meet targets and achieve results could lead to punishment, such as denial of support by rural extension officers or, occasionally, land expropriation.

Exit

van der Linden lists seven variants of exit from chattel slavery: "owners can compel slaves to leave, or they can be forced to free them by another entity (an abolitionist state, for example), but they can also free them unconditionally; slaves can run away or mutiny; they can purchase their own freedom; they can remain as slaves; or they may die."⁶⁶ All these circumstances are attested to Tahoua. In Tuareg societies, forced exit occasionally took the form of disappearance of slaveowners, especially for allotment slaves. Certain masters' families died out, such as those who resisted French occupation and were exterminated; or became so impoverished that they severed social ties and lived as poor nomads isolated from dependents. Others lost their livestock in famines and had to rely on the help of former slaves. The latter configuration eludes easy classification in clear-cut typologies. Some former masters used ideological threats to convince former slaves to continue serving them. But I have also collected testimonies in which ex-slaves explained that they had continued helping the descendants of former masters out of genuine pity.

Up until the 1920s exit from slavery happened mainly through manumission, escape, or self-ransom. Then, from the 1920s onward, colonial abolition started being systematically enforced. Slaves who wished to distance themselves from masters either left (this option was prevalent among young men of slave descent) or denounced the bad treatments of masters to colonial authorities, an option prevalent among women who were more often traded or faced the pain of having their children taken away from them. Since the famous case

of Hadijatou Mani, more concubines came to the fore to denounce their own sale and unwanted servitude through recourse to NGOs and national justice. Exit dynamics are highly gendered; it is rare for slaveowners to attempt to stop male slaves from breaking ties of dependence.

The notion of exit from slavery suggests a total break. But in Tuareg society individual slaves, or entire slave villages, could not be completely liberated from their servile status. If they were manumitted, their prior enslavement continued to influence their status as they were reclassified as liberated slaves. Freed slaves fell into two categories, the *ighawellan*, who had enjoyed free status for a long time, and the more recently freed *iderfan*. They could not become assimilated into freeborn people (*ilellan*). Slaves or ex-slaves were seen as ethnically different from “real” Tuareg and denied full human status by members of the elite. Racialized criteria differentiated them from freemen also after manumission.⁶⁷ This is one of the reasons why a large number of people of slave descent changed ethnicity and Hausaised as an emancipation strategy. This process lasted two or three generations and involved moving to a Hausa village and adopting the Hausa language and lifestyle.⁶⁸ To be sure, slavery existed in the Hausa-speaking societies of Ader, but social mobility was easier here than in Tuareg contexts.

Exit from colonial forced labor took primarily the form of resistance and escape. Ader’s workers resisted so vehemently to forced enrollment in colonial worksites that the colonial administration hesitated to impose recruitment in this region. This was a consequence of the limited potential of this region as a source of colonial revenue. Local workers became seasonal labor migrants both to pay, and to avoid paying, colonial taxes. Their migration toward British Nigeria was a major concern to French administrators. Ader’s potential employers competed against the revenues that could be derived by migrating, which were almost invariably higher than what employers would be willing to offer workers in Ader.

What was produced in Ader faced barriers to commercialization in the form of high transport costs. Only few private producers/traders in local cash crops employed local workers who could not or would not migrate. The colonial and independent state could try to coerce workers to work by impeding their departures. But enforcing a systematic and effective surveillance of laborers was not worth the cost of coercion. Due to ideologies that stopped them from migrating, women were more likely to accept the low rates of remuneration that some employers would offer—as in the case of the Keita Project. Elderly women of slave descent are those most likely to continue serving former masters—their weakness and limited alternative livelihood options make subservience more acceptable.

From the 1920s onward, ex-slaves who owned scarcely fertile lands on northern Ader’s rocky slopes turned into seasonal migrants, not into self-sufficient peasants. They diversified their livelihoods: women and children farmed the family’s dry fields, and men worked for wages in West Africa’s cities. Some of the poorest groups migrate locally, often with the whole family,

following a particular form of migration known as “*cin rani*,” which involves leaving one’s household after the harvest until the following rainy season when people come back to farm and rely on the previous harvest’s stocks at a time when the price of cereals is highest. Those practising this type of migration, even today, are often persons of slave descent who migrate locally to work for descendants of former slaveowners in the dry season. Women carry out domestic work for their employers during the day, and they take two meals (with their young children, if they had any) at their employers’ homes. They are paid the equivalent of 5–10 GBP per month. Husbands might work for the same employers; or work abroad as long-distance migrants; or work in a larger village nearby where jobs are available in local trade, irrigated agriculture, or the service sector.

CONCLUSION

Coercion is costly. Coercers must invest resources and energy into forcibly recruiting people; supervising workers and providing incentives to make them work hard; and preventing them from exiting their exploitative circumstances. Coercion is also costly on moral grounds. The exploitation of particular individuals or groups must be justified morally and politically. This requires convincing people that coercion is somehow legitimate according to society’s moral compass. Throughout the twentieth century, indigenous slavery and colonial forced labor were progressively contested, and eventually outlawed, because people changed their views about which forms of coercion were legitimate and which ones weren’t. Different groups changed how they thought about various forms of coercion at different moments.

The colonizers considered themselves abolitionists and presented the eradication of traditional slavery as a moral justification for the imposition of their rule. They introduced new forms of forced labor. Until the mid-1940s, French administrators spoke of the compulsory work they were imposing on African societies as a way to turn Africans into “free” workers. But eventually, thanks mainly to African protests and resistance, French policymakers and administrators came to see the forced labor they had imposed on African colonial subjects as unjust. Concurrently, in the early twentieth century, many West Africans saw slavery as a legitimate institution and resented colonial forced labor and colonialism. They progressively changed their views about slavery. The first to resist slavery were the enslaved. They also mobilized against colonial rule and forced labor. Ideas changed, but the Sahel’s environment never ceased to threaten potential employers and employees alike with high risks of business failure and low returns to commercial agriculture.

Comparing slavery and forced labor in this context shows that slavery has been more resilient not because it maximized anyone’s profits, but because it had potential to reduce risk. This was true for both slave-owning and enslaved groups, but the nature of their relationship was far from mutualistic: slave-owners dominated those enslaved and reaped potentially greater benefits from

slavery than the enslaved, who would not resist enslavement when it protected them from hunger. But when hunger and extreme poverty were not unavoidable, as I showed elsewhere, they sought freedom.⁶⁹ Poverty is unavoidable for people who, for whatever reason, cannot travel and who cannot access adequate food by working for themselves or for others. By van der Linden's definition, working for others is always coercive except when the arrangements can be characterized as mutualistic. In general, Ader's circumstances hampered the ability of potential employers to offer wages. Why, then, employ dependent labor at all, after abolition?

Under colonial regimes, the French administration had to prove that it could govern the population of these Sahelian regions, and this involved mobilizing their labor. During the Sahel crisis, international development projects whose vocation it was to stop the desert's advance had to enroll the local workforce in the anti-desertification worksites. This made it necessary to mobilize local labor. But it mattered relatively little whether this labor achieved its ends lastingly and efficiently. Finally, Ader does contain limited fertile lands that produce onions and tomatoes. These are local cash crops and a small group of entrepreneurs offer wages to those willing to work on their farms. Many of the latter are local small-scale farmers, whose family members work on their own farms and who also borrow seeds and inputs from their employers on credit and pay them back in kind at the harvest. Poverty and debt account for the coercive conditions of statutorily "slave" and "free" labor at the desert's edge.

van der Linden's analytical framework is useful. It makes it possible to compare coercive labor regimes without using concepts like "slavery" that carry heavy moral connotations. In Euro-America, we have come to see slavery primarily as the worst form of labor commodification. van der Linden's framework allows researchers to compare different forms of labor coercion with greater precision, while eluding the ideological straitjackets implicit in our own analytical language. But even when "exit, extraction, and exit" are applied, most of the work of interpretation still remains to be done. The three moments framework is no magic formula. It does not in itself answer questions like why has slavery proven more resilient in certain contexts than in others.

Some of van der Linden's assumptions require more reflection. In particular, the idea that all labor for others should be seen as coerced labor is a simplification that would benefit from some conceptual nuancing. How can the intensity of coercion be theorized for comparative purposes? Being enslaved through abduction in a violent raid on one's village is experienced differently from enrolling into an international development project for a daily meal as a wage but no other pressure by the employer. The threat of hunger and the bitter choices it forces one to make are experienced differently from the physical pain inflicted by an abductor or a violent master. How to account, analytically, for these differences? Noel Lenski's suggestion to develop an indicator—he calls it "vectors of intensification"—to measure the intensity of exploitation in coercive relations is helpful.⁷⁰ Such a measurement would make it possible to weigh benefits to masters (use and exchange

value of slaves as commodity, or of slave labor and its fruits) against disadvantages to enslaved persons (permanence of the slave condition, level of violent domination, degree of natal alienation and dishonor). This matters not only because it might increase the clarity and precision of our understanding of the past, but also because it can inform decisions on how to give more and better choices to potential victims of coercion in the future.

NOTES

1. Research for this article received funding from the European Research Council (ERCAG 885418, RISE 734596) and the Arts and Humanities Research Council of the United Kingdom (AH/R005427/1, AH/V01210X/1) and the author wishes to thank these institutions for their generous support.
2. Eric Williams, *Capitalism and Slavery* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994, first edition 1944); Seymour Drescher, *Econocide: British Slavery in the Era of Abolition* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010, first edition 1977); Howard Temperley, "Capitalism, Slavery, and Ideology," *Past and Present* 75 (May 1977): 94–118; David Eltis and Stanley Engerman, "The Importance of Slavery and the Slave Trade to Industrializing Britain," *Journal of Economic History* 60, no. 1 (2000): 123–44.
3. Gareth Austin, "Capitalists and Labour in Africa," in *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries*, ed. Stefano Bellucci and Andreas Eckert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 425–56, here 436.
4. Testimony of Dela Mahamadou, interviewed by Apsatou Bagaya and Benedetta Rossi in Niamey, 13 November 2021.
5. Note on the terminology of slavery: the terms "slave" and "master" are used to indicate socially recognized statuses that feature in the sources referred to in this chapter. Despite colonial and national abolition laws, some groups continue to view "slave" and "master" statuses (and related living conditions) as legitimate. These terms carry normative connotations and reveal the persistence of non-abolitionist ideologies. This chapter interrogates and analyzes the causes of this persistence. Today most anti-slavery activists in the West African Sahel reject the use of the term "enslaved person" or "enslaver" as substitutes for the terminology that is actually used by people in these contexts. Some of these activists call for the term "slave" to be used as a way to denounce the continued existence of actual slavery in their societies, a terrible reality that they do not wish to euphemize, but choose to denounce and fight against. As this chapter seeks to show, the circumstances are complex and all terminological choices are problematic. The use of the term "slave" in this chapter is meant to retain the sources' terminology that reveals the endurance of a pro-slavery discursive regime. It is never meant to imply a pejorative connotation: it refers to a status/condition which should have disappeared, but which continues to exist in practice and in local parlance. This attests to the ongoing oppression of the groups and individuals labeled "slaves" (some of whom may face actual conditions of enslavement) by the groups and individuals labeled "masters." It attests, too, to the presence of local activists who struggle against slavery and its legacies.

6. Gareth Austin, "Cash Crops and Freedom: Export Agriculture and the Decline of Slavery in Colonial West Africa," *International Review of Social History* 54, no. 1 (2009): 1–37.
7. Frederick Cooper, "From Enslavement to Precarity? The Labour Question in African History," in *The Political Economy of Everyday Life in Africa: Beyond the Margins*, ed. Wale Adebaniwi (Oxford: James Currey, 2017), 135–56.
8. Marcel van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labor," in *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, ed. Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodriguez Garcia (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 293–322, here 294. See also Christian De Vito, Juliane Schiel, and Matthias van Rossum "From Bondage to Precariousness. New Perspectives on Labor and Social History," *Journal of Social History* 54, no. 2 (2020): 1–19.
9. Martin Klein, *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
10. Frederick Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 31; Babacar Fall, *Le travail forcé en Afrique Occidentale française (1900–1945)* (Paris: Karthala, 1993), 17–19; Romain Tiquet, *Travail forcé et mobilisation de la main-d'œuvre au Sénégal, Années 1920–1960* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2019).
11. Cooper, *Decolonization and African Society*, 58–73.
12. The full text of the ILO's Forced Labor Convention (Co29) can be found at the following link (checked and working on July 8, 2017), http://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C029.
13. Fall, *Le travail forcé*.
14. For a discussion of the circumstances in which the Convention was developed, see Suzanne Miers, *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem* (Walnut Creek, CA: Altamira, 2003), 134–51.
15. Benedetta Rossi, "What 'Development' Does to Work," *International Labor and Working Class History* 92 (Fall 2017): 7–23.
16. Babacar Fall and Richard Roberts, "Forced Labor," in *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments, 20th–21st Centuries*, ed. Stefano Bellucci and Andreas Eckert (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 77–115, here 112.
17. Corrie Decker and Elisabeth McMahon, *The Idea of Development in Africa: A History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021), 143–63.
18. Frederick Cooper, "African Labor History," in *Global Labour History. A State of the Art*, ed. Jan Lucassen (Bern: Peter Lang, 2006), 91–116.
19. John Sender and Sheila Smith, *The Development of Capitalism in Africa* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1986).
20. Karin Hofmeester, Jan Lucassen, and Filipa Ribeiro da Silva, "No Global Labor History without Africa: Reciprocal Comparison and Beyond," *History in Africa* 41 (2014): 249–76, here 268. Marcel van der Linden defines mutualism as "all voluntary arrangements, in which people make contributions to a collective fund, which is given, in whole or in part, to one or more of the contributors according to specific rules of allocation." Marcel van der Linden, *Workers of the World: Essays toward a Global Labor History* (Leiden: Brill, 2000), 81.
21. Structural Adjustment Participatory Review International Network (SAPRIN). *Structural Adjustment—The SAPRI Report: The Policy Roots of Economic Crisis*,

- Poverty and Inequality* (London: ZED Books, 2004); Béatrice Hibou, ed., *La privatisation des états* (Paris: Karthala, 1999).
22. Ibrahim Thioub, "Regard critique sur les lectures africaines de l'esclavage et de la traite atlantique," in *Les historiens africains et la mondialisation*, ed. Issiaka Mandé and Blandine Stefanson (Paris: Karthala, 2005), 271–92.
 23. This is the case of Senegal, Niger, Mali, Chad, and Guinée, for example. By contrast, in Mauritania and some states in Northern Nigeria shariah law is national law.
 24. William Gervase Clarence Smith, *Islam and the Abolition of Slavery* (London: Hurst & Company, 2006); Khaled Abou el-Fadl, *The Great Theft: Wrestling Islam from the Extremists* (Harper San Francisco, 2005); Bernard K. Freamon, "Slavery, Freedom, and the Doctrine of Consensus in Islamic Jurisprudence," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 11, no. 1 (1998), accessible at <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1564321>.
 25. Lee Ferran, Dana Hughes, James Gordon Meek, and Colleen Curry, "Boko Haram: Kidnappers, Slave-Owners, Terrorists, Killers," *ABC News*, 5 May 2014, accessible at <https://abcnews.go.com/Blotter/boko-haram-kidnappers-slave-owners-terrorists-killers/story?id=23598347>.
 26. In 2014, Iraqi-Iranian Shia political-religious leader Ayatollah Mohammad Taqi al-Modarresi met with the Leader of Catholic Christianity Pope Francis and other religious authorities to draft an inter-faith declaration to "eradicate modern slavery across the world by 2020 and for all time." The declaration was signed by several Shi'ite leaders including the Sunni Grand Imam of Al Azhar Mosque in Cairo (Egypt). See Global Freedom Network, A United Faith Against Modern Slavery: The Joint Declaration of Religious Leaders against Modern Slavery. *Vatican City*, 2 December 2014, <https://cdn.walkfree.org/content/uploads/2020/10/06154604/GFN-2-Dec-Vatican-Book-digital.pdf>. Muslim scholars also released a separate open letter to condemn the declarations and activities of ISIS and Boko Haram in 2014, see: Religion News Service, "Muslim Scholars Release Open Letter To Islamic State Meticulously Blasting Its Ideology," *The Huff Post*, 24 September 2014, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/muslim-scholars-islamic-state_n_5878038.
 27. Eric Hahonou and Lotte Pelckmans, "West African Antislavery Movements: Citizenship Struggles and the Legacies of Slavery," *Stichproben: Wiener Zeitschrift für kritische Afrikastudien* 20 (2011): 141–62; Eric Hahonou, "Slavery and Politics: Stigma, Decentralisation, and Political Mobilisation in Niger and Benin," in *Reconfiguring Slavery: West African Trajectories*, ed. Benedetta Rossi (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2009), 152–81; Zekeria Ould Ahmed Salem, "Bare-Foot Activists: Transformations in the Haratine Movement in Mauritania," in *Empires of Speed: Time and the Acceleration of Politics and Society*, ed. Robert Hassan, Stephen Ellis and Ineke van Kessel (Leiden: Brill, 2009).
 28. Benedetta Rossi, ed., *Reconfiguring Slavery*. On the political and identitarian reconfigurations of relations rooted in slavery, see also Baz Lecocq, "The Bellah Question: Slave Emancipation, Race and Social Categories in Late Twentieth-Century Northern Mali," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 39, no. 3 (2005): 42–67.

29. Lotte Pelckmans, "Breaking the Silence? The Ongoing Legacies of Internal Slavery in Mali," article published online in August 2000, accessible at <https://www.slaveryforcedmigration.org/en/article-breaking-the-silence-the-ongoing-legacies-of-internal-african-slavery-in-mali-lotte-pelckmans-aout-2020-en-anglais/>.
30. See, for example, Ann McDougall, "A Sense of Self: The Life of Fatma Barka," *Canadian Journal of African Studies* 32, no. 2 (1998): 285–315.
31. Moussa Zangaou and Kadir Abdelkader Galy, *Wahaya, Domestic and Sexual Slavery in Niger* (Niamey: Antislavery International and Timidria, 2012), <https://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/Wahaya-report.pdf>.
32. Testimony of Dela Mahamadou, interviewed by Apsatou Bagaya and Benedetta Rossi in Niamey, 13 November 2021.
33. Mohammed Bashir Salau, *The West African Slave Plantation: A Case Study* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011); Mohammed Bashir Salau, *Plantation Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Historical and Comparative Study* (University of Rochester Press, 2018).
34. Stephen Baier and Paul Lovejoy, "The Desert Side Economy of the Central Sudan," *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 8, no. 4 (1975): 551–81; Stephen Baier and Paul Lovejoy, "The Tuareg of the Central Sudan: Gradations in Servility at the Desert's Edge (Niger and Nigeria)," in *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives*, ed. Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977); Benedetta Rossi "Kinetocracy: The Government of Mobility at the Desert's Edge," in *Mobility Makes States: Migration and Power in Africa*, ed. Joel Quirk and Darshan Vigneswaran (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2015), 223–56.
35. Valerio Colosio, "'The Children of the People': Integration and Descent in a Former Slave Reservoir in Chad," Ph.D. Thesis, University of Sussex (UK), Department of Social Anthropology, 2018.
36. On trans-Saharan connectivity, see James McDougall and Judith Scheele, eds., *Saharan Frontiers: Space and Mobility in Northwest Africa* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012).
37. Benedetta Rossi, "Periodizing the End of Slavery: Colonial Law, the League of Nations and Slave Resistance in the Nigerien Sahel, 1920s–1930s," *Annales (Histoire, Sciences Sociales—English edition)* 72, no. 4 (2017): 605–40, here 622.
38. Abdulkarim Umar Dan Asabe, *Comparative Biographies of Selected Leaders of the Kano Commercial Establishment*, MA Thesis, Bayero University (Kano, Nigeria), Department of History, 1987.
39. Data from *Archives Nationales du Niger* (ANN) 381; if the measure is the *tiya*, 12,000 measures of millet correspond roughly to 24 tons.
40. Her story is told in Rossi, "Periodizing the End of Slavery," 635.
41. *Murgu*, in the Hausa-speaking world, is an institution through which a slave could pay money to his owner in lieu of the work owed to him. Some slaves were allowed to work for a salary but had to give all or part of that salary to their owners. On how this institution worked in the late nineteenth century and was transformed under colonial rule in Northern Nigeria, see Paul Lovejoy, "Murgu: The Wages of Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate," *Slavery & Abolition* 14 (1993): 168–85.

42. Interview with anonymized speaker, Charingue Tajac, 10 June 2005. Unless otherwise specified, all interviews were conducted in Hausa by the author with the assistance of Ahmadou Seydou.
43. Testimony of Alesmaghil Ag Mousa, in Francis Nicolas, “Textes ethnographiques de la Tamajeq des Iullemmeden de l’est, (quatrième partie),” *Anthropos* 51 (1956): 129–56, here 148–9.
44. Interview with Keitawa elders in Keita, 8 September 2005.
45. I discuss examples of these circumstances in “Beyond the Atlantic Paradigm: Slavery and Abolitionism in the Nigérien Sahel,” *Journal of Global Slavery* 5, no. 2 (2020): 238–69.
46. Valerie Couillard, *Difficile Passage vers la liberté. Dix années de travail contre l’esclavage par ascendance en Afrique de l’Ouest* (London: Anti-Slavery International, 2019).
47. Benedetta Rossi, “Introduction: Rethinking Slavery in West Africa,” in *Reconfiguring Slavery*, 5.
48. Galy Kadir Abdulkader, *Slavery in Niger: Historical, Legal and Contemporary Perspectives* (London and Niamey: Anti-Slavery International and Association Timidria, 2004), 9–10.
49. Jean Allain and Robin Hickey, “Property and the Definition of Slavery,” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 61 (2012): 915–38, here 923.
50. Moussa Zangaou and Kadir Abdulkader Galy, *Wahaya*.
51. Jean Allain, “Hadijatou Mani Koraou v. Republic of Niger: Judgement no. ECW/CCJ/JUD/06/08,” *The American Journal of International Law* 103, no. 2 (2009): 311–17; Helen Duffy, “Hadijatou Mani Koroua v Niger: Slavery Unveiled by the ECOWAS Court,” *Human Rights Law Review* 9, no. 1 (2009): 151–70.
52. Roman Tiquet, “Challenging Colonial Forced Labor? Resistance, Resilience, and Power in Senegal (1920s–1940s),” *International Labor and Working Class History* 93 (2018): 137; Ash, Catherine B. Ash “Forced Labor in Colonial West Africa,” *History Compass* 4, no. 3 (2006): 402–06.
53. Gregory Mann, “What was the indigénat? The ‘Empire of law’ in French West Africa,” *Journal of African History* 50, no. 3 (2009): 331–53; Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and West Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).
54. Gouverneur Niger to Commandants de Cercles and Subdivisions, Circular, 12 March 1931, Archives Nationales du Senegal (hereafter ANS) K263 (26).
55. Gouverneur Niger to Commandants de Cercles, Circular No. 152, 30 July 1938.
56. Note for the Director of Political Affairs, 15 June 1939, ANS K263 (26).
57. Benedetta Rossi, “From Unfree Work to Working for Free: Labor, Aid, and Gender in the Nigerien Sahel, 1930–2000,” *International Labor and Working Class History* 92 (Fall 2017): 155–82.
58. van der Linden, “Dissecting Coerced Labor,” 308, Fig. 13.2.
59. This distinction, based on my enquiries in Ader, matches the observations of Bernus, “L’évolution récente des relations entre éleveurs et agriculteurs en Afrique tropicale: L’exemple du Sahel nigérien,” *Cahiers ORSTOM* 9, no. 2 (1974): 137–43, here 142; see also Edmond Bernus and Susanne Bernus, “L’évolution de la condition servile chez les Touaregs sahéliens,” in *L’Esclavage en Afrique précoloniale*, ed. Claude Meillassoux (Paris: Maspéro, 1975), 27–47, 33–5.

60. Testimony of Rabi ag Elibdar in Francis Nicolas, "Textes ethnographiques de la Tamajeq des Iullemeden de l'est, (troisième partie)," *Anthropos* 50 (1955): 635–58, here 655–6.
61. For a study of the power of masters' curse, see Christine Hardung, "Curse and Blessing: On Post-slavery Modes of Perception and Agency in Benin" in *Reconfiguring Slavery*, 116–39.
62. Interview with Mousa Bukoci and other elders in Jigгина, 1 December 2008.
63. According to decree No. 184 of 31 March 1927, casual workers would receive a daily fee of 0.50 francs, which was the estimated cost of their evening meals. According to decrees No. 630 of 14 November 1927 and No. 34 of 17 January 1928, permanent workers recruited at the cercle level to carry out construction work for the colony would receive 100 francs after six months of work, and 200 francs after one year. Workers would receive one daily meal on the worksite, which decree No. 52 of 15 April 1928 increased from 125 to 200 grams of meat. Gouverneur Niger to Gouverneur Général, 1 May 1928, ANS K59 (19). It is, of course, not always clear if these legal provisions were actually implemented.
64. Interview with elders of Tegueleguel Teguef, 7 June 2005.
65. Commandant de Cercle of Tahoua to Governor of Niger, 22 May 1940.
66. van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labor," 314 and 311, Fig. 13.3.
67. Edmond Bernus and Susanne Bernus, "L'évolution de la condition servile," 31–32.
68. I provided a detailed example of this process in "Being and Becoming Hausa in Ader (Niger)," in *Being and Becoming Hausa: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*, ed. Anne Haour and Benedetta Rossi, 113–40.
69. Benedetta Rossi, "Dependence, Unfreedom, and Slavery in Africa: Toward an Integrated Analysis," *Africa* 86, no. 3 (2016): 571–90.
70. Noel Lenski, "Framing the Question: What is a Slave Society?," in *What is a Slave Society? The Practice of Slavery in Global Perspective*, ed. Noel Lenski and Catherine Cameron (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018), 220–50, here 52–53.

FURTHER READINGS

- Abdelkader, Galy Kader, ed. *Slavery in Niger : Historical, Legal and Contemporary Perspectives*. London and Niamey: Anti-Slavery International and Timidria, 2004. Accessible at: http://www.antislavery.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/full_english_slavery_in_niger.pdf
- Austin, Gareth. *Labour, Land and Capital in Ghana. From Slavery to Free Labour in Asante, 1807–1956*. Rochester, NY: University of Rochester Press, 2005.
- Bellucci, Stefano, and Andreas Eckert, eds. *General Labour History of Africa: Workers, Employers and Governments 20th-21st Centuries*. Suffolk, UK: Boydell and Brewer, 2019.
- Cooper, Frederick. *Decolonisation and African Society: The Labor Question in French and British Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.
- Fall, Babacar. *Le travail force en Afrique Occidentale Française (1900-1945)*. Paris : Karthala, 1993.
- Klein, Martin. *Slavery and Colonial Rule in French West Africa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998.

- Lovejoy, Paul, and Jan Hogendorn. *Slow Death for Slavery. The Course of Abolition in Northern Nigeria, 1897–1936*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993.
- Ngaide, Abderrahmane. *L'esclave, le colon et le marabout. Le royaume peul du Fula de 1867–1936*. Paris : l'Harmattan, 2012.
- Rossi, Benedetta. *From Slavery to Aid: Politics, Labour, and Ecology in the Nigerian Sabel, 1800–2000*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015.
- Salau, Mohammed Bashir. *Plantation Slavery in the Sokoto Caliphate: A Historical and Comparative Study*. Rochester, NY: Rochester University Press, 2018.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Slave Labor in Nazi Germany

Marc Buggeln 

INTRODUCTION

The National Socialists regarded the population of Eastern Europe, if they were not to be killed or left for dead, as a reservoir of slave labor that would guarantee the Germans a higher standard of living. The Reichsführer SS, Heinrich Himmler, formulated this in unvarnished clarity in his infamous Posen speech from October 4, 1943: “Whether the other peoples live in prosperity or whether they die of hunger, that interests me only to the extent that we need them as slaves for our culture, otherwise it does not interest me. Whether 10,000 Russian women collapse from exhaustion during the construction of a tank ditch or not, that interests me only insofar as the tank ditch for Germany is completed.”¹

As more and more German men had to go to the front to join the war effort, Nazi Germany needed more and more replacement workers to maintain the country’s war economy. Nazi Germany exploited a total of about 12 million people as civilian forced laborers, prisoners of war, and concentration camp inmates. Not only did leading National Socialists regard them as slaves, but many of those exploited also made this analogy. Their accounts speak of feeling as if they were on the slave market or in slavery. For example, one

M. Buggeln (✉)
University of Flensburg, Flensburg, Germany
e-mail: buggelnm@hu-berlin.de

History Department, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Berlin, Germany

chapter in the famous Buchenwald Report, which was compiled by Eugen Kogon and nine other ex-prisoners in May 1945 from numerous prisoner interviews, was entitled “The SS Slave Trade.”

The Allies also saw clear similarities to slavery in 1945, when they freed the prisoners held in Germany, which is why slave labor became one of the charges at the International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg. The prosecutors understood this to mean primarily the “slave labor program,” i.e., the deportation of millions of civilians to Germany for forced labor, rather than concentration camp forced labor. In the decades that followed, however, forced labor in the Federal Republic of Germany was trivialized as a common phenomenon of war. It was not until the 1980s that comprehensive historical work on these crimes began to emerge. In the negotiations for the compensation of former forced laborers in the early 2000s, the distinction between forced labor and slave labor was introduced. The category “slave labor” included forced labor in concentration camps, in labor education camps, and by Jews in occupied Eastern Europe.

This chapter examines the use of state-sponsored slave labor in Nazi Germany. In what follows, I will first use analytical categories to identify the forced labor relationships under German rule for which the term slave labor applies. The second part of the chapter is concerned with the conditions in the National Socialist concentration camps. It focuses on the different forms of entry into the concentration camps, the prisoner experiences with slave labor, and the possibilities for the exit. Since most forms of forced labor did not become a mass phenomenon until the beginning of World War II, the chapter covers primarily the period after 1939.

THE ORIGINS OF FORCED AND SLAVE LABOR IN NAZI GERMANY

Terms and Practices

Starting from the three stages of the employment relationship: entry, exit, and working conditions² and the important role played in the latter by Albert O. Hirschman’s concept of voice,³ Mark Spoerer and Jochen Fleischhacker proposed a division of forced laborers in the Reich into four groups. For the first three categories, the distinction is made primarily based on voice and exit; for the last, the chance of survival is the defining criterion. According to Spoerer and Fleischhacker, slave labor is characterized by the fact that there is neither an exit option nor the possibility to voice criticism (Table 34.1).⁴

I largely share the hierarchical positioning of the groups made here. Instead of less-than-slaves, however, I describe the category as slave labor with a high mortality rate, because there were also cases of extremely high mortality in “classical” slavery—e.g., on the Caribbean islands. The category less-than-slaves makes sense above all for those groups who were already murdered upon arrival in the extermination camps or, like the Sinti and Roma, who were held

Table 34.1 Main groups of foreign workers in Germany 1939–1945

| | <i>Privileged exit and voice</i> | <i>Forced labor No exit, but voice</i> | <i>Slave labor No exit, no voice</i> | <i>Less-than-slaves</i> |
|---|--|--|--|-------------------------|
| <i>Civilian</i> | | | | |
| Croatia/Slovakia | X | | | |
| Italy | X (until September 1943) | | X (after September 1943) | |
| France/Belgium/Netherlands/Serbia | | X | | |
| Baltic States | | X | | |
| Poland/Soviet Union | | | X | |
| <i>PoW</i> | | | | |
| France/Great Britain/US/Serbia | | X | | |
| Italy/Poland (non-Jewish) | | | X | |
| Poland (Jewish)/Soviet Union | | | | X |
| <i>Prisoners</i> | | | | |
| Concentration camp/Work education camp | | | | X |

Note Spoerer and Fleischhacker, “Forced Laborers,” 175

Table 34.2 Rate of survival by type of labor

| | <i>Privileged</i> | <i>Forced labor</i> | <i>Slave labor</i> | <i>Slave labor and high death rate</i> |
|------------------|-------------------|---------------------|--------------------|--|
| Rate of survival | 99% | 98% | 89% | 41% |

Note Spoerer and Fleischhacker, “Forced Laborers,” 196.

in a separate camp without being comprehensively used for forced labor before their planned extermination (Table 34.2).

The mortality rate among the Italian military internees was about ten times higher than among the German population. It was even higher among Soviet prisoners of war. Here, however, the timeframe was of central importance. Mortality was exorbitantly high in 1941 and 1942, especially in the winter of 1941/1942, when Soviet prisoners of war were deliberately deprived of supplies. From the middle of 1942 onward, the mortality rate fell significantly because prisoners of war were increasingly needed as laborers, and their living conditions were improved for this purpose.

Mortality in the work education camps was consistently higher than in the civilian forced labor camps. However, it rarely reached such dramatic proportions as in the concentration camps. In the latter, mortality was consistently high throughout the second half of the war, reaching a peak from autumn

1942 to mid-1943 and then falling again from autumn 1944 until the end of the war. Even then, it remained much higher than in the civilian forced labor camps. In summary, mortality was highest in the concentration camps and lowest in the civilian forced labor camps and the prisoner-of-war camps (with the exception of the Soviet prisoners of war in 1941/42), while the work education camps represented an intermediate stage.

Before analyzing the situation in the concentration camps in detail, I briefly discuss the three most significant groups included under the two categories of slave labor: Polish and Soviet civilian forced laborers, Soviet prisoners of war, and prisoners in work education camps.⁵

Civilian Foreign Forced Laborers

The halt of the German offensive before Moscow at the end of 1941 and the beginning of 1942, and the subsequent shift to longer-term warfare constituted a key turning point in forced labor policy. At the beginning of 1942, some 2.1 million civilian foreign workers were deployed in Germany, while by the end of 1944 the figure had risen to 5.7 million. Above all, Sauckel's appointment as Plenipotentiary General for the Use of Labor in March 1942 marks the transition from a recruitment policy still largely based on advertising and voluntarism—with the exception of Poland, where considerable pressure was exerted as early as 1940—to increasingly resorting to coercion. In addition, there was also a gradual shift from agriculture to industry and construction. Of the approximately 2.1 million civilian foreign workers at the beginning of 1942, about one million were of Polish origin. About three-quarters of them worked in agriculture, where they were usually housed individually with farmers rather than in camps. In the early war years, Western European civilian workers mostly lived in private flats. In Berlin, for example, about 120,000 of 250,000 civilian foreigners were housed in private quarters at the beginning of 1943. It was not until the summer of 1943 that compulsory camps were also decreed for Western European forced workers in the cities, but this was not fully implemented.

Due to the increasing number of Soviet forced laborers, and finally due to the housing shortage in the wake of the Allied bombing, most forced laborers were housed in camps. In contrast to the concentration or work education camps, differences in the treatment of Eastern and Western forced laborers remained of central importance in the labor camps until the end of the war. While Western European workers were able to dissolve the employment relationship and even voice criticism, the Eastern European forced laborers were given identification marks and subjected to a rigid racist special law. They had very little opportunity to complain about their working and accommodation conditions.⁶

Prisoners of War Camps

The use of prisoners of war also changed as the war progressed. Polish soldiers were the first prisoners of war to arrive in the German Reich. The vast majority, however, were transferred to civilian status after a few months and used mainly in agriculture. Only a small proportion of the French prisoners of war arriving in 1940 were released to civilian status, but they too worked mainly in agriculture; as late as August 1944, 60 percent of them were still employed in the agricultural sector. The organization of the prisoner-of-war system changed with the decision taken in the autumn of 1941 to bring Soviet prisoners of war into the Reich. In the camps with Soviet prisoners of war, there was an extremely high mortality rate in the winter of 1941–42. Only in the summer of 1942 did the situation begin to improve with the increase in food rations.

The prisoners of war were now increasingly assigned to forced labor in industry, mining, and construction. Of the Soviet prisoners of war, only 24 percent were working in agriculture in August 1944, but as many as 31 percent in industry and 25 percent in mining. In total, over 4.5 million prisoners of war had been brought to the Reich for work by the end of the war. While most prisoners of war enjoyed some protection under the 1929 Geneva Agreement on the Treatment of Prisoners of War and could be visited by the Red Cross, this did not apply to Soviet prisoners of war because the Soviet Union had not acceded to the agreement and Nazi Germany refused an offer from the Soviet Union in 1941 to treat prisoners of war from both sides in accordance with the agreement. While it was possible for almost all groups of prisoners of war to switch to civilian forced labor, this hardly applied to the group of Soviet prisoners of war.⁷

Work Education Camps (Arbeitserziehungslager)

The work education camps were located between forced labor camps and concentration camps as a place of repression. The first camps of this type were established in 1940–1941. They were intended both for the punishment of foreign civilian forced laborers and for disciplining German workers. A massive expansion of the work education camps took place in 1942 with the arrival of Soviet forced laborers. After that, the proportion of German workers among the inmates continued to decrease. Of the approximately 400,000 prisoners who passed through these camps in total, about two-thirds were civilian forced laborers from Poland and the Soviet Union. The admission was mainly on the initiative of factories; responsibility for the camps lay with the Secret State Police. The great advantage for the companies was that the period of imprisonment was limited to 56 days and that they were usually assured that the forced laborers would be returned to them, whereas workers were lost to the employer after being sent to a concentration camp. In addition, the factory management hoped that the encounter with the returned inmates of

such work education camps, who were often starved and marked by beatings, would have a deterrent effect on the other forced laborers.

The main aim of the factories was to keep work performance constantly high through incarceration, to minimize absenteeism and slow work, and to nip any form of resistance in the bud. The inmates were also used for forced labor. Due to the high turnover, however, deployment in skilled industrial work was inconceivable, and particularly strenuous physical work in construction or other low-skilled work dominated. Due to the brutality and the high mortality rate, the classification of forced labor in work education camps as slave labor is obvious, but this situation was not permanent; instead, if the inmates did not die beforehand, there was an exit from this forced labor relationship after eight weeks at the latest, which is why the term slavery has little analytical use for the work education camps.⁸

THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS AND SLAVE LABOR

Entry: The (Pseudo-)Legal Basis for Admission

The National Socialist dictatorship was a state of injustice. However, especially in its early phase, the regime tried to give its rule a legal appearance, which is why even the admission to concentration camps was regulated by laws, ordinances, and decrees. The early concentration camps were under the sovereignty of the *Länder*, which means there was a large number of more or less different legal regulations on admission to a concentration camp. Basically, two procedures can be distinguished: *Schutzhaft* (protective custody) and *Vorbeugungshaft* (preventive detention) authorized the executive to commit prisoners without a court ruling, while *Sicherungsverwahrung* (security detention) was ordered by the judiciary.

The procedure most commonly used for incarceration was the *Schutzhaft*. The basis for this was the “Ordinance for the Protection of the People and the State” (“Verordnung zum Schutz von Volk und Staat”), signed by Reich President Paul Hindenburg immediately after the burning of the Reichstag on February 28, 1933. The first article suspended several basic rights in order to enable the “defense against communist violence threatening the state.” All *Schutzhaft* orders were made with reference to this article. *Schutzhaft* violated the four internationally recognized basic principles of lawful deprivation of liberty. Firstly, it was carried out without a judicial order and, secondly, without the existence of a criminal offense. Thirdly, it did not allow the person concerned any legal remedy and fourthly, the period of detention was indefinite. *Schutzhaft* was the procedure by which primarily political opponents of National Socialism were sent to concentration camps, whereby the limitation to communist opponents in article 1 was circumvented, so that social democrats, trade unionists, or liberals were also subjected to it. There was also a tendency to extend the reach of the decree beyond political opponents, so that sometimes criminals (*Berufsverbrecher*) or beggars (*Asoziale*) were also

taken into *Schutzhaft*. After the start of the war, *Schutzhaft* was also the main mechanism through which foreigners were sent to concentration camps.

As early as 1933, Heinrich Himmler and other representatives of the police also sought to use the concentration camps for general social-racist prevention. Therefore, for the two groups of “professional criminals” and “asocials,” procedures of concentration camp incarceration other than *Schutzhaft* were increasingly developed. The most important executive procedure was *Vorbeugungshaft*, which was introduced by Prussian Prime Minister Hermann Göring in a decree on 13 November 1933. People could be taken into *Vorbeugungshaft* if they had several previous convictions, but no criminal offense could be proven in a court of law at that time.

However, there were also paths that ultimately led to the concentration camp via legal proceedings. Since 1934, the courts could impose *Sicherungsverwahrung* on people with several previous convictions, which went beyond the actual prison sentence. Initially, detention took place in regular correctional facilities. However, from the autumn of 1942 onward, the judiciary transferred most persons in *Sicherungsverwahrung* to a concentration camp, and from then onward newly convicted persons were sent directly to concentration camps. In addition, there was also the possibility to take welfare recipients into *Arbeitshaft* (labor detention) in order to force them to work. In Bavaria, the Dachau concentration camp was one of the places to deter welfare recipients. In contrast to the other procedures, however, this one included a time limit, usually between three months and three years.⁹

Camp Arrival and Initiation Rites

In the concentration camp system the dehumanization of the prisoners began right from the start with their capture and transport. Upon their arrival at the concentration camp, further steps were taken in this process. Often beatings were immediately administered to make it clear who were the masters over life and death. The prisoners were stripped of their own names to deprive them of an important element of self-identification. The SS gave the concentration camp prisoners numbers and in Auschwitz prisoners were branded with them.

The prisoners had to hand in their clothes and all personal belongings. Instead, they were given a blue and white striped concentration camp uniform. Toward the end of the war, when there was a shortage of uniform material, they were often allowed to keep their clothes, but these were marked with a bright yellow cross on the back. In addition, the prisoners were shorn on arrival and, as a rule, only a few functionary prisoners were allowed to let their hair grow.

In the concentration camps, prisoners were in principle not totally cut off from their families and social environment. At least in theory, most of them were allowed to exchange letters with their families. However, the letters had to be written in German, which meant that a large proportion of prisoners required help in writing their letters. Some prisoners were also allowed to

receive parcels from their families or the Red Cross. During the war, German prisoners could even receive visitors in the camps if they had family members serving in the Wehrmacht.

In the camps, however, the SS tried with all its might to prevent the creation of new families by keeping men and women strictly segregated and by quickly killing any children born in the camps either through neglect or through the administration of direct violence by members of the SS.

PRISONER EXPERIENCES AND FORMS OF EXTRACTION OF SLAVE LABOR

The Evolution of Slave Labor in the Camps (1933–1945)

As early as 1933, the system of discipline and punishment established by Eicke at Dachau included compulsory labor for all inmates, a requirement that the SS would extend to all other concentration camps. In this regard, the literature is dominated by the idea that Eicke's use of forced labor was mostly intended to torment the inmates. It was only in 1937, when full employment had largely been achieved in the Reich, that the SS was faced with demands to use the inmates not only for developing its own camps and workshops, but also for the benefit of the state. The SS responded by collaborating with Albert Speer, who had become head of the General Construction Inspectorate for the Reich Capital on 30 January 1937, under the orders of Hitler, with sole responsibility for redesigning Berlin.

On 29 April 1938, the German Earth and Stone Works, known by its German abbreviation, DESt, was founded by Arthur Ahrens and Dr. Walter Salpeter, who both had the SS rank of *Sturmbannführer* and would together play the role of official proprietors. However, the DESt was under the de facto control of Himmler and his chief administrator Oswald Pohl. Shortly after its founding, the DESt signed a contract with the General Construction Inspectorate on 30 June 1938, in which Speer guaranteed the purchase of 120 million bricks per year for ten years, for which the SS received an advance payment of 9.5 million Reichsmarks. After this, there was much hectic activity in the SS in order to start production of the construction materials. All plans were based on the exploitation of forced inmate labor.

The new concentration camps Mauthausen, Flossenbürg, and Neuengamme were erected next to quarries and brickyards. Work there was hard and heavy. Therefore, even though inmate labor had increased in economic value with the growth of SS business enterprises after 1938, this did nothing to improve the situation of inmates—in fact, quite the opposite. The SS extended working hours, and with the outbreak of war, concentration camps saw a continual growth in mortality rates.

As 1941 drew to a close, it became clear to the German leadership that arms production would have to be organized differently if there was to be any hope of winning the war. When the German offensive failed at the gates of

Moscow in late 1941, it marked the definitive end of the Blitzkrieg strategy. As the new Minister of Armaments, Albert Speer was assigned the task of reorganization. In November 1941, the German military decided to revoke plans to release crucial workers from the army and have them return to their jobs in arms production, as the course of the war had rendered this idea obsolete; instead, even more soldiers would have to be recruited for frontline duty. This development also made it clear that the German arms industry would suffer from a serious labor shortage from then on.

To combat this shortage, Fritz Sauckel, the *Gauleiter* of Thuringia, was named general plenipotentiary for the employment of labor on March 21, 1942. Sauckel's stated goal was to recruit large numbers of foreign workers for the German arms industry, as quickly as possible. His policies proved to be extremely successful for the German side. Sauckel reported that in the first eight months of his campaign, around 2.7 million workers had been acquired for the Reich.

At the concentration camps within the German Reich itself, the use of inmate labor saw little change until March 1942. It was only when Speer and Sauckel began to achieve results in their new duties that the SS perceived a threat to their continued control of the inmate population. Consequently, Himmler quickly moved to negotiate with Speer. Himmler's offer was that companies could build manufacturing facilities inside the main concentration camps and use inmates for labor. As a result, large production plants were established in concentration camps, such as the Siemens plant in Ravensbrück.

However, industrial leaders and the German military found this arrangement unsatisfactory. They feared that the SS could gain control over the factories in the camps. Furthermore, the construction of new production plants proved burdensome. Industry would have preferred the opposite situation: instead of bringing the factory to the worker, bring the worker to the factory. In September 1942, Speer brought these proposals to Hitler, who then agreed.

Speer and Hitler's agreement laid the groundwork for building a system of subcamps, as external branches of the main concentration camps. These new subcamps would now be established directly on business premises, or in the immediate vicinity of a workplace. Until late 1942, there existed roughly 80 subcamps. Just one year later, in late 1943, the SS had set up 186 subcamps throughout the entire area controlled by the Germans. However, it was not until supplies of civilian forced laborers from the occupied territories began to dwindle that forced labor using concentration camp prisoners gained sweeping importance for wartime efforts to complete large projects. In the spring of 1944, due to the retreat of the Wehrmacht from a number of occupied territories, Sauckel had to admit that only a small fraction of the number of forced laborers originally anticipated could be supplied. From the spring of 1944, this led to a rapid increase in the number of subcamps built. In June 1944, there were 341 camps; by January 1945, the number had grown to at least 662 subcamps, despite the considerably reduced amount of territory under

German control. The rising number of subcamps was accompanied by a sharp increase in the number of inmates. The Concentration Camp Division of the Economics and Administrative Department of the SS (Amt D, WVHA) registered 110,000 prisoners in the late summer of 1942; by the summer of 1944, this number had grown to 524,826 detainees; and in January 1945, the camp population reached 714,211 prisoners, of which 202,674 were female. Following a brief registration in one of the main concentration camps, the majority of new arrivals were immediately transported to one of the many subcamps. As of late 1944, most of the prisoners—i.e., at least 60 percent, and closer to 80 percent within the Reich territory—were detained in subcamps, which were under the control of the main camps.

Since prisoner slave labor became especially important, more so in the second half of the war, the following section deals primarily with the conditions in the subcamps.¹⁰

The Terms and Conditions for the Establishment of a Subcamp

The procedure to erect a subcamp was that private companies or state enterprises submitted a request for inmate labor to the SS, and increasingly to the Ministry of Armaments as well. If this was approved, then the company had to build a camp that satisfied the security guidelines of the SS. After this was complete, the SS would then transfer inmates and a squad of guards to the camp. Supervision inside the camp was completely in the hands of the SS, and the company's own personnel were generally not allowed to visit. In contrast, the workplace featured a supervision system with two or three layers. The SS guard detail secured the workplace and prevented escape attempts. The company's civilian personnel directed and supervised the actual work. If they found that work was too slow or too careless, they could demand the inmate be punished by either an SS man or a functionary prisoner, also known as a *Kapo*. Sometimes this punishment would not be given until later, inside the camp, but often it was done immediately at the workplace. On some occasions, even civilian supervisors would commit the violence, although they were officially forbidden to do so.

For an unskilled male inmate or a female inmate, an employer had to pay four Reichsmarks per day to the SS, or in the final analysis, to the state. A skilled male inmate cost six Reichsmarks. Therefore, the cost to the employer was lower than that of a German worker or even a civilian forced laborer. However, this lower cost usually also meant much lower productivity from a camp inmate, so that it was only in some cases of good productivity that businesses could expect superior profits from inmate labor. If they had a choice, businesses generally preferred to take German workers or foreign civilian laborers. Therefore, businesses took an interest in camp labor mostly when it was uncertain if other laborers could be found for a particular project. In 1942–43, this applied in particular to any production project that was

not essential to arms production. However, after the Ministry of Armaments changed policy in 1943, requests for camp inmates were approved only for projects relating to arms production.

A Comparative Look at Slave Labor: Costs, Incentives, and Mechanization

Wolfgang Sofsky argued that the work in the concentration camps was not slave labor but terror labor. Sofsky defined this as work that is ineffective per se, does not preserve the value of labor power but wastes it: "Violence is not a means for labor, labor is a means of violence."¹¹ However, this did not apply to the work in many subcamps. Most of the work performed took place in war and armament-related missions and work was far more important in the daily operation of the subcamps than terror. Violence here was primarily involved in the organization of work. Nor is it true that the slave labor of the prisoners was always ineffective. Ulrich Herbert's and Karin Orth's assertion that the productivity of prisoners was no more than 15 percent of that of a German worker¹² can be considered refuted. Mark Spoerer has already shown that this was between 30 and 70 percent.¹³ My own research shows that the productivity was in some cases even higher. I therefore argue that the labor system in the subcamps can be much more accurately described as slave labor than as terror labor.¹⁴

Of particular importance is that the companies did not pay the concentration camp prisoners any wages, and thus there was no incentive to increase work performance. However, as in many other historical cases of slavery, a bonus system was introduced, which was supposed to be a wage-like incentive, but without making it permanent. The central difference compared to the Atlantic slave system in the United States or the Caribbean was that the concentration camp prisoners were not the property of the entrepreneurs, but prisoners of a state institution. The state lent out the prisoners for a rental fee, which meant that the logic of action and calculation for the beneficiaries of slave labor was different from that of the historical plantation economy. The slave owner of the Caribbean plantation system paid a one-time and comparatively high purchase fee for a slave, and then only the cost of reproduction. Because of the purchase price, the slave had to survive for several years in order to become profitable. Within this framework, however, there were different possibilities. The tendency on the sugar plantations in the Caribbean was maximum exploitation, which is why slaves usually died after six to ten years, and sometimes even faster; while on the tobacco, sugar, and above all cotton plantations in the South, due to a different organization of work longer life spans for slaves were common, often only slightly below the life expectancy of the free, white citizens in the United States.

In the case of the concentration camp prisoners, the main advance payment by the companies or authorities was not a purchase price, but the establishment of a camp. In some cases, this entailed greater costs, which required the continued use of prisoners to pay off. However, this cost compensation was

not linked to an individual prisoner, but to the deployment as a whole. Since dead prisoners were usually replaced by the SS, the death of a prisoner was not related to the costs of camp construction. The principle of a daily rental fee instead of a labor hourly rental fee was designed to demand a high daily output from the prisoners. The daily rental fee for a male auxiliary laborer from the concentration camp was four Reichsmarks, and the hour of labor cost 0.50 Reichsmarks for an eight-hour working day and 0.33 Reichsmarks for a twelve-hour working day. This meant that a concentration camp inmate still worked more cheaply for a twelve-hour working day than for an eight-hour day, if he only worked 70 percent of the eight-hour day. The choice of the daily rental fee method was thus an incentive from the outset to exploit the prisoners' labor as much as possible each day. From the point of view of the companies, the wear and tear of prisoners was irrelevant for their cost and profit calculations as long as they did not possess special skills that only a few other prisoners could demonstrate. Only then was the death of a prisoner a direct disadvantage. These special skills were mainly knowledge that had already been incorporated in school, training, studies, and work.

These "kill and mistreatment" obstacles were much more common in production work than in construction work. In most construction work, especially in the tank trenching, rubble removal, and underground relocation commands, there were hardly any skilled jobs for prisoners. For most of the work, only physical strength was necessary; if this dwindled, the exchange of prisoners was advantageous because the new prisoners could be used immediately in the same position and hardly needed to be trained. In the production of commandos, however, it was more likely that the prisoners would perform better after a training period because the work required specialized knowledge and practice. The number of qualified skilled workers and technicians among the concentration camp prisoners was probably small overall. It is estimated that of the 120,000 to 150,000 concentration camp prisoners who were employed in the armaments industry in 1944, probably 5 percent, but at most 10 percent, were skilled workers.¹⁵

The proportion of skilled workers among the dead in the subcamps was by no means small, which clearly shows that skilled worker status alone did not protect against death within the concentration camp system. Assignment to a subcamp in which production required a high technical level was in fact not exclusively to the advantage of the prisoners. In tendency, a higher technical level did not mean a higher qualification expectation for all workers, but a sharper differentiation between jobs. Highly skilled knowledge undoubtedly brought prisoners a considerable increase in their own value to the entrepreneur and incentives for better work and treatment. However, even in production there were many simple jobs that required lower skills and above all the use of physical strength. In those cases, the value of the prisoner to the entrepreneur remained similarly low as it was for the unskilled prisoner in construction work. The central advantage of employment in production was then reduced to the roof over one's head and the partially heated rooms. But

for many production prisoners this was also only partly the case. For example, much of the work in the shipyards took place outdoors.

It should be emphasized that the under-technification of the prisoners' work that can be seen in some places was not solely due to the malice of companies or the SS or to a targeted "extermination through labor," but was rooted in the nature of slave labor. Since the entrepreneur who exploited the labor power for his own purposes was not vulnerable to the prisoners because of the guards, his property was the central target of attack for the slave laborers. For this reason, in the case of slave labor, companies tried, as far as this was possible and justifiable in the labor process, to use equipment that was particularly difficult to destroy. However, it is misleading to speak of a general under-technification of slave labor in the subcamps. Some of the jobs were in the highly mechanized armament production. Many of the construction sites where concentration camp prisoners worked were also anything but under-engineered. When Sofsky claims, for example, that the construction work could have been carried out more quickly by excavators than prisoners, etc., this is true of the construction work in the main camps, some of which was nonsensical and some of which was under-engineered because the SS wanted to save money.

For the subcamps in large construction projects, this is wrong. According to an engineer, the gigantic construction site at the Valentin submarine bunker was one of the most technically equipped construction sites of the time. The time pressure in the construction of most armament projects was so immense in the subcamps that prisoners were not harassed with tasks that could be done much faster elsewhere, but were assigned work which German construction workers had done before the war.

Forms of Violence

As a rule, the slave labor of concentration camp prisoners was at the center of life in the satellite camps. Since they received no wages for their work, they usually had no interest in increasing their workload. Rather, it was in the prisoners' interest to disrupt production—as far as possible—and thus harm the employers who exploited them. In addition, due to insufficient supplies, they were dependent on working as slowly as possible in order to have any chance of survival. Prisoners were often interested in the work process at the beginning of slave labor, because it could sometimes give them back a sense of dignity through the use of their own skills. This feeling quickly disappeared as the struggle for survival set in. The increasing disinterest of the prisoners in the production process could not be changed by the bonuses introduced in 1943 to reward work performance. Thus, the beneficiaries of slave labor had only the means of threatening and using violence if they wanted to increase the prisoners' labor productivity.

However, since there no longer were enough SS men to guard the prisoners, and extensive supervision by the companies would have been too

expensive, functionary prisoners were tasked with driving the other prisoners to work. The prisoner commandos used in production tended to develop a comparatively regulated system of punishment for working too slowly in the eyes of the supervisors, which was halfway predictable for the prisoners. Either they were beaten directly on the work site with fists and tools by *Kapos* and civilian foremen, or they were punished in the camp following a report by civilian foremen. The level of violence here was comparatively constant, and excessive beating of prisoners that resulted in admission to the infirmary was rather the exception. Even more frightening for the prisoners in the production commandos, and in some cases also in the construction commandos, was the threat that sabotage would be punished by death. There is evidence in several cases that prisoners were constantly threatened by company employees that they would be reported for sabotage.

In the case of slave labor in most construction commandos, the violent situation was usually more explosive. Since the prisoners here often had to do heavy carrying work, which they were hardly capable of doing due to their physical constitution, work performance was often extracted from prisoners by force. It was not uncommon for the *Kapos* to accompany the prisoners while they carried heavy loads and beat them indiscriminately. The situation had a high potential for escalation: if a prisoner fell out of line with the porters, he was often kicked and not infrequently beaten to death. The most common official punishment in the concentration camp was public flogging with the whip. The SS resorted to the central instrument of beatings that reflected the difference between freemen and slaves since ancient times.

If the prisoner was completely absent for a fortnight after the regular punishment and was probably able to work for another two weeks at half strength, this can hardly have been in the interest of the exploiters of slave labor. However, it should also be noted that the SS did not mistreat dozens of prisoners in this way every day in the majority of the subcamps and that, due to the form of slave labor, the prisoners could also only be driven to work under the threat and exemplary enforcement of violence. Exemplary punishment was therefore only irrational to a limited extent; it was in fact necessary for the maintenance of the social system of slave labor.¹⁶

The Inmate Society

Until 1940–41, concentration camps inside the German Reich had an inmate population that was mostly German. This changed very quickly, so that by the end of the war, Germans made up less than one quarter of the population in every major camp. At the end of the war, the two largest nationalities at concentration camps within the German Reich were the Soviets and the Poles. The third-largest nationality was often the French. The Jewish populations of Auschwitz and Majdanek began to quickly rise in 1942, until they eventually became the largest inmate group at these camps. It was not until the summer of 1944 that camps within the German Reich began receiving

Jewish inmates, but then in great numbers, especially females. By early 1945, nearly 30 percent of the inmates were female, and the majority of them were classified as Jewish. From the SS viewpoint, there was a racial hierarchy among inmates, with Eastern Europeans, especially Jews, at the lowest end.

Since the beginning of the war the situation had become so bad that for most inmates, food rations were insufficient for continued survival. Even if one could avoid the violence of the guards, simple existence still meant a constant struggle between life and death. Therefore, the life of most inmates was mainly focused on just surviving to the next day. This involved paying close attention to food distribution and trying to get extra food during the course of the day.

In terms of work, the goal was to avoid wasting any physical energy. Most inmates considered the Nazi system or the German people to be the enemy, and thus had no interest in increasing productivity—on the contrary, they would rather sabotage German war production. This was very risky because of the threat of capital punishment. Inmate rebellions were nearly out of the question, given the overwhelming firepower and violent tendencies of the guards. Only Auschwitz experienced an inmate rebellion, but this was at the camp's extermination section, in the face of certain death. There were also isolated incidents of smaller collective protests. Resistance by male inmates was handled with particular brutality.

The SS was always concerned about potential rebellions among male inmates, so attempts were made to play different nationalities off against each other, for example by assigning *Kapo* positions to a particular nationality. Extra care was taken to avoid establishing subcamps with homogenous nationalities, so the SS tried to achieve maximum possible diversity when assembling work units. According to eyewitness reports from many different camps, the SS often succeeded in creating animosity between groups of inmates. This was further aggravated by the shortage of supplies, which made the survival of one group dependent on competing with other groups for food.¹⁷

The SS systematically tried to undermine the development of solidarity among the prisoners. This was by no means universally successful, but the harsh conditions on the verge of subsistence severely limited the possibilities for solidarity. In the words of the former Auschwitz prisoner and later sociologist Anna Pawelczynska: "The slave deprived of all rights can afford neither aristocratic manners nor the customs and traditions cultivated in other social classes."¹⁸

The Perpetrators

While some of the early camps of 1933 also had guards from the SA and the Gestapo, it was not long before the SS assumed exclusive responsibility for guarding concentration camps. Under the supervision of Theodor Eicke, SS camp personnel were taught that inmates were political enemies and should be persecuted as such. It was only in 1942 that the directives of the SS leadership began to reflect a greater emphasis on exploiting labor. From then

on, everyday life in the camp was to become more efficient by reducing unnecessary harshness and exploiting inmate labor to the maximum possible extent.

The constant rise in camp populations led to an increased demand for guard personnel. In the early phase of the war, the SS was able to meet this demand by recruiting ethnic Germans from outside the Reich itself. However, by 1944 there was a major shortage of suitable personnel, made worse when some of the more experienced guard squads were commandeered for frontline warfare. Since inmate labor was also used for important military production, the SS finally convinced the military to help with its staffing shortage. The German military agreed to supplement the camp guards with soldiers who could no longer serve on the frontline. By the end of the war, over half of the camp guards were relocated soldiers. In addition, when inmates began working on municipal projects in the autumn of 1944, guard duty was also covered by government workers. For subcamps with female inmates, the SS either recruited female overseers from the employment office or used the company's own female employees, putting them on guard duty after a quick training session.

This meant that guards who supervised inmate labor in 1944–45 were quite different from those who came before. During the early phases of the war, camp guards were a relatively homogenous group with years of ideological training; in contrast, later guards were much more diverse. At many subcamps, less than 10 percent of the guards were experienced SS men, and in many cases, there were only one or two of them. Most of the new guards may have exercised violence during their military days on the frontline, but only a few were experienced in harassing and terrorizing the unarmed. This is why many inmates later reported that when the new guards arrived in the camps, there was often an initial reduction in physical violence, although there were also soldiers who quickly adopted the brutal practices of the SS.

Toward the war's end, conditions in the concentration camps had become much worse because of supply shortages, overcrowding, hard labor, and cold weather, which meant that in most cases, direct acts of violence were no longer the main cause of death. In order to counteract the high inmate mortality rates, active efforts would have been necessary, and not just the cessation of violence that was seen among at least some ex-soldiers, and even among certain SS men. However, hardly any soldiers were prepared to take active measures. Instead, in the few available reports describing the behavior of individual soldiers toward inmates, their attitudes ranged from widespread indifference to hatred and contempt. Therefore, the deployment of soldiers in the camps generally improved little for the inmates; instead, as the overall situation became worse, so did the situation inside the camps.¹⁹

EXIT

According to Nikolaus Wachsmann, between 150,000 and 200,000 people were subjected to temporary detention without trial in 1933. By 1935, there were only five concentration camps left, with around 4000 inmates. While release was the norm in the concentration camps until 1935, it happened only rarely thereafter. In Mauthausen, slightly more than 3500 male and just over 700 female prisoners were released between 1938 and 1945, most of them in the last two years of the war through initiatives of the Red Cross. In total, the SS thus released about 2 percent of the approximately 190,000 prisoners who passed through the Mauthausen concentration camp, while about 90,000 did not live to see the end of the war. Release from the concentration camp, like the *Schutzhaft*, which did not require justification, was an expression of the unrestricted power of the SS and Gestapo. Those released continued to be monitored by the Gestapo and subordinate regional and local police units. Some releases from the concentration camps only led to a new imprisonment or that the released were sent to the punishment units of the Wehrmacht, in which many former prisoners died in frontline service.²⁰ Especially compared to the Soviet Gulag system, escaping from a Nazi concentration camp was extremely difficult. Accordingly, escapes played an even smaller role in terms of numbers than releases.

NOTES

1. Speech by Heinrich Himmler on the occasion of the SS Group Leader meeting in Posen, 4 October 1943, Nuremberg Document 1919-PS, in *International Military Tribunal*, vol. XXIX (Nuremberg: 1948), 123.
2. Marcel van der Linden, "Dissecting Coerced Labor," in *On Coerced Labor: Work and Compulsion after Chattel Slavery*, eds. Marcel van der Linden and Magaly Rodríguez García (Leiden: Brill, 2016), 293–322.
3. Albert O. Hirschman, *Exit, Voice, and Loyalty: Responses to Decline in Firms, Organizations, and States* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970).
4. Mark Spoerer and Jochen Fleischhacker, "Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33, no. 2 (2002): 169–204.
5. Mark Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit unter dem Hakenkreuz: Ausländische Zivilarbeiter, Kriegsgefangene und Häftlinge im Deutschen Reich und im besetzten Europa, 1939–1945* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2001), 227–231.
6. Ulrich Herbert, *Hitler's Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997); Alexander von Plato, Almut Leh, and Christoh Thonfeld, eds., *Hitler's Slaves: Life Stories of Forced Labourers in Nazi-Occupied Europe* (Oxford: Berghahn, 2010); Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*.
7. Christian Streit, *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die Sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945* (Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1991); Reinhard Otto, Rolf Keller, and Jens Nagel, "Sowjetische Kriegsgefangene in deutschem Gewahrsam 1941–1945: Zahlen und Dimensionen," *Vierteljahrshefte für Zeitgeschichte* 56, no. 4 (2008): 557–602.

8. Gabriele Lotfi, *KZ der Gestapo. Arbeitserziehungslager im Dritten Reich* (Stuttgart: DVA, 2000).
9. Julia Hörath, “Asoziale” und “Berufsverbrecher” in den Konzentrationslagern 1933 bis 1938 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017), 89–142. On *Sicherungsverwahrung*, see also Nikolaus Wachsmann, “‘Annihilation through labor’: the killing of state prisoners in the Third Reich,” *Journal of Modern History* 71, no. 3 (1999): 624–659.
10. Marc Buggeln, *Slave Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 10–65; Nikolaus Wachsmann, *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016), 392–496.
11. Wolfgang Sofsky, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 172.
12. Karin Orth, *Das System der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Eine politische Organisationsgeschichte* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999), 241.
13. Spoerer, *Zwangsarbeit*, 186.
14. Buggeln, *Slave Labor*, 26, 125–127, 132–135.
15. Buggeln, *Slave Labor*, 92f.
16. Buggeln, *Slave Labor*, 195–212.
17. Buggeln, *Slave Labor*, 140–191; Wachsmann, *KL*, 497–541.
18. Anna Pawelczynska, *Werte gegen Gewalt: Betrachtungen einer Soziologin über Auschwitz* (Oświęcim: Verlag Des Staatlichen Museums Auschwitz-Birkenau, 2001), 233.
19. Buggeln, *Slave Labor*, 213–250; Wachsmann, *KL*, 100–117; Karin Orth, *Die Konzentrationslager-SS: Sozialstrukturelle Analysen und biographische Studien* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2000); Stefan Hördler, *Ordnung und Inferno: Das KZ-System im letzten Kriegsjahr* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015).
20. Wachsmann, *KL*, 23–78; Rainer Müller, “Entlassungen aus den Konzentrationslagern am Beispiel des KL Mauthausen,” BA thesis, University of Vienna, 2014.

FURTHER READINGS

- Buggeln, Marc. “Were Concentration Camp Prisoners Slaves? Possibilities and Limits of Comparisons and Global-Historic Approaches,” *International Review of Social History* 53, no. 1 (2008): 101–129.
- Buggeln, Marc. *Slave Labor in Nazi Concentration Camps*. Translated by Paul Cohen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.
- Hörath, Ulrich. *Hitler’s Foreign Workers: Enforced Foreign Labor in Germany under the Third Reich*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.
- Hördler, Stefan. *Ordnung und Inferno: Das KZ-System im letzten Kriegsjahr*. Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015.
- Hörath, Julia. “Asoziale” und “Berufsverbrecher” in den Konzentrationslagern 1933 bis 1938. Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2017.
- Lotfi, Gabriele. *KZ der Gestapo: Arbeitserziehungslager im Dritten Reich*. Stuttgart: DVA, 2000.
- Orth, Karin. *Das System der nationalsozialistischen Konzentrationslager: Eine politische Organisationsgeschichte*. Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 1999.

- Plato, Alexander von, Almut Leh, and Christoph Thonfeld, eds. *Hitler's Slaves: Life Stories of Forced Laborers in Nazi-Occupied Europe*. Oxford: Berghahn, 2010.
- Sofsky, Wolfgang. *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997.
- Spoerer, Mark, and Jochen Fleischhacker. "Forced Laborers in Nazi Germany: Categories, Numbers, and Survivors," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* 33, no. 2 (2002): 169–204.
- Streit, Christian. *Keine Kameraden: Die Wehrmacht und die sowjetischen Kriegsgefangenen, 1941–1945*. Bonn: J.H.W. Dietz, 1991.
- Wachsmann, Nikolaus. *KL: A History of the Nazi Concentration Camps*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2016.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





State-Introduced Slavery in Soviet Forced Labor Camps

Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal^{id}

INTRODUCTION

In October 1917, a political group came to power in Russia that declared productive labor *the* basic element of society. The first constitution of 1918 proclaimed work to be the duty of all citizens under the slogan “He shall not eat who does not work.”¹ At the same time, the government set itself the ambitious goal of transforming the hitherto peasant country into the world’s first socialist state. Under the guise of short-term efforts to achieve this goal and the “re-education” of people who were “not accustomed to work,” various forms of coerced labor were already introduced shortly after the Revolution, and further developed under Stalin. The transitions between the forced labor of prisoners and “free” labor became increasingly fluid: laws and government measures limited “free labor,” such as by calling on the population to perform shock labor and by the administrative persecution of job changes²; “special resettlers” (*spetspereselentsy*) of the 1930s as well as people in the *trudarmia*, the labor columns, were deported to remote areas and subject to imposed labor without being incarcerated or separated from their families; and a significant number of convicts (15–50 percent) performed forced labor without deprivation of freedom. But the most severe form of forced labor existed in the camps and colonies of the Main Administration of the Camps (*Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei*) that existed from 1930 until 1959.³

F. Fischer von Weikersthal (✉)
University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany
e-mail: felicitas.fischer.von.weikersthal@zegk.uni-heidelberg.de

The notorious camps of Stalinist times, which became known worldwide under the acronym of its Main Administration, the GULAG, are alongside the Nazi concentration camps prototypical of the ruthless economic exploitation of prisoners in modern times. Originating in the diverse camps of the 1920s, the Gulag experienced its ascent during the years of Stalin's forced industrialization. By government decree, the camp system of the secret police (OGPU) was expanded in 1929 in order to colonize scarcely populated regions of the Soviet Union, to exploit its resources and to isolate sections of society considered dangerous or obstructive to the construction of socialism. In its heydays the Main Administration managed over 50 camp complexes, each of them consisting of a varying number of sub-camps and subdivisions. Quite to the contrary than initially proclaimed, only the biggest camp complexes were situated in the Far East while many smaller camps lay in more populated western parts of the Soviet Union. A tight network of larger and smaller camps stretched across the entire country. In almost twenty years of its existence, up to approximately 18–20 million people in total served a term in the camps of the Gulag. The apogee of the camps with around 2–3 million prisoners simultaneously was experienced in the last years of Stalin's life.⁴

By exploiting the prisoners, the camps took part in the development of infrastructure, in timber and agriculture, in the exploitation of raw material deposits, in industries important to the war economy, and, in the case of some specialists, also in research. In particular, the use of prisoners in the timber industry triggered the first contemporary discussions in the West about the nature of this form of prisoners' work. Repeatedly, Western countries complained about "forced labor" in Soviet Russia, especially in connection with the 1926 League of Nations Geneva Convention on Slavery and the 1930 International Labor Organization Convention Against Forced Labor. The Cold War gave yet another kick-off for attacking the Soviet Union on slavery—and this with extremely exaggerated figures, as we now know. In 1949, delegates to the United Nations Economic and Social Council criticized the Soviet Union for exploiting in its camp and colonies up to 14 million people as "slaves." Two years earlier, the Russian Menshevik emigrants David Dallin and Boris Nikolaevsky had published a book entitled *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia*, in which they used the terms forced labor and slavery interchangeably. They clearly classified Gulag prisoners as slaves arguing that they were "torn out of life and society, deprived of everything including hope, and nothing is left to them but their chains..."⁵

If we leave the anti-communist rhetoric of the Cold War behind, what does—or does not—qualify the system of the Gulag as a form of slavery? Poorly equipped and fed, the majority of those imprisoned in the Gulag were forced to perform unskilled, emaciating labor. The product of their labor was claimed by the Main Administration of the Camps or by economic enterprises that "rented" the prisoners. Gulag inmates were deprived of their right of freedom and could exert no or only limited influence on working conditions, the length of the workday, accommodation, or mobility. Most of the time

Gulag prisoners received neither direct nor indirect wages. Even in the understanding of the sources, these people were degraded to labor force (*rabochnaia sila, r/s*), to human raw material (*chelovecheskoe syr'ie*) that could be moved at will from job to job and across the Soviet Union. The Main Administration of the Camps, thus, exercised ownership toward the prisoners. Moreover, for the time of their imprisonment many Gulag prisoners, depending on what they were convicted of, lost any political rights, many lost ties to their families. Moreover, imprisonment in the camps represented a clear break in their life history. They were, thus, excluded from society. Consequently, some characteristics can be found that are attributed to slavery in all disciplines that try to determine the nature of slavery.⁶

Interestingly, however, today's international scholars on the history of the Gulag use the terms slavery or slaves rather reservedly.⁷ Golfo Alexopoulos is one of the few who explicitly described the Gulag as a "system of slavery" and called for a comparative study of slavery and Gulag forced labor. She argues that "as in the case of global slavery, the Gulag found legitimacy in an elaborate narrative of difference that involved the presumption of dangerousness and guilt."⁸ Camp inmates were perceived as commodities, they were exploited for their labor.⁹ Marc Buggeln, who is more oriented toward existing definitions of slavery than Alexopoulos, argued for the inclusion of Nazi and Gulag camps in research on slavery, too, emphasizing primarily the social exclusion and the degradation of the prisoners.¹⁰ However, in the case of the Gulag, social exclusion was never absolute, nor was the degradation of prisoners as pronounced as in Nazi camps. Often enough prisoners worked side by side with free laborers, and the social dividing line between "slaves" and "slaveholders" was permeable in both directions. In some cases, Gulag imprisonment was even not the lowest hierarchical level.¹¹ What also complicates matters is the fact that the Gulag was an integral part of the Soviet penal system and Soviet society. Social exclusion, the loss of freedom and self-determination can consequently also be understood as part of the penalty which we find in other penal contexts, too. Moreover, different to other forms of slavery, Gulag "slaves" were not seen as a valuable investment and missed any protection of their labor force.¹² The biggest difference, however, may lie in the question of entry and exit. Both were at least formally determined by more or—often—less legally secured judgments. The status of being a "slave" in the context of the Gulag was temporary and determined theoretically by the length of a fixed period of detention. In principle, each Gulag inmate could hope for an exit at some point. This limits both the transferability of the concept of slavery and of the typology developed by Marcel van Linden—in which he calls for a dissection of coerced labor by examining the entry, extraction of labor, and exits from such arrangements—onto Gulag studies. In the case of van der Linden's typology, at least the question of its extension must be raised. In order to do this, it is first necessary to explain how the Gulag came into being and how it fits into Soviet contexts of labor and the penal system.

THE GULAG AND (COERCED) LABOR IN THE SOVIET UNION

The origins of the Gulag go far back into the first years of Soviet rule. On the one hand, the Gulag is rooted in the Bolshevik terror against all actual and potential enemies, which resulted, among other things, in the establishment of concentration and special camps of the political police (the Tcheka, in 1924 renamed into OGPU). On the other hand, the Gulag is grounded in the efforts to reform the penal system according to the differentiation and correction of prisoners combined with the idea to abolish “bourgeois” prisons. The reformers, who were embedded in the penitentiary discourses of the modernizing states of their time, called for new forms of places of detention to serve primarily the correction of the detainees, but also to become independent of state subsidies. Inmate labor—and especially “socially important” labor—should serve both goals: the betterment of the prisoners and the self-sufficiency of the places of detainment. Moreover, the Soviet Constitution had declared that only those who performed productive labor should have the right to participate in the Soviet state and would receive an adequate basic living, an attitude that was to become fundamental to the forced labor system of the camps.¹³

During the 1920s, several institutions experimented in the spirit of the reformers, but in the end the OGPU most convincingly argued to have achieved the best realization of the new penitentiary system in its Camp for Special Purposes on the Solovki islands in the White Sea, due to its successful economic integration of the prisoners in logging, fishing, and construction but also due to an alleged successful “re-education” of its camp inmates. In 1929, the Soviet government assigned the OGPU to establish new camps on the model of its Solovetsky camps. The expansion and development of the camps coincided with the forced collectivization of the country and a rapid industrialization. To conclude from this that the Gulag was a natural continuation of the camps of the 1920s, or that the government aimed from 1929 onward to use the camps as a reservoir of an army of cheap, disposable labor slaves for its economic goals seems premature, however. Even in the 1930s, the camps were only one form of penal system and continued to exist in parallel with more lenient alternative forms of punishment. Moreover, internal documents show that even in 1930 the camps were still seen as a provisional and temporary measure, and that in many areas the government preferred free labor and mechanization over prisoners’ labor. An economic priority in the expansion of the camp system also seems questionable in view of the skyrocketing prisoner numbers. The camp population grew from 19,876 in April 1929 to 170,000 in August 1930; between 1930 and 1933 the numbers almost doubled. Such an unexpected rapid growth not only challenged the camp administrations to accommodate the prisoners but also to organize work for them all. Political, penal, and economic interests in the formation and expansion of the camp system were hence intertwined and often competed with each other.¹⁴

If in the beginning the colonization of remote regions was formulated as a reason for the expansion of the camp system, the economic focus of the camps soon shifted to large-scale infrastructural construction projects. Camp inmates worked on the construction of canals, hydroelectric power plants, railroad tracks, and others. Individual camps were devoted to agriculture, while the Main Administration also provided contract laborers for non-Gulag enterprises. Over the years, various restructurings of the Main Administration and of the individual camps took place, all designed to increase productivity. These reorganizations, especially those under Lavrentii Beria in 1939, transformed the Gulag step after step into a giant economic enterprise under the aegis of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs, the NKVD, which in 1946 was converted into the Ministry for the Interior, the MVD.

These restructurings, the vast geographical spread of the camps as well as the multitude of different fields of activity already indicate that we are dealing with a very diverse, constantly evolving system, which hardly allows accurate statements for all camps and all times. Moreover, although the Corrective-Labor Code of 1924 and its modification of 1933 as well as several regulations on the camps issued either by the government or the Main Administration determined the basic features of camp life, of prisoners' work, their food rations and housing, the actual circumstances on the ground depended on a number of other factors: the character of the camp commanders, their willingness to follow instructions, the type of work performed, the composition of the prisoners' society and especially the ratio of hard-core criminals, the geographical location of the camp, climatic conditions, and more. Individual experiences could vary greatly even within one camp complex.¹⁵ Abuse of power and violence on spot, however, should in no way absolve the central authorities of their complicity in disastrous living and working conditions. A general disregard for human life was a constant feature of the Gulag, and even economic considerations led only to limited long-term improvements for the camp inmates.

What most of the projects and work assignments had in common was that they were carried out with extremely little investment and material input, which brings us to the question of the economic benefit that forced prison labor ultimately possessed for the state. Overall, it is difficult to evaluate the economic efforts of the camps and their contribution to the Soviet economy. In terms of the share in the total Soviet labor force, the camps played a negligible role (approximately 3 percent in 1940, including inmates of colonies and special settlers) and their share in the GDP was even less. The White Sea Canal is often used as an example to underscore the absolute nonsense of Gulag construction projects. Certainly, the canal was completed in the prescribed time, but in the end, it was not deep enough to really fulfill its original purpose. With the quite successful mining of raw materials and probably also with some construction work, however, the Gulag did play an important part in some sectors of the Soviet economy. And if we look at Vorkuta and Magadan, for example, the camps took their share in the development

of sparsely populated regions. Ultimately, some projects would probably never have been started without the reservoir of ostensibly cheap labor.¹⁶ This reservoir was constantly replenished with ever new and growing contingents of prisoners.

ENTRY INTO THE GULAG

There existed two ways to enter the Gulag system: a court decision or an administrative order. In 1935, for example, about half of the Gulag prisoners entered the camps through regular judicial proceedings; for the other half, the security organs and their special courts or rather special commissions had ordered camp detention. Theoretically, only those who had been sentenced to at least three years of imprisonment were to be sent to the camps. In reality, we find quite a number of prisoners who served a sentence less than three years. The majority, however, was sentenced either to 10 years of forced labor in the camps (30 percent in 1939), 5 years (22 percent), or 3 years (19 percent). These figures alone show that the Gulag administration did not operate with a fixed labor force that remained constant over the years. Instead, it had a steadily growing labor force, but one that was subject to large fluctuations.

The vast majority of Gulag prisoners were male (80–90 percent) and between 18 and 40 years old, i.e. at the prime working age.¹⁷ The overwhelming majority had a rural background, one-fifth were workers. As far as the ethnicity of the camp inmates is concerned, the composition of the camps' population most of the time reflected the one of the Soviet Union, the largest ethnic groups being Russians (around 60 percent), Ukrainians (approximately 14 percent), and Belarusians (around 3 percent). It was not until the outbreak of the war that the proportion of ethnic minorities living in border regions and belonging to nationalities the Soviet Union was in war with grew disproportionately due to political fears of a fifth column. After the war, this shift continued for a couple of years due to the imprisonment of alleged or real "collaborators" from the occupied territories. Nevertheless, all in all, Soviet forced labor was characterized by the fact that it did not subjugate a foreign nationality or an ethnic or religious minority perceived as alien, but could affect anyone of its populace.

At least two-thirds of all Gulag inmates had been sentenced due to criminal offenses like theft, murder, "hooliganism," or banditry or due to malpractices. However, it should be noted in this context that in the Soviet Union even minor violations of labor or social discipline were criminalized. Hiding a chicken from the requisition troops to ensure one's own survival, for example, or repeatedly being late for work was considered sabotage and state crimes. Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that, contrary to long-held assumptions, political prisoners, that is those arrested for so-called "counterrevolutionary" crimes, made up only one-third or even less of all Gulag inmates. "Counterrevolution" was punished by the notorious paragraph 58 of the Criminal Code, whose subparagraphs on terror, espionage, diversion, etc., were extremely

imprecisely formulated and even prosecuted unreported knowledge of such an offense.¹⁸

The criminalization of the smallest infractions of order and the broad interpretability of some paragraphs of the Criminal Code resulted in the fact that every Soviet citizen could potentially become a prisoner in the Gulag system. Even though the majority of the Gulag inmates were of working age, there could be found also non-employable groups of persons among them. During the Great Terror in 1938/39 even weak and sick, fully and partially disabled people came into the camps, against the original regulation that only persons capable of work should be transferred from the prisons to the Gulag. This and the often very rapid increase in the prisoner contingents confronted the camp administrations with huge problems both in terms of accommodation, equipment, and food and in terms of productivity and labor deployment. To increase productivity, the Main Administration and local camp officials resorted to a bouquet of measures on all three levels designed by Marcel van der Linden—compensation, coercion, and commitment.

LIFE AND WORK IN THE GULAG

As in free Soviet society, work formed the bedrock of camp life. In principle, every prisoner had to work. Gulag administration sorted its prisoners into three, later four categories of work capacity. Category 1 included all those who were capable of heavy physical work, while category 2 included those who had minor physical deficits and who should be used for medium-heavy work. The third category included those who could perform only light physical work due to physical defects and illnesses. Category 4 was the category for the disabled and the invalids. The categorization was done by medical examination, but there were also specifications that said what percentage of the prisoners had to be in which category. Single camps and camp units would be sharply criticized from Moscow, for example, when the proportion of prisoners in category 4 rose to 20 percent during the war years.

There existed some gradations between the individual camps, which can be attributed on the one hand to the system of punitive differentiation, and on the other hand to economic considerations. Camps with economic priority, such as the camp complex in Norilsk, where the important raw materials nickel, cobalt, and copper were mined, received only those prisoners who were of good physical constitution. Agricultural camps, on the other hand, stayed behind with the old and sick and with invalids. At the same time, camps that required hard physical labor represented one of the harshest forms within the camp system with its graduated detention regimes, except for the punishment camps and punishment isolators. Accordingly, living conditions were particularly harsh for those assigned to hard physical work.

Insufficiently clothed, inadequately equipped, and malnourished, the prisoners performing hard physical work came closest to what we associate with slave laborers. During long working days they fulfilled unskilled work. In

theory, decrees limited daily working hours to 8 to 9 hours and allowed prisoners one day off per week. Recollections of former Gulag inmates¹⁹ as well as official data indicate, though, that actual working hours always exceeded Moscow's specifications. Regularly the prisoners were neither granted the work-free days to which they were entitled, nor did work stop on excessively cold days, as was actually prescribed. At the same time, however, prisoners who were either assigned according to their vocational training or worked in the administration or in the camps' self-sufficiency facilities were subject to less harsh working and often also less harsh living conditions. Consequently, depending on the sector of work, large differences in the status of the prisoners can be observed.

Most commonly prisoners lived in guarded camp zones (in Russian: *zona*). Surrounded by barbed wire or wooden fences, the *zona* included sleeping barracks or dugouts, a kitchen and canteen, sanitary facilities, punitive isolation cells, and in larger camp units also infirmary barracks, a club or theater, and a banya. Within the *zona* the prisoners could move relatively freely in their leisure time and could engage in sports, in cultural activities, or in vocational training programs—as long as the offers existed and as long as the prisoners were not too exhausted after a long day's work. The wooden barracks were equipped with wooden bunk beds, an oven, a few tables, and possibly a few cupboards. These mass shelters prevented any privacy, often did not provide sufficient protection against the extreme weather conditions, and were infested with bugs and lice. Occasionally, however, prisoners lived outside the camp zone, either in rented rooms or in huts or tents that had been set up at short notice for a specific work assignment. These prisoners often received a so-called "dry ration" and cooked for themselves. Especially if they worked far away from the next camp zone, they could live rather free and untouched. In addition, there was the phenomenon of de-convoyed prisoners (a minimum of 10 percent), who lived inside the camp zone, but were able to move freely outside of it. Camp society was, thus, far more complex, than we might suspect.

The wide-ranging use of the prisoners' labor even in administration and the guards is above all related to a lack of cadres and to the fact that the camps ideally should become independent of state subsidies—a goal that was never achieved. Even those responsible for the system were clearly aware that unfree labor was much less productive than free labor. Questions of increasing productivity were therefore frequently discussed. At different times various measures were taken to increase the productivity of the prisoners. Some of these measures were coercive and based on the threat of corporal punishment or the deprivation of food, others enticed with perks or rewards—just like outside the camp zone.²⁰

The slightest work incentives were generated by recognition and pride. The early 1930s in particular were marked by campaigns to promote an enthusiasm for work among Gulag inmates by presenting the projects as relevant to the construction of socialism. In official propaganda, for example, *kanaloarmeitsy*, that is "soldiers of the canal," built the waterway connecting the Baltic with

the White Sea. These forced laborers fulfilled a duty which was described as similarly important as the service in the Red Army.²¹ Similarly, the Second World War triggered solidarity with the system and a certain enthusiasm for work.²² In the early 1930s, camp units called each other to a socialist competition. Whole departments received awards from the camp management if they showed high working productivity whereby quantity rather than quality counted. Similar prominence was given to well-performing prisoners, who were celebrated as shock workers and *stakhanovtsy* in the pages of camp newspapers, on wall newspapers, and posters and who received honorary certificates (*pochetnye gramoty*).

Even if some of the Gulag inmates might have honored such a public praise or were caught up in the enthusiasm for the construction project or the social relevance of a particular task, considerably more attractive were material awards and monetary bonuses and, thus, material compensation. For a permanent over-fulfillment of the work quota shock workers and *stakhanovtsy* were supposed to get an improved equipment, better living conditions, and above all an increased food ration and a “necessarily saturating” breakfast. Prisoners with a good working performance could be transferred to lighter camp regimes or received permission for additional visiting days or packages from home or passports for a free movement in and out of the camp zone. To relate compensation solely to a direct or indirect wage system, as Marcel van der Linden does, thus falls obviously short in the context of the Gulag.

The link between labor productivity and food ration, the so-called *kotlovka*, did not only account for compensation but implied a coercive aspect, too: in accordance with the first Soviet constitution, a full ration was received only for those who fulfilled the quota. Low productivity led to a significant cut in the food supply: Instead of 800 g of bread per day, a poor worker received only 500 g or even only 200 g. And the bread was the basic food in the camps. Thus, apart from the camp regulations, *kotlovka*, that is the deprivation of food as a punishment for low productivity, was probably the main incentive for camp prisoners to submit to forced labor. Since the work quota was often overestimated and since the full ration did not provide the camp inmates with the necessary calories a vicious circle began, especially for prisoners who were not used to physical labor and who were emaciated after months in prison. Working ability and thus also the productivity of many prisoners decreased sufficiently already in the first months of their term. This is evident not only by relatively high death rates but also by uncountable cases of scurvy, pellagra, diarrhea, or tuberculosis—diseases, all of which indicate substantial malnutrition. Although time and again even the Main Administration explained the prisoners’ low productivity as well as high rates of deaths and invalids with the inadequate nutritional situation, nothing changed in the long run.²³

In addition to the deprivation of food, “absentees, those refusing to work, and wreckers” had to fear a whole range of punishments. They could lose the right to correspond with their families, some were beaten, others were sent to

camp units and work assignments with even harsher working and living conditions, to detention cells or punishment isolation. In the early 1930s, it was common practice to leave the prisoners at the working place until the quota was reached. Additionally, “wreckers” were publicly pilloried, whether through newspaper articles, display boards, or fictitious graves with low standard fulfillment inscribed on their tombstones. Especially in the 1930s, the names of those who had underperformed were displayed every evening on a blackboard under the heading “our shame” while those who had overperformed were praised as “our pride.” Such ostracism by the collective was further advanced when the labor output of the worker brigade as a whole was calculated. Poor work performance by an individual member of the brigade now fell on the small collective and could have serious consequences for all of its members.

Although the pressure on the individual was increased by collective accountability, the latter also opened up spaces of mutual help. Strong prisoners could compensate for the low work performance of their weaker fellow prisoners and thus ensure their survival. There were also prisoners who evaded the obligation to work. In particular, hardened criminals successfully resisted being coerced to work or in turn forced fellow inmates to do their share of the work for them. Other prisoners had often no other choice but malingering or to mutilate themselves in order to escape the obligation to work.²⁴ However, throughout the history of the Gulag there were also repeated strikes or minor revolts through which the prisoners hoped to achieve improvements in the regime and in working conditions. Moreover, there existed the possibility of filing complaints, which in some cases even entailed a criminal investigation. The camp inmates, therefore, were not totally deprived of all possibilities of influencing their situation, to voice criticism, although only a minority took advantage of these opportunities. A much more common way to counter the work pressure was the “technique of fictitious accounting” (*tufta*). Reports were frequently falsified and labor output statistics exaggerated.

The greatest positive impact on the labor productivity of Gulag inmates had neither coercion nor commitment or material compensation but the compensation through the crediting of working days to the period of imprisonment. The system of “workday credits” changed often over time and differentiated between prisoners from accepted strata of society (workers, peasants) and those who were accused to be “enemies of the people.” For the latter category the accountability of working days was limited, but “socially reliable” prisoners could reduce their sentence significantly by a third if not by half. In 1939, though, the NKVD abolished this very successful incentive and replaced it with improved food rations and monetary bonuses.

Already in the late 1940s, the system of “workday credits” was slowly but increasingly reintroduced. Once again, the discussion about productivity and profitability of the camps had gained new momentum. In April 1950, the government even implemented wages for all Gulag inmates.²⁵ These wages corresponded in theory with those for civilians; however, costs for food, accommodation, and clothing as well as taxes were deducted. If we follow

Oleg Khlevnyuk this introduction of wages signified “a conversion of slaves to serfs.”²⁶ For Khlevniuk, therefore, compensation through direct wages makes the difference between slavery and serfdom.

Material and monetary incentives should not cover the fact that due to *kotlovka* coercion most of the time prevailed. Moreover, even if material compensation was provided on paper, the realization was hampered by a general poor supply of the camps. In general, high work quota paired with malnutrition and insufficient equipment made it difficult for the majority of the prisoners to meet or exceed the quota anyway. A large proportion of the prisoners could therefore hardly hope for early release on the basis of good work performance, but had to rely on other forms of exit.

RETURN FROM THE GULAG

Looking at statistics of individual camps and of the Main Administration of the Camps, four main forms of exit can be identified: release, transfer, death, and escape. As already indicated above, death was, thus, not the one and only way out of the Gulag. Mortality rates varied widely over the years and likewise from camp to camp and they often correspond with external factors and increased mortality rates outside the camp zone. It is striking, for example, that particularly high death rates correspond to the Soviet famine of 1932–1933 (approximately 15 percent of all Gulag inmates), the Great Terror of 1938 (5.35 percent), the Second World War (6 percent in 1941 up to 24.9 percent in 1942), and the scarcity of supplies after World War II (3–4 percent in 1947–1948). In most other years, mortality lay below 3 percent and from 1949 onward, it stabilized well below 1 percent of the whole Gulag population.²⁷ Low mortality rates, however, were due less to substantially improved living conditions—although after the hunger years of 1932–33 and 1945–1946 supply did indeed improve—than to the method of early release for seriously ill and weak prisoners whose death was imminent at short notice. This method artificially reduced the mortality rate significantly. For example, between 1946 and 1948, 148,205 persons died in the camps, another 102,000 received early release due to their miserable state of health. Moreover, when using official data of the Gulag, it should also be noted that those who died on the way into the camps, who were shot by the guards or killed by co-prisoners or who died while trying to escape were not included into the statistics. All figures of the camp administrations concerning the death of prisoners should therefore be supplemented by an estimated figure of unrecorded cases that might double the official death rates.²⁸

Far more common than death was the transfer of Gulag inmates to other forms of imprisonment. In some years, the number of those transferred even exceeded those released. Until 1937, moreover, flight represented a not insignificant form of exit. In the years 1935 to 1937, the number of fugitives even exceeded the number of those who died, although it must be said that, as a rule, almost half of the fugitives were picked up again. From 1938 on, the

camps got a better grip on guarding the inmates and the number of escapees dropped from approximately 22 to 4.5 percent of all those leaving the camps. After 1943, the numbers dropped significantly once again, so that from this point on, flight can hardly be called a reliable exit.

The most common way out of the Gulag was release, i.e. a conditional exit. Like the entry, the exit out of the Gulag system was determined essentially by criminal law and by special orders of the penal authorities. Archival sources suggest that at least 20 percent, in some years even up to 40 percent of the camps' inmates were released every year. As indicated above, these figures should be treated with caution. But even if we acknowledge that the Gulag administration learned to release precisely the weak and sick prisoners who barely survived liberation in order to get rid of unproductive eaters and to polish mortality statistics, it cannot be denied that a substantial number of Gulag prisoners was freed and survived. Exit through release was achieved either through amnesties, by serving the term, by early release due to excellent work performance and good behavior, by work contracts, due to petitions or early release campaigns.

Economically prioritized camps in particular encouraged early release through contracts with prisoners. Prisoners agreed to settle near the camp despite their release. The freedmen continued to work for the camps as free laborers, lived outside the *zona* and could bring their families to live with them. Both the example of Vorkuta and Magadan show, that a significant number of city dwellers were such ex-prisoners.

Petitions for early release could be submitted individually both by prisoners themselves, especially those with a high work record, and by their relatives. Frequently, the poor health of the person concerned was the decisive factor for petitions by family and friends. Amnesties occurred after the completion of a major task like the building of the *Belomor* canal, after the war and to an even greater extent after Stalin's death. Only those sentenced for "counter-revolutionary" crimes did often not profit from most forms of early release and amnesties. In this context it should also be mentioned that the smallest violations of camp discipline or reduced work performance prevented any accounting of work days and could easily lead to an extension of the period of imprisonment. Especially during World War II, in accordance with government decrees, camp administrators withheld releases even of those whose term of imprisonment had expired (order N°221 1941). Or prisoners were released but were not allowed to leave the camp premises (order N°185 1942). In addition, reports from former prisoners as well as administrative documents testify to the fact that quite frequently additional terms were imposed without explanation. At the same time the Second World War triggered several waves of "early release" into Red Army squads. Exit through release was thus the most common, but not necessarily the most reliable, way of leaving the camps.

For many prisoners, the release did often not imply an immediate full return to society and a re-establishment of the individual status quo ante. Many were

forced to settle temporarily near the camps or in prescribed regions. These ex-prisoners remained restricted in their freedom of movement and disadvantaged compared to the normal population by being denied wage supplements and other benefits. Even freedmen who were allowed to move out of the former camp area had only limited freedom to choose where to settle. In particular, the major urban centers of the Soviet Union remained closed to many Gulag returnees for several years. In addition, political prisoners, in particular, did not regain their civil rights for the first five years after release. Passports or special forms stigmatized them as criminals and ex-Gulag inmates and thus made them second-class citizens. At least, the release could bring a reunion with the families, as long as husbands, wives, or children had not broken away from the detainee and survived repressions and exile themselves.²⁹

Once at liberty did not mean that the ex-prisoner was safe from re-arrest, too. Under Stalin, therefore, any exit from the Gulag was only conditional. Only the reforms after Stalin's death brought unconditional freedom—within the framework of normal criminal prosecution—and thanks to a wave of rehabilitation social recognition.³⁰ Already the reforms toward the end of Stalin's rule and the introduction of wages had prepared the end of the phase of “slavery,” however. Only months after Stalin's death the Soviet government amnestied large contingents of the Gulag prisoners. Shortly after, the whole camp system and its Main Administration were restructured. The Ministry for the Interior lost its economic functions and most of its penal ones, too. In October 1959, the Soviet government dissolved the Main Administration of the Camps. This ended the existence of the Gulag as an administrative body and as a system of massive repression and ruthless exploitation of prison labor.³¹

NOTES

1. Chapter 5, Paragraph 18, *Constitutsia (osnovnoi zakon) Rossiiskoi Sotsialisticheskoi Federativnoi Sovetskoi Respubliki* [Constitution (basic law) of the Russian Socialist Federative Soviet Republic] (Petrograd: Izdanie Petrogradskogo Soveta rabochikh i krasn. deputatov, 1918), 6.
2. Marcel van der Linden, “Forced Labour and Non-Capitalist Industrialization: The Case of Stalinism (c. 1929–c. 1956),” in *Free and Unfree Labour. The Debate Continues*, eds. Tom Brass and Marcel van der Linden (Bern et al.: Peter Lang, 1997), 351–62.
3. Following the historiographical discourse, this article uses the term Gulag to symbolize the camp system within the Soviet Union as a whole, including the camps situated along the river Kolyma in the Far East as well as the camps for prisoners of war during and after World War II. Both belonged most of their existence to a different administrative system though, the Dalstroi and the GUPVI, respectively. For Dalstroi see the publications of David Nordlander as well as Anatolij Shirokov, *Dal'stroi v sotsial'no-ekonomicheskom razvitii Severo-Vostoka SSSR: 1930–1950-e gg.* [Dal'stroi within the social-economic development of the North-East of the USSR: 1930 to the 1950s] (Moscow:

ROSSPEN, 2014). For GUPVI see Stefan Karner, *Im Archipel GUPVI. Kriegsgefangenschaft und Internierung in der Sowjetunion 1941–1956* [In the GUPVI Archipelago: Prisoners of War and Internment in the Soviet Union 1941–1956] (Wien et al.: Oldenbourg, 1995).

In order to leave the argumentation coherent this article concentrates on the camps under control of the Main Administration. It leaves out labor colonies, special settlements or the “labor army” (*trudarmii*) although they also belonged under the control of the Main Administration and although in the special settlements in the 1930s as many people were repressed as in the camps. For the special settlements see Lynne Viola, *The Unknown Gulag: The Lost World of Stalin’s Special Settlements* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007); for the *trudarmii* see Arkadij A. German, *Nemtsy SSSR v “Trudovoi armii” (1941–1945)* [The Germans of the USSR in the “Trudovoi armii” (1941–1945)] (Moscow: Gotika, 1998).

4. An excellent overview of the geographical and numerical development of the camps including the number of prisoners and the mortality is provided by the interactive map of the Moscow State Museum of the History of the Gulag: <https://gulagmap.ru/>. However, the prisoner figures given there per year are in part somewhat lower than those used in research.
5. David D. Dallin and Boris I. Nikolaevsky, *Forced Labor in Soviet Russia* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1947), XIV.
6. Cf. Marc Buggeln, “From Private to State Slavery and Back Again. Slavery and the Camp Systems in the 19th and 20th Centuries,” *Eurozine* (2017), <https://www.eurozine.com/from-private-to-state-slavery-and-back-again/>.
7. As the most striking example Alan Barenberg, “Forced Labor in Nazi Germany and the Stalinist Soviet Union,” in *Cambridge World History of Slavery*, eds. D. Eltis, S. Engerman, S. Drescher, and D. Richardson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 630–54.
8. Golfo Alexopoulos, *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin’s Gulag* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017), 5.
9. Golfo Alexopoulos, “Destructive Labor Camps. Rethinking Solzhenitsyn’s Play on Words,” in *The Soviet Gulag. Evidence, Interpretation, and Comparison* ed. Michael David-Fox (University of Pittsburgh Press, 2016) 42–64, here 44.
10. Buggeln, “From Private.”
11. The permeability of camp boundaries describe in particular Alan Barenberg, “Prisoners without Borders: Zazonniki and the Transformation of Vorkuta after Stalin,” *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas* 57, no. 4 (2009): 513–34; and Willson T. Bell, “Was the Gulag an Archipelago? De-conveyed Prisoners and Porous Borders in the Camps of Western Siberia,” *Russian Review* 72, no. 1 (2013): 116–41.
12. See David Brian Davis, *Inhuman Bondage: The Rise and Fall of Slavery in the New World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006).
13. On the development of the camps in the 1920s and early 1930s see Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal, *Die “inhaftierte” Presse. Das Pressewesen sowjetischer Zwangsarbeitslager, 1923–1937* [The “Imprisoned” Press. The Press of Soviet Forced Labor Camps, 1923–1937] (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011); Michael Jakobson, *Origins of the GULAG: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917–1934* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993).
14. The argument that political interests outweighed economic ones in the formation of the Gulag is stressed by Oleg Khlevniuk, *The History of the Gulag*.

From Collectivization to the Great Terror, trans. Vadim A. Staklo (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004), 23–24. See also Wilson T. Bell, *Stalin's Gulag at War: Forced Labour, Mass Death, and Soviet Victory in the Second World War* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019).

15. Wilson T. Bell uses the Siblag to illustrate the diversity of possible individual experience in a camp complex. Bell, *Stalin's Gulag*.
16. For a discussion of the economic significance of the camps, see Paul R. Gregory and Valery Lazarev, eds., *The Economics of Forced Labor. The Soviet Gulag* (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003).
17. In general, women are significantly less likely to be found in prison systems worldwide. In the Soviet Union they were probably also more likely to be sentenced to serve in Corrective Labor Colonies than to a term in the Gulag. Only during the war the percentage of women in the Gulag rose to 20 percent.
18. An overview of the composition of the camp prisoners according to gender, age, ethnicity, social origin, educational background, reason for conviction, term of imprisonment can be found in files of the main administration, printed in Aleksandr Kokurin, ed., *GULAG (Glavnoe upravlenie lagerei), 1917–1960* [GULAG (Main Administration of the Camps), 1917–1960] (Moscow: Mezhdunarodnyi Fond “Demokratiia,” 2000), and in *Istoriia stalinskogo Gulaga: konets 1920-kh-pervaia polovina 1950-kh godov: sobranie dokumentov v semi tomakh* [The History of Stalin's Gulag: From the End of the 1920s to the First Half of the 1950s: A Collection of Documents in Seven Volumes], vol. 4, *Naselenie Gulaga: Chislennost' i usloviia soderzhaniia*, ed. I. V. Bezborodova (Moscow: ROSSPĖN, 2004).
19. Sarah Young has compiled a bibliography of English-language Gulag memoirs: <https://sarahyoung.com/site/gulag-bibliography/gulag-bibliography-english-language-texts-and-translations/> (accessed 1 November 2021). For those able to read Russian the Sakharov Centre in Moscow provides a database of Gulag memoirs: <https://www.sakharov-center.ru/asfcd/auth/?t=list> (accessed 1 November 2021).
20. With regard to incentives and penalties to increase productivity, see, for example, Fischer von Weikersthal, *Die “inhaftierte” Presse*; Steven Barnes, *Death and Redemption. The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011).
21. On the general enthusiasm connected to the Belomor-project both in- and outside the camp see Julie Draskoczy, *Belomor. Criminality and Creativity in Stalin's Gulag* (Boston: Academic Studies Press, 2014).
22. See Steven Barnes, “All for the Front, All for Victory! The Mobilization of Forced Labor in the Soviet Union during World War Two,” *International Labor and Working-Class History* 58 (2000): 239–60.
23. Golfo Alexopoulos interprets this fact to suggest that the camps were “a willfully destructive institution,” (Alexopoulos, *Illness*, 1).
24. Dan Healey, “‘Dramatological’ Trauma in the Gulag. Malingering, Self-Inflicted Injuries and the Prisoner-Patient,” in *(Hi-)Stories of the Gulag. Fiction and Reality*, eds. Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal and Karoline Thaidigsmann (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2016), 37–62.
25. Remuneration had been introduced in individual camps as early as 1940.
26. Oleg Khlevnyuk, “The Economy of the OGPU, NKVD, and MVD of the USSR, 1930–1953,” in *The Economics of Forced Labor. The Soviet Gulag*,

- eds. Paul R. Gregory and Valery Lazarev (Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003), 43–66, here 57.
27. Compare the graphs on p. 140 in Volkhard Knigge and Irina Scherbakova, eds., *GULAG. Spuren und Zeugnisse 1929–1956* [Gulag. Traces and Testimonies] (Weimar: Wallstein, 2012).
 28. Any figures provided by the camp administration should be treated with extreme caution, since, on the one hand, presentation and accounting methods changed over the years and, on the other hand, some of the people involved in the preparation of the figures were not qualified in accounting. In addition, statistics were frequently fudged, which was quite common in the Soviet Union. Galina Ivanova, “GULAG-Statistiken im Spiegel von Archivmaterialien und Memoiren,” [Gulag Statistics in the Mirror of Archival Materials and Memoirs] in *(Hi-)Stories of the Gulag. Fiction and Reality*, eds. Felicitas Fischer von Weikersthal and Karoline Thaidigsmann (Heidelberg: Winter Verlag, 2016), 21–35.
 29. Life after the Gulag is treated by Nanci Adler, *The Gulag Survivor. Beyond the Soviet System* (London et al.: Routledge, 2004); Stephen F. Cohen, *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin* (London et al.: I.B. Tauris, 2011); Meinhard Stark, *Die Gezeichneten. Gulag-Häftlinge nach der Entlassung* [The Marked. Gulag Prisoners after Release] (Berlin: Metropol, 2011).
 30. However, rehabilitations should not be overestimated due to their slow and limited nature.
 31. It is therefore misleading to adopt the dissident narrative and to extend the term Gulag to the Soviet Union’s system of prisons and penal colonies after 1960. Similarly, an equation of today’s Russian penal system with the Gulag evoked by prominent political prisoners or Western media is misleading. Neither did political repression take place after 1960 on a scale even approaching that of the Stalin years, nor were and are inmates exploited as ruthlessly as Gulag inmates for the state economy. On the dismantling of the Gulag system after Stalin’s death see Jeffrey S. Hardy, *The Gulag after Stalin: Redefining Punishment in Khrushchev’s Soviet Union, 1953–1964* (Ithaca et al.: Cornell University Press, 2016).

FURTHER READINGS

- Alexopoulos, Golfo. *Illness and Inhumanity in Stalin’s Gulag*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2017.
- Applebaum, Anne. *Gulag: A History of the Soviet Camps*. London: Penguin Books, 2003.
- Barenberg, Alan. *Gulag Town, Company Town. Forced Labor and Its Legacy in Vorkuta*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014.
- Barnes, Steven. *Death and Redemption. The Gulag and the Shaping of Soviet Society*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.
- Bell, Wilson T. *Stalin’s Gulag at War: Forced Labour, Mass Death, and Soviet Victory in the Second World War*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2019.
- Cohen, Stephen F. *The Victims Return: Survivors of the Gulag after Stalin*. London et al.: I. B. Tauris, 2011.

- Ertz, Simon. *Zwangsarbeit im stalinistischen Lagersystem: eine Untersuchung der Methoden, Strategien und Ziele ihrer Ausnutzung am Beispiel Norilsk, 1935–1953*. Berlin: Duncker & Humblot, 2006.
- Gregory, Paul R. and Valery Lazarev, eds. *The Economics of Forced Labor. The Soviet Gulag*. Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2003.
- Ivanova, Galina. *Istoriia GULAGa 1918-1958. Sotsial'no-ekonomicheskii i politiko-pravovoi aspekty*. Moscow: Nauka, 2006.
- Jakobson, Michael. *Origins of the Gulag: The Soviet Prison Camp System, 1917-1934*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1993.
- Khlevniuk, Oleg V. *The History of the Gulag. From Collectivization to the Great Terror*. Translated by Vadim A. Staklo. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2004.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





North Korean Slavery and Forced Labor in Present-Day Europe

Remco E. Breuker 

INTRODUCTION

This chapter deals with the practice of exploiting North Korean workers in the European Union through human trafficking, forced labor, and the suspension of most personal liberties. As a form of state-driven contemporary slavery, it starts from legal premises: the workers arrive with valid visas, residence permits, and work permits. They then find themselves in a miniaturized reproduction of North Korean society: with their minder came the entire socio-ideological structure of constraint—daily compulsory meetings, confession and criticism sessions, ideology instruction lectures, etc.—, which is recreated in situ in order to legitimize and make practically possible the extraction of labor and the removal of personal freedoms. The focus of this chapter is on the structure of the system that enslaves DPRK workers—not on the specific characteristics of the cases that have been researched. For specific details of place, time, number, and so forth I refer to the appropriate research.¹ For this chapter I specifically but not exclusively looked at the DPRK workers in Polish shipyards in the mid-2010s. The presence of DPRK labor in Poland, or in Eastern Europe for that matter, has a long history, but that falls without the scope of this paper; mainly because the circumstances before the 2000s were significantly different.² This chapter offers a predominantly empirical description and

R. E. Breuker (✉)
Leiden University, Leiden, Netherlands
e-mail: r.e.breuker@hum.leidenuniv.nl

analysis of the phenomenon, as there is yet hardly any empirically grounded academic literature on the topic.

The number of DPRK citizens working abroad has consistently risen over the past two decades. Increasingly strict international sanctions notwithstanding, hundreds of thousands of DPRK workers have worked or are working in tens of different countries, most notably in terms of absolute numbers China, Russia, and Mongolia, but also in Middle Eastern states, African states, and a number of EU countries. The exploitative and abusive treatment of these workers by the state that dispatches them and the companies that employ them has resulted in media attention, research by NGOs and academics, and criminal complaints in two EU jurisdictions. Concerns that the money earned was funneled into weapons development programs convinced the UN to include a gradually imposed ban on overseas DPRK labor in its sanctions on North Korea. On December 22, 2019, all UN member states were expected to have sent home all DPRK workers remaining in their territories, although evidence suggests this sanction was complied with only slowly and in some territories incompletely or marginally.³

This volume defines slavery as “as a practice by which human beings were held captive for indefinite periods of time; treated as property that could be bought and sold; coerced into extremely dependent and exploitive power relationships; denied rights (including potentially rights over their labor, lives, and bodies); subjected to forced migration by various means; and compelled to labor against their will.” DPRK overseas labor conforms to this definition, with the possible exception of being treated as property that could be bought or sold. While an argument can be made that this is what happened in certain cases and while another argument can be made that instead of buying and selling again in some cases “leasing” seems to have been an appropriate characterization of the forced movement of laborers, generally speaking this has not been the case with DPRK overseas workers. The fear of being sold is effectively replaced by the fear of being punished (or having loved ones punished), and in particular of being sent to the kind of political camps that only admit new inmates but—almost—never release them.⁴

Overseas DPRK labor fits the pattern of slavery observed elsewhere in the world—in its past and present. It is also very much a globalizing phenomenon. As a form of state-led human trafficking which in situ results in forced labor and labor exploitation, it also serves as a convenient and reliable indication of North Korea’s place in the global economy. Due to the state-led nature of overseas DPRK labor it does not always show a good fit with studies done on migrant labor—it does however show similar patterns to those found in human trafficking.

ENTRY INTO SLAVERY (HOW PEOPLE BECAME ENSLAVED)

The DPRK is widely known as an extremely repressive state in which not much is left for its citizens to decide for themselves.⁵ Structural human rights

infringements by the DPRK state have been described as “without parallel.”⁶ The DPRK tops the Global Slavery Index, which measures and compares the prevalence of modern slavery in a society.⁷ While it would go too far to characterize all North Koreans as living in modern slavery, state coercion is extremely strong. As such, corvée labor (unpaid and forced) is part and parcel of the average North Korean citizen’s life.⁸ State organs decide in the stead of the individual what profession he or she will enter (de facto hereditary professions are widespread) and it is illegal not to hold a job for North Korean males between the ages of 18 and 65 and unmarried adult females—the possibility of punishment for being unemployed also acts as a strong motivation to accept the state’s directions in this regard. An extensive and intrusive system that guides and monitors ideological, social, and political loyalty and sanctions breaches thereof is an obligatory and ever-present part of the lives of all North Koreans with the exception of the supreme ruler himself and the inmates of the political annihilation camps (whom the state does not count as human beings and as such no longer in need of ideological guidance) restrict freedom even further and structure and repurpose that freedom which is left.⁹ Humans being human beings, even within this structure, designed to be totalitarian, omnipresent, and ambitiously omniscient, the room is found to demur, be inconspicuously different, and find freedom in unexpected places.¹⁰ Still, the template the North Korean state forces upon its citizens is singularly coercive. This is important for the present discussion in two manners. First, the strong coercive nature of state involvement shapes attitudes, patterns, and expectations among North Korean citizens. And second, this system travels with those who are sent abroad—in fact, it would not be much of an exaggeration to state that the defining characteristic of North Korean civil life is participation in Party Organisational Life (POL).¹¹

Perhaps the only structural exception to the immediate and coercive presence of the state is the realm of economic activities, in which, even if the state (or its representatives) always takes their share, individual initiative, if profitable, is condoned. Sending workers overseas at first sight points at strong direct state involvement. The history of DPRK overseas labor also suggests as much.¹² Local practices at the overseas sites where DPRK workers reside and work, however, indicate a certain variety in hiring, employing, and sheltering workers. In Vladivostok, workers seem to be fairly self-reliant and relatively free to move around in the city. Vladivostok-based workers, for example, seem to work at least one other job next to the work they do for the North Korean state.¹³ In Poland, on the other hand, individual movements were extremely restricted and few of the workers there seem to have had an opportunity to do work outside of what was expected from them by the regime.¹⁴ Construction workers in St. Petersburg were infamously locked in shipping containers surrounded by barbed wire fences when they were not at work.¹⁵ While the shipyards in Poland were filled with male Pyongyang citizens in good standing with spouses and children,¹⁶ Chinese textile factories or Czech shoe factories preferred young female workers, even when they had not yet started a family of

themselves. Among the workers sent abroad, an increasing number is in fact active-duty (which in the context of North Korea means conscripted) army personnel.¹⁷ Paradoxically, this last example points to private initiatives rather than state-led efforts. Across the board, however, there are a number of factors that strongly suggest that the prime mover behind DPRK overseas labor is the state, even if local execution is leading and varied.

First, there is the selection process: prospective overseas workers need permission from the state, both locally and centrally, to be able to even apply to go abroad. Such permission is then given by the central department that arranges everything, but locally, confirmation of one's good standing is also needed from one's (former) place of work and from the blockhead (*inminbanjang*). Having received this permission, there are then the centrally ran labor camps, the second indication of the state being in charge of this process. The prospective laborer is inducted into a training camp, run by one of the central facilities that have specialized in sending laborers abroad. Here, the wait can extend to one year, depending on the bribes paid by the worker. A noteworthy aspect that emerged from interviews done with former North Korean overseas laborers is that generally no one in these training centers was told where they were going to be sent or what they would be doing there for what kind of salary. While waiting to be sent overseas, the workers' visas and work permits are arranged and negotiated by local North Korean diplomats. This is the third indication of state sponsorship of overseas labor. Fourth, the travel to the place of destination is routed through embassies: usually the first overnight stop is the DPRK embassy in China. From Beijing, workers, who travel in groups, travel to the DPRK embassy nearest to their final destination. For a long time, this was the embassy in Sophia, Bulgaria, for those workers dispatched to Europe, Russia, and Africa: from there, cheap flights were booked to the final destinations. A fifth indication of state involvement is offered by the treaties and agreements the DPRK state with foreign governments to be able to send (an increased number) of laborers abroad.¹⁸ And finally, sixth, as soon as the workers arrived, passports would be collected by their managers and kept for safekeeping at local embassies or consulates.¹⁹ In the cases this did not happen, the embassy was too remote or passports were needed intermittently, making this an inconvenient arrangement. Instead, passports were then kept in the safe of the manager of the workers.

If we put these six indicators of state involvement together, it becomes clear that the export of overseas laborers in the DPRK is an affair initiated, mediated, and largely executed by the state. This is not to say that it is a centralized affair, or that the volition of the workers does not play a role in the process of being sent and working abroad. There is agency on the part of the workers, albeit limited, and there seems to be little to no central coordination, once the initial decision to permit a North Korean entity (e.g. a business, a Party department, or an Army enterprise) to send laborers overseas is made. Interviews with recent refugees from North Korea seem to indicate

that males serving out their mandatory military service have been occupying an increasingly large share of the people sent out to work abroad.²⁰

One important takeaway from the level of state involvement in the selection and dispatch of workers shown by the DPRK is that it reflects a difference in the social background of workers selected to be sent abroad compared to when the system started in the late 1940s. Then, being sent abroad (as a lumberjack in Siberia) signified that the state had its doubts about the persons sent.²¹ North Koreans who had worked in Siberia however returned not merely with tales of hardship, but also with tangible fruits of their labor, such as refrigerators and other goods difficult to get hold of in North Korea. Such economic opportunity gradually caused citizens in good standing with the regime to volunteer for being sent abroad. It is a well-known fact that one needs to bribe the authorities in order to be considered for being sent abroad to work there.²² As a result, the authorities have come to prefer, if possible, sending Party members abroad (roughly 15 percent of the DPRK population is a member of the Korean Workers' Party), a clear break with previous policy. The analysis of the workforce of a shipyard in Poland in 2015 yielded an unexpectedly high percentage of Party members: over 75 percent of the workers there was a member.²³ The fact that now citizens in good standing with the state have been dispatched to work abroad signals a broad shift in policy on several levels. First, being sent abroad to work is no longer used as a tool of punishment. As a result of workers abroad returning with cash and/or with desirable goods hard to obtain in North Korea, going abroad to work changed from being seen as a sanction to being regarded as an opportunity. The need for bribery even to be considered to be sent abroad shows just how desirable working abroad came to be (even though there are indications that this has been changing over the last few years).²⁴ Second, this indirectly also shows that DPRK workers were increasingly being sent to places from where defection was not only easier but also more to be expected. For the average North Korean sent to a Siberian logging camp in the seventies, life in the Soviet Union on his own would not necessarily have been a better option than life in North Korea, even if North Korean living standards were lower. But in the case of workers spending a number of years in countries like Poland, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Austria, or Malta, the DPRK authorities became more apprehensive about the flight potential. Sending groups of workers to such high-risk countries that consisted predominantly of Party members living in Pyongyang (which is a hard-earned favor in North Korea) alleviated some of the concerns the authorities had. Nonetheless, the risk that workers would flee while overseas was something to be taken much more seriously than in earlier decades, because the number of DPRK citizens escaping the country became much higher from the late nineties onward. As a result networks to flee the country and to help one's family escape had come into being, which created the possibility of a worker fleeing while working abroad and then relying on those networks to get his or her family also out of the country. Consequently, there were two additional measures the DPRK state

took to ensure the flight-risk was kept at a minimum. Potential candidates to be sent abroad were screened, not just whether they were a Party member or not, but also with regard to their family. Only people with a family to be left behind while they were going abroad, were considered safe to send. The second measure is taken I will go into more detail later: the Party Organization Life-system that structures the life of a North Korean citizen accompanied the workers to wherever they would be sent to work.

The facts that North Korean overseas forced labor is an initiative of the DPRK state, that it is undertaken by organizations that are part of that state, and that state involvement is a necessary element of the phenomenon would seem to suggest that the many different concrete instances of DPRK overseas forced labor that have occurred across the world were centrally coordinated. Perhaps surprisingly, this however does not seem to have ever been the case. Interviews with former workers, former managers, and former diplomats tasked with the supervision of overseas work sites in their area suggest that there is no central coordination for sending workers overseas and then managing them there. Central coordination seems mainly to exist on the level of planning and the setting of financial quota. Also, parts of the profits made by the entities that send out and manage the overseas workers are collected on a central level.²⁵

EXPERIENCES OF SLAVERY

Generally, workers were only told where they were going to work and what kind of work they were expected to perform once they were on their way there. In some cases, workers only found out after arriving at their overseas work site. Again, it needs to be stressed here that since there was no factual central coordination for workers being sent overseas, but that each group was sent and managed by the particular company, army department, or state or Party bureau, circumstances could differ greatly. Also, due to their proximity to North Korea and the well-established labor migration from North Korea to there, workers traveling to China or Russia generally did know where they were going and what kind of tasks they were going to perform. But a group traveling to for example the Middle East might only find out on arrival what country they found themselves in.

In the case of an EU Member State as a final destination, workers tell of being immediately taken to their site of work and immediately being put to work there. Then their lives abroad start, characterized by isolation from the society in which they now live and work, as well as by exploitation and unfreedom.

The experiences of the DPRK workers in Polish shipyards have been relatively well documented, due to efforts by the Polish Labor Inspectorate to regulate work done by third-country nationals (i.e. workers who possess neither the Polish nationality nor that of another EU Member State),²⁶ to two investigative documentaries precisely on this topic,²⁷ to two detailed reports

mentioned above, and to one North Korean worker who fled the shipyards to start a life elsewhere. These sources have chronicled some of the experiences of DPRK workers at Polish shipyards, which are reproduced below.

These experiences may be set against the definition of slavery this volume used. For the sake of convenience, I have used the constitutive elements of the definition as subject headers.

*A Practice by Which Human Beings Were Held Captive for Indefinite
Periods of Time*

DPRK workers sent to the EU did not know how long they would stay there. It was assumed before they went that it would be about three years and this seems to have been the case for a large number of workers. Other workers stayed in the EU for a longer period, but as far as studies have shown, not indefinitely. Once the workers arrived at their destination, they were quickly familiarized with their surroundings and their new way of life. They were instructed not to socialize with the local population and only work together with local workers if absolutely necessary. In Gdansk, for example, 35 workers stayed in the same house (meant for one family), traveling to and from work as a group. At the Partner Shipyards in Stettin, housing facilities had been arranged on the shipyard. Special permission was needed in all cases to leave the compound. A former worker testified that such permission was given if a doctor's visit was absolutely necessary (in which case one's passport was also returned temporarily); for doing groceries; or for buying beer and cigarettes on the rare occasion when one was free from work and ideological training. Access to internet, radio, TV, and newspaper was forbidden.²⁸ So was leaving the house. Infractions would be punished by physical violence, but more often by levying a fine.²⁹ In severe cases, the perpetrator could be sent home for trial and punishment. Contact with one's family at home was not allowed.

The way this regime was maintained was not through violence and also not through the threat of violence, although having left one's family at home, there was a very strong implicit threat there. On the ground, this regime was maintained by reproducing part of the North Korean authoritarian structure: by holding regular compulsory ideological meetings, self and mutual criticism sessions, Party lectures, donations, and the like. These meetings were strictly attended, and detailed notes were taken to be sent to Pyongyang in order to file them with the individual files of the workers.³⁰ A worker in the EU stated the following: "I take a rest on Sundays. First, we clean after breakfast on Sunday morning. And then from 9:30 am until 10:30 am we hold a meeting. It's usually about watching seminar video clips, propaganda films, or discussing the weekly settlement."³¹ POL comes at a price: "The reason why our second wage was 100 zloty less than the first wage was because the manager provided 100 zloty as a donation to the Kumsusan Palace Fund. All North Koreans are virtually obligated to pay to the government 30 dollar every quarter as a contribution to the Kumsusan Palace Fund. This also applies

when you work abroad.”³² Ideological hierarchies overlap with those on the work floor, creating structures that effectively trap the worker in place: “In our system, the director of the company is no.1, the party secretary is no.2, and the no.3 is the security officer from the State Security Department. In practice, no.3 wields all real authority. The manager (Mr. K.) is party secretary for the company and our team leader functions as cell party secretary.”³³

Workers were also expected to inform one another. The coercive power of this system (Party-Organizational Life) that is aimed at ceaselessly correcting and censoring North Koreans into becoming a model citizen can hardly be overstated: model behavior in these meetings is necessary to find or keep work, to obtain a house, to marry, and generally to not get into trouble with the regime. By bringing the threat inherent to the POL system with them, the managers were capable of controlling a much larger group of workers by themselves, because the entire weight of the DPRK politico-social and ideological structure is encapsulated by the POL system.

Treated as Property that Could Be Bought and Sold

Here again, a perfect fit cannot be found. Studies of the circumstances under which DPRK workers worked in the EU have not found instances of the person being bought or sold.³⁴ During the time workers were under contract with the North Korean state through its intermediary that had brought them to the EU they had no say in where they stayed, where they worked, how much they earned, or how long they stayed in the EU. Interviews with former workers in Poland made it clear that the groups of North Korean workers could be moved from one place to another overnight, which in one case meant moving from a shipyard with relatively lucrative work for which the workers were qualified to a building site where the work was both unfamiliar and paid worse.³⁵ The opaque constructions that tied the workers, on paper self-employed contractors, to the joint ventures of Polish and North Korean operators, and to the temp agencies that managed the workers’ assignments, constructions that were kept wholly outside the knowledge of the workers themselves, further increased their isolation and absence of self-determination. As such, it can be argued that for the duration of their stay in the European Union DPRK workers were for all practical purposes the property of the joint venture that hired them out to the companies where they would work.³⁶ Their input was not only not asked for, giving input could be seen as being subversive.³⁷

Coerced into Extremely Dependent and Exploitative Power Relationships

Extremely dependent and exploitative power relationships that are entered under coercion and/or deception are at the very heart of the system of slavery (and of human trafficking). The situation in which North Korean workers in the EU find themselves after arrival reads like a textbook case.³⁸ After having

been taken to their place of work in the EU without their prior knowledge, DPRK workers are bound hand-to-foot to the structure in place. They rely for their job on their manager, often a North Korean who also doubles as an interpreter and who resides in the country of work.³⁹ The manager/interpreter had access to the workers' passports (kept in the DPRK embassy if nearby, otherwise in the safe of the temp agency employing them). Housing, food, and clothing were arranged for by the manager (but paid for by the workers),⁴⁰ as were the work permits and residence permits. In clear violation of EU rules, the workers did not have individual bank accounts in their own name (they have none at all), which meant that for their salaries they were also completely dependent on the goodwill of the manager/interpreter.⁴¹ Contact with one's family back home was impossible and actively blocked. Combined with the presence of the coercive ideological straight-jacket of the POL, it is no exaggeration to state that DPRK workers in the EU were kept completely dependent on the very same people that managed their exploitation.⁴²

Denied Rights (Including Potential Rights Over Their Labor, Lives, and Bodies)

Reports by the Polish Labor Inspectorate confirm what interviews with DPRK workers also pointed out: the workers were kept completely ignorant of their rights.⁴³ They did not know they were entitled to an employment contract which specified the kind of employment, remuneration, working conditions, et cetera. Denial of rights largely came down to keeping the workers in isolation (itself a rights violation). As a result, none of the workers was aware of the following rights (which were all violated): liberty of movement and the freedom to choose one's residence,⁴⁴ the right not to be subjected to arbitrary and unlawful interference with privacy, family, home, or correspondence,⁴⁵ freedom of thought, conscience, and religion,⁴⁶ freedom of expression, the right to hold opinions without interference,⁴⁷ and the right to adequate standard of living, food, clothing, and housing,⁴⁸ the right of peaceful assembly; and the right of freedom of association.

Rights are further violated by the arbitrary punishment that managers are free to met out: "I thought that I needed to obey their [DPRK officials] commands in order to come out alive. I did imagine what it would be like to escape and run, but if I got caught I would have been punished by death. So I tried to find an opportune moment to escape, but it never came."⁴⁹ Punishment ranged from beatings to the withholding of payment, which could take on quite extreme forms: "There was an incident in October 2014 in X, where two young welders (35 years old) stole electronics from stores and one was arrested. He was taken to the police station, but the manager negotiated with the storeowner and covered up the case. After that case, all North Koreans in Y were grounded for a while. The person directly involved was transferred from Z to A and didn't receive even one penny for an entire year. [...] He wasn't given his wages for an entire year even though he had to keep working."⁵⁰

A Czech employee of a factory that employed DPRK workers testified that physical violence was used as a tool of discipline, signaling the DPRK manager's abrogation of the right to physical integrity: "Mr. Kim was probably the head or the boss. If I can talk about my own company, we forbade him from accessing the factory because he behaved extremely roughly with the workers. Once, he even wanted to beat one of them because her work performance was not as he imagined."⁵¹

Physical violence was also used as a way by the managers of channeling frustrations and anger about the difficult situation workers were in, the grinding work, not being paid, and being isolated from society and their families for years on end: fights between workers were allowed to go on as a release valve. This happened both among female tomato-pluckers in Poland and male welders at Polish shipyards.⁵²

Subjected to Forced Migration by Various Means

This is a condition that is not entirely met by DPRK workers in the EU. As described above, many DPRK workers volunteered to go abroad, even if they had not been told where they would go and what kind of work awaited them there. Bribery was a common phenomenon in order to be able to go abroad. At the same, it should be noted since the Treaty of Palermo (2000) voluntary participation in human trafficking on the part of the trafficked is seen as involuntary coercion, because of the deception involved. This certainly is a factor in the selection of workers in North Korea also and deception was one of the factors that persuaded people to volunteer for going abroad.⁵³ The most important factor in the forced migration of the workers is the state apparatus—as such, this analysis should ideally be extended to how that apparatus coerces DPRK citizens, both at home and abroad.

Compelled to Labor Against Their Will

DPRK overseas labor is, predictably, all about its citizens' capacity to work that the North Korean state sells, parcelled out over more than forty countries worldwide. Between 150,000 and 200,000 workers are thought to have been mobilized before the 2019 sanctions took effect.⁵⁴ The strict regime that traveled with them from North Korea to their place of destination meant that to not work when told to was not a viable option: the worker would place himself or herself in danger—and possibly endanger his family remaining behind in North Korea as well. As described above, the absence of rights, of information, of identity papers, of employment contracts and the presence of threats, isolation, and the POL structure cemented the workers within their exploitative environment. Intimidation and threats, withholding of wages, frequent excessive (and unpaid) overtime, isolation from other non-DPRK workers, and other violations of international laws and treaties have been written up in detail in the reports of the Polish Labor Inspectorate. Interviews with (former)

DPRK workers sketch the same picture of the impossibility to not work, even when one was ill (if a worker was too ill to work, more wages would be withheld).

A worker who worked in Poland testified the following: “I woke up at 6am, made up my bed and washed until 7, had breakfast and went to work by 8 o’clock. I worked until 12 o’clock and had lunch for an hour, worked again until 6 o’clock and dinnertime was from 6 to 7 o’clock. Excluding lunchtime, I usually worked 11-12 hours per day. There were extended work hours every two or three days. There wasn’t any policy about it, but low-level executives encouraged us to bring glory to the Party by working more. They encouraged us to finish the task earlier and report good news to the Party. [...] Extended working hours every 2-3 days made daily average work hours increase to 14, since three hours were added every time. Usually (I worked) from 7 am to 7 pm. On Saturdays it was until 5 pm. But later on they made us work until 7 pm on Saturdays as well. [...] Sometimes I worked until 11 pm. Usually when the work was not finished, they made us work nights as well, but once neighbours complained about the noise, so we had to stop working at night.”⁵⁵

We used to work 10-12 hours a day. A regular working day is eight hours, but the manager or the foreman would encourage extending the shifts. On a rare occasion it could happen, if we received special instructions, that I’d have to work 24 hours, then rest some 30 minutes, and then continue again the next day. That happened twice to me. Of course, you would do that, expecting to be able to earn more money, but you would never get paid the hours you actually worked. It was physically very hard, I couldn’t do that anymore. We were told that we could have a rest on Sundays, but that would depend on the foreman. If he said we had to work overtime, we’d have to do it.⁵⁶

DPRK OVERSEAS LABOR AS GLOBALIZING FACTOR

There are several remarkable characteristics that make DPRK overseas labor in the EU (and elsewhere). First, in many aspects it is a hybrid phenomenon with fluid boundaries. It is hybrid in its combination of (the remnants of) a socialist authoritarian state structure’s supply of labor with the demands of a globalized capitalist economy. A concrete manifestation of this hybridity, and of the meaninglessness of hard boundaries between different—ideological—systems such as socialism and capitalism and between state and private, is the way DPRK overseas labor roots in foreign soil. The smaller entities within the DPRK state prepare and effectuate the dispatch of the workers to the EU, local joint ventures owned by Polish businesspeople and North Korean managers help arrange contracts with local intermediary companies that take care of all practical matters involved with shuttling the workers from workplace to workplace,

and with the local companies, some of which (like Polish shipbuilding giant Christ) are big international players, where the workers are actually placed.⁵⁷ Among the customers of shipyards like Christ on whose ships North Korean welders had worked, were big Dutch shipbuilders and the NATO, weaving North Korean forced labor into the very fabric of EU economic life. It is important to note that the visual aspects of this phenomenon (the fact that it looks North Korean) only partly overlap with its real structure—the fact that it is a diversified, globalized structure of which North Korea only forms one part.

Second, similar hybridity can be found in the status of the workers, who during their time abroad in the EU live lives virtually without personal freedom, but whose status changes when they return to the DPRK—even if an argument could also be made that the life of an average DPRK worker shares fundamental similarities with that of someone living under conditions of modern slavery. It is therefore possible (and has happened) that workers who had a measure of personal freedom in the DPRK were relegated to captivity and forced labor when they were sent abroad to work. Upon return, the meager earnings they were allowed to keep (often less than 10 percent of their real wages) helped them in ameliorating their lives in North Korea. A second trip abroad returned them to a state of slavery—the second return home helped them to better their circumstances. Such changes in relative unfreedom show the fluid and impermanent boundaries of the status of slavery among DPRK workers sent abroad.

The DPRK is popularly known as the most isolated country in the world, but its practice of sending groups of workers abroad to earn money for the state connects it not only to over forty countries worldwide, but it also connects it firmly to the global economy. The global movement of DPRK workers integrates their experiences of unfreedom and the particular power-based relationship peculiar to the DPRK system with EU economic activities and legal structures.

NOTES

1. Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, eds., *Slaves to the System: North Korean Forced Labour in the European Union, the Polish Case. How the Supply of a Captive DPRK Workforce Fits Our Demand for Cheap Labour* (Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2017); Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, eds., *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale* (Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018); Teodora Gyupchanova, “Labor and Human Rights Conditions of North Korean Workers Dispatched Overseas: A Look at the DPRK’s Exploitative Practices in Russia, Poland, and Mongolia,”

- Cornell International Law Journal* 51 (2018): 183. The 2014 UN Commission of Inquiry report does not mention forced labor; due to the short period within which the report needed to be completed, it was not deemed feasible to include a large topic such as this. See Commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, "Report of the Detailed Findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea" (United Nations Human Rights Council, 2014).
2. Breuker and van Gardingen, *People for Profit*; Liudmila Zakharova, "Russia-North Korea Economic Relations," *Joint US-Korea Academic Studies* 27 (2016).
 3. United Nations Security Council Resolution 2397 had called for the return of all DPRK nationals earning income abroad within 24 months from 17 December 2017. See S/RES/2397, 17 December 2017, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/2397\(2017\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/2397(2017)).
 4. Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, "Pervasive, Punitive, and Prevalent: Understanding Modern Slavery in North Korea," *Global Slavery Index 2018* (Walk Free Foundation, 2018).
 5. Commission of inquiry on human rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, "Report of the Detailed Findings of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea"; Sandra Fahy, *Dying for Rights: Putting North Korea's Human Rights Abuses on the Record* (Columbia University Press, 2019).
 6. This comparison actually was made in the very first sentence of the public presentation of the report made by Justice Kirby. See Michael Kirby, "Statement by Mr Michael Kirby Chair of the Commission of Inquiry on Human Rights in the Democratic People's Republic of Korea to the 25th Session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, 17 March 2014" (25th session of the Human Rights Council, Geneva, March 17, 2014).
 7. See *Global Slavery Index* at <https://www.globalslaveryindex.org/2018/findings/highlights/>. The definition used by the GSI as well as its methodology for measuring slavery are not uncontested, in particular with regard to a society such as North Korea that does not allow any field or archival research in situ, but a qualitative analysis of a survey of North Korean refugees confirms the prevalence of modern slavery within contemporary North Korean society. Breuker and Gardingen, "Pervasive, Punitive, and Prevalent."
 8. For a qualitative analysis of this question, see Breuker and Gardingen.
 9. Breuker and van Gardingen, 22.
 10. Memoirs of North Koreans in exile confirm as much.
 11. The only exception to this—seriously enforced—rule in North Korea is its Supreme Leader, loyalty to whom is the overriding moral value instilled, monitored, and stimulated during POL meetings. For an overview of the POL, see Kim Sönggyöng, "'Pukhan chumin-üi ilsang-gwa pangböb-ürosö-üi maüm: Saenghwal ch'onghwa-wa kömyör-üi sanghwang-esö-üi kongmo-hanün maüm," *Kyöngje-wa Sahoe*" 109 (2016): 153–90; Yi Kyöngsu, "[Saenghwal-Lo Pon Pungnyöksahoe 10] Chojik saenghwal: Sonyöndan-but'ö Chosön Rodongdang-kkaji modün chumin 1 kae isang chojig-e kaip haksüp,ch'onghwa t'onghae'chiptanjuüi'üishik naemyönhwa," *Minjok* 21, 2007, 66–71; Andrei Nikolaevich Lankov, In-ok Kwak, and Choong-Bin Cho, "The Organizational Life: Daily Surveillance and Daily Resistance in North Korea," *Journal of East Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2012): 193–214, <https://doi.org/10/gm78f6>.

12. Zakharova, "Russia-North Korea Economic Relations"; Gyupchanova, "Labor and Human Rights."
13. Britt C. H. Blom and Rosa Brandse, "Surveillance and Long Hours: North Korean Workers in Russia," in *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, ed. Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen (Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018), 43–66.
14. Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*.
15. Håvard Melnæs, "The Slaves of St Petersburg," *Josimar*, 03 2017, <https://www.josimar.no/artikler/the-slaves-of-st-petersburg/3851/>.
16. Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 81.
17. Personal communication Ko Young-hwan on August 3, 2017.
18. Which have continued to be concluded with Russia, also after the UN sanctions made this illegal. See for example Isabelle Khurshudyan and Min Joo Kim, "For North Korean Workers, Russia's Far East Remains a Windfall for Them and for Kim's Regime," *Washington Post*, July 18, 2021, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/europe/north-korean-workers-russia-sanctions/2021/07/18/5d1f5d82-e3eb-11eb-88c5-4fd6382c47cb_story.html.
19. According to Kim T'aesan, who was managed a group of 150 DPRK workers in the Czech Republic between 2000 and 2000: "It is the general practice of North Korea's overseas labour that all passports of workers are collected and that the embassy of the DPRK in the hosting country takes care of them. In our case, we kept all the passports of the workers in a locked safe in the office of the manager. Only when the workers were to prove their ID, for instance, when they needed to go to the hospital, they were allowed to hold their passport." See Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 32.
20. Personal communication with Ko Young-hwan on August 3, 2017.
21. Zakharova, "Russia-North Korea Economic Relations."
22. Breuker and van Gardingen, *People for Profit*; Artyom Lukin and Liudmila Zakharova, "Russia-North Korea Economic Ties: Is There More than Meets the Eye?" *Orbis* 62, no. 2 (2018): 244–61.
23. Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 81.
24. Breuker and van Gardingen, "Pervasive, Punitive, and Prevalent."
25. When I discussed this aspect with a former North Korean diplomat who had among other things been responsible for overseeing the different work sites in Poland between 2014 and 2016, he told me that the DPRK authorities have no reliable grasp of how many workers have been sent abroad, because that is not necessarily what they monitor. Tallies are kept in Pyongyang, but only in terms of what the different enterprises, bureaus, etc., earned for the central leadership in US dollars. Personal communication from T'ae Yŏngho on August 3, 2017.
26. The reports of the Polish Labour Inspectorate can be found in Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*; Breuker and van Gardingen, *People for Profit*.
27. *Cash for Kim* (2016) directed by Sebastian Weis (https://video.vice.com/en_us/topic/cash-for-kim), and *Dollar Heroes* (2018) directed by Carl Gierstorfer and Sebastian Weis (<https://www.thewhy.dk/films/dollar-heroes-north-kor-eas-secret-slaves>).
28. Although all North Koreans possessed mobile phones and could access the Polish internet.

29. One of the workers the documentary makers of *Dollar Heroes* spoke to in secrecy told about having been physically molested after a supposed infraction of the rules set by the manager.
30. Although it seems that at least at one occasion the reports sent to Pyongyang had been faked: there had been no meeting.
31. Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 76.
32. Breuker and van Gardingen, 77.
33. Breuker and van Gardingen, 79.
34. Although such circumstances were and still are clearly present in the Chinese area bordering on the DPRK, where the trade in North Korean women and children thrives. See Hee-soon Yoon, "Sex Slaves: The Prostitution, Cybersex & Forced Marriage of North Korean Women & Girls in China" (London: Korea Future Initiative, 2019).
35. Remco E. Breuker, "Non-Enforcement: The Conscious Choice Not to Enforce," in Breuker and van Gardingen, *People for Profit*, 159.
36. There is also an argument to be made that upon their return to the DPRK (and indeed before the departure from it) a large number of them would have found themselves in conditions were much akin to those associated with modern slavery. See Breuker and Gardingen, "Pervasive, Punitive, and Prevalent."
37. Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, "Accountability for DPRK Workers in the Value Chain: The Case of Partner Shipyard, a Polish Shipbuilder and Its Dutch Partners," in Breuker and van Gardingen, *People for Profit*, 12–42.
38. Which was indeed the verbatim reaction of a colleague, a criminologist specialized in human trafficking, when we went through the available testimonies and other evidence detailing the situation of DPRK workers in the EU.
39. His expertise is deemed too valuable to be wasted by sending him back after a number of years. In Poland, we found that DPRK managers and/or interpreters would even have long-term or permanent residence permits, so that the structure they had set up to recruit, train, manage, and lease the workers remained stable, even if the workers themselves came and went. See Breuker and Gardingen, *People for Profit*.
40. "A manager told us that they [the foreign enterprises] are hiring us because of our low personnel costs, and that they deduct the charges for board and lodging, gas, and electricity from our monthly wages. They never let us know how much we earn and how much they charge for the expenses. That's why none of us knows how much we are being exploited." See Breuker and Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 35.
41. According to a former manager of DPRK workers in the Czech Republic: "The workers wouldn't dare to raise an issue against the system, for instance, regarding their wages. If they do, they know they will be sent back home (DPRK), where they will face punishment." Breuker and Gardingen, 11. The way the wages were withheld was simple: "The manager would list the names of all the workers on the salary list and, next to our names, we would have to write our signature, but it didn't record the actual salaries we received. The list was merely prepared for the inspector of the labour authority; that is why they kept the list that recorded all the salaries." van Gardingen, "Accountability," 19.
42. This was also the case in the Czech Republic. Jan Blinka, "Employing North Korean Workers in the Czech Republic," in Breuker and van Gardingen, *People for Profit*, 84–117.

43. For a more complete and legal review in reference to the relevant international treaties of the denial of rights suffered by DPRK workers in the EU, see Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 28–45. For an exhaustive analysis of this case under EU law, see van Gardingen, “Accountability.”
44. Article 12 of the ICCPR (International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights#article-12>.
45. The right of every person to be protected against arbitrary or unlawful interference with his privacy, family, home, or correspondence as well as against unlawful attacks on his honour and reputation is enshrined in Article 17 of the ICCPR (<https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights#article-17>). The POL system, which demands total transparency with regard to thought and deed from all DPRK citizens as well as the duty to inform upon one another is in violation of Article 17.
46. As stipulated by the Human Rights Committee in General Comment 22 on Article 18. A confidential informant in Poland stated the following: “Once a week we write notes about self-critique, pros, and cons, and then get checked by the cell leader. The reason we keep track of the records is for the party secretary from the embassy or the secretary from the company patrolling down randomly. Indeed, there once was the time we did not hold the meeting for a month and procrastinated writing notes until the end of the month.” See Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 39.
47. Human Rights Committee, General comment No. 34, September 2011, CCPR/C/GC/34. “If you complain or go against their opinion, you become an outcast. No one can act that way. Workers think it as a natural thing and they just go along with it. Of course, we complain among ourselves. There is a possibility that the manager’s informant can hear us but I believe he is on the same side. It is all right unless you make a statement against the system.” Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 40.
48. Article 11 of the ICESCR states: “The States Parties to the present Covenant recognize the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family, including adequate food, clothing and housing, and to the continuous improvement of living conditions.” See <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/international-covenant-civil-and-political-rights#article-11>.
49. James Burt and Saemee Kim, “The Will of the State” (London: EAHRNK, 2015), 36.
50. Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 54–55.
51. Blinka, “Employing North Korean Workers in the Czech Republic,” 94.
52. Breuker and van Gardingen, *People for Profit*, 4.
53. Although this seems to have been changing after 2015. See Breuker and van Gardingen, “Pervasive, Punitive, and Prevalent.” This is what a worker in Poland remarked on the situation: “As for institutes carrying the name of foreign construction training centre, there are Nūngna [Rungra], Pyongyang, Moranbong, Songhwa, Yangyak and 15 other training centres (20 in total). There are many training centres, but they are having trouble by having not that many applicants. It is the job of the executives from the training centre to recruit as many applicants as possible to dispatch them overseas. They can

easily become the target of criticism if they don't meet certain performance targets by the evaluative work meeting at the end of the year." Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 46.

54. Marieke Meurs, "Addressing North Korean Forced Labour by Means of Internationale Economic Sanctions," in *Tightening Belts: Two Regional Case Studies on Corporate Social Responsibility*, ed. Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, Asser Institute Series (The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2019), 181–92.
55. Breuker and van Gardingen, *Slaves to the System*, 54–55.
56. Van Gardingen, "Accountability," 18.
57. For details what such arrangements look like, see van Gardingen, "Accountability."

FURTHER READINGS

- Blinka, Jan. "Employing North Korean Workers in the Czech Republic." In *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, 84–117. Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018.
- Blom, Britt C. H., and Rosa Brandse. "Surveillance and Long Hours: North Korean Workers in Russia." In *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, edited by Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, 43–66. Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018.
- Breuker, Remco E. "Non-Enforcement: The Conscious Choice Not to Enforce." In *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, edited by Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, 159–75. Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018.
- Breuker, Remco E., and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, eds. *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*. Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018.
- . "Pervasive, Punitive, and Prevalent: Understanding Modern Slavery in North Korea." *Global Slavery Index 2018*. Walk Free Foundation, 2018.
- , eds. *Slaves to the System: North Korean Forced Labour in the European Union, the Polish Case. How the Supply of a Captive DPRK Workforce Fits Our Demand for Cheap Labour*. Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2017.
- Fahy, Sandra. *Dying for Rights: Putting North Korea's Human Rights Abuses on the Record*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2019.
- Gardingen, Imke B. L. H. van. "Accountability for DPRK Workers in the Value Chain: The Case of Partner Shipyard, a Polish Shipbuilder and Its Dutch Partners." In *People for Profit: North Korean Forced Labour on a Global Scale*, edited by Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, 12–42. Leiden: LeidenAsiaCentre, 2018.
- Gyupchanova, Teodora. "Labor and Human Rights Conditions of North Korean Workers Dispatched Overseas: A Look at the DPRK's Exploitative Practices in Russia, Poland, and Mongolia." *Cornell International Law Journal* 51 (2018): 183.
- Lankov, Andrei Nikolaevich, In-ok Kwak, and Choong-Bin Cho. "The Organizational Life: Daily Surveillance and Daily Resistance in North Korea." *Journal of East Asian Studies* 12, no. 2 (2012): 193–214.
- Lukin, Artyom, and Liudmila Zakharova. "Russia-North Korea Economic Ties: Is There More than Meets the Eye?" *Orbis* 62, no. 2 (2018): 244–61.

Meurs, Marieke. “Addressing North Korean Forced Labour by Means of Internationale Economic Sanctions.” In *Tightening Belts: Two Regional Case Studies on Corporate Social Responsibility*, edited by Remco E. Breuker and Imke B. L. H. van Gardingen, 181–92. Asser Institute Series. The Hague: T.M.C. Asser Press, 2019.

Zakharova, Liudmila. “Russia-North Korea Economic Relations.” *Joint US-Korea Academic Studies* 27 (2016).

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Modern Slavery in the Global Economy

Bruno Lamas 

INTRODUCTION

A chapter with this title written thirty years ago would most likely have faced widespread skepticism and disbelief. Until then the phenomena involved were themed only by a few specialists and NGOs; today, although the subject has not taken over national public spheres with the same fervor, everyone has heard of “modern slavery.” The expression appeared with its current meaning in the mid-1970s and its use remained rare and more or less restricted to the circle of international humanitarian agencies until the late 1990s, when several successful publications began to systematically apply the term to a vast aggregation of overlapping types of phenomena of abuse and exploitation spread throughout the world—namely human trafficking, forced labor, debt bondage, sex and child trafficking, worst forms of child labor and state-enforced labor. A “new abolitionist” cause rapidly emerged around which thousands of public and private organizations sprang up and billions of dollars were mobilized, leading to the spectacularly rapid rise of an anti-slavery industrial complex that

This work was supported by FCT., IP, the Portuguese national funding agency for science, research and technology, through the individual research grant SFRH/BD/130355/2017.

B. Lamas (✉)
ISEG, Lisbon School of Economics and Management, Lisbon, Portugal
e-mail: bl.urban@gmail.com

today has considerable prominence and influential power on the international political and humanitarian agenda. Quite easily, “modern slavery” has become institutionalized as a battle slogan, has taken on a life of its own and it is unreasonable to think that it will be out of the spotlight any time soon.

Decisive for its success was the entry into force in 2000 of the UN *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons*, a concern triggered by certain anxieties of Western States regarding migration resulting from the collapse of the USSR, and which immediately merged with the umbrella term of “modern slavery,” with which it is often confused and not always out of mere carelessness. Another success factor was the publication of a set of dubious estimates of the global number of slaves and their repetition throughout the media. The *Global Slavery Index* (GSI), developed by the mega-NGO *Walk Free Foundation*, estimated in 2013 the existence of 29.8 million slaves; in 2014 the number was 35.8 million; in 2016, 45.8 million and in 2018, 40.3 million. But, despite these quantifications, “modern slavery” is not an unequivocal and perfectly limited phenomenon that exists “out there” in the world and is immediately identified as such by everyone. It is not just that this two-word label applies to criminal practices that usually occur in the shadows or remote regions, and obviously it is not a collective worldwide hallucination either. There are indeed millions of human beings subsumed in the notion but there are also intense classification struggles over their representation. The emerging and rapidly evolving field is therefore both academic and political and involves a complex mix of theoretical and empirical research, discussions about subtleties of international and national laws, old and new NGOs competing for funding, grassroots activism, journalistic reporting and the unstable attention economy of social media. In this sense, despite the media dominance of the neo-abolitionist framework that in a way produced such an “object,” it is my understanding in this chapter that the term “modern slavery” names less a discrete set of phenomena than *a controversy around the legitimate modes of perception and representation* of a plethora of quite distinct but really existing and increasing practices of human bondage and exploitation in the capitalist world today. Using “slavery” as a strong catch-all word for all these phenomena sounds both a half-truth and a truth-and-a-half; it is as if it simultaneously explains too much and too little, precisely because the term seems to dispense explanation. But, on the other hand, it is not only a problem of representation but also of today’s confusing and dynamic objective reality.

An overview in a single chapter of this theoretically vast and politically rough field is a completely impossible task and there are already hundreds of publications that offer the reader very comprehensive and in-depth introductions. Considering the scope and purpose of this volume, it is appropriate above all to clarify and make more explicit the most relevant tensions at stake in the controversies of “modern slavery.” The first section seeks to present the main conceptual steps taken from the abolition of chattel slavery

to the umbrella term “modern slavery”; the second section presents an imminent critique of the ongoing classification struggles around “modern slavery”; the third and final section considers the so-called “root causes” and their frameworks.

THE CONCEPT OF SLAVERY: FROM THE ABOLITION OF CHATTEL SLAVERY TO THE UMBRELLA TERM “MODERN SLAVERY”

Concepts such as “slavery” are grounded in historical experience, mediate our perception of the world and cannot be reduced to mere verbal definitions; they are unstable and tension-filled social processes, inseparable from the life of a given social formation and sometimes full of emotional content, and even those with more universal pretensions cannot fail to have a particular history, gaining a status of abstract generality in specific social circumstances and to the detriment of other concepts. The particular experiences of the Atlantic world’s colonial slave system and the subsequent abolitionist movement so marked the collective consciousness of modern Western society that they ended up constituting fundamental moments in the modern concept of slavery itself. On the one hand, transatlantic slavery became the *prototype* of slavery, not only affecting our retrospective look at the servitude relations of pre-modern Western societies themselves, highlighting in particular the undeniably existing similarities, but also becoming the more or less explicit yardstick of comparison with many other institutions of human bondage in non-Western societies. On the other hand, it was in the course of the world-historical process of modernity that slavery emerged as “slavery-in-general,” a *general abstraction* (as nebulous as “king”) applied perhaps with too few reservations to diverse relations of personal dependence in different societies and thought of as a single universal institution with multiple forms (like “marriage”), but which, in the meantime, comparative historical research always ends up highlighting the New World slave system as something quite distinct (in terms of transcontinental scale, colonial setting, degrees of institutionalization, “economic” purpose and “racial” and gender bias). Transatlantic slavery was thus left in a paradoxical position: the most perfect and popular *example* of slavery (and, in Western culture, even of human bondage in general) which, at the same time, researches increasingly present as the *exception* in the history of a global meta-institution, a tension internal to the modern concept of slavery which even today proves very difficult to overcome.

Significantly, neo-abolitionism began precisely by calling on the Western public to abandon its mental image of slavery, advocating the need to elaborate a new, universal definition that encompasses “all forms of slavery.” Some believe that this is an epistemologically extremely complex and always unsatisfactory step; others that it is even inherently aporetic, since it is only possible to identify and compare the “slaves” in the most diverse historical societies if

we already have some concept of slavery. The search for a transhistorical definition tends to ignore this risk of an optical illusion or projection and to focus on the supposedly self-evident bundle of common attributes that converge in “slavery-in-general.”

A slave cannot exist alone; it thus seems safe to assert that considered abstractly slavery cannot but be a *relationship* between at least two individuals: the slave and the master. This is a logical inference from which the problem of identifying the remaining constituent elements of the dyad has usually been posed. Various concepts in themselves quite complex are evoked in this task, with each author presenting different sets: property, domination, exploitation, exclusion, violence, kinlessness, otherness (outsider, “racial” or ethnic other, etc.), dishonor, degradation, objectification of human beings, etc. Understanding concepts as a list of tick-boxes (slavery = a + b + c), the classification of phenomena tends to give rise to two questions: For “something” to be slavery must it necessarily exhibit all the attributes or only most or a “significant” part of them? Are all attributes of equal relevance, the “essence” of slavery being the respective set, or are some “more essential” than others? With the recent controversies over “modern slavery” and its criminal character, these questions seem increasingly crossed by another: while it is true that the relationship between at least two individuals is a *necessary* condition of slavery, is this a *sufficient* condition? While some of the attributes referred to above are inherently social (placing the slave in a certain position vis-à-vis society, in what Franz Steiner called a status of “total social range”¹), others are not, allowing conceptualizations reduced to a strictly interpersonal level. The interpersonal level is also always already social, but this cannot be represented in the legal sphere, whose specific concern is personal culpability, something essential after the illegalization of chattel slavery. At stake in these differences are fundamental problems that have long marked modern thinking about slavery.

First of all, it seems relatively clear that in the modern understanding of slavery, property and domination have stood out as the “most essential” concepts around which other attributes gravitate more or less close to this core. On the other hand, it seems also that in recent history they have not always had equivalent relevance, with property dominating the mode of representation most of the time. Rather than considering property as a bundle of features, it is important to bear in mind that although it appears to Western eyes to be only a private relationship between a subject and an object, it is actually a social relation of recognition between subjects mediated by objects, something that stands out when we speak of property as a *right* over something. The slave *qua* slave is an object of property, not a subject of property; hence he/she cannot recognize rights. Thus, if we observe slavery only in terms of property, it is not possible for it to be considered as only an interpersonal relationship, other actors being necessary and some form of legal admission of the relation (by a community, a “state”, etc.). From this point of view, the very term “chattel slavery” is a logical pleonasm, slavery is essentially a social status and has no genuine existence without some legal recognition

of ownership of human beings. This argument does not seem to consider the possibility of significant differences between actual social status and formalized legal permission, but we should not underestimate the historical force of its reasoning. After all, it was on this basis that the classical abolitionist project developed, also giving political expression to the historically new and specifically modern social beliefs that a human being cannot be property and that one of the conditions of his individual freedom is precisely to be the owner of himself (a condition that for a long-time excluded women and non-whites in general). Within this framework, the concept of slavery inevitably had to be fixed in a general legal abstraction on the inadmissibility of the ownership of human beings, simple enough to guarantee minimum legal certainty and the feasibility of the whole project on an international scale (although not all societies conceived property in Western terms). A historically important outcome of this process was the definition of slavery in the 1926 *Slavery Convention* as “the status or condition of a person over whom is exercised any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership” (Article 1). This legal definition was the product of a highly politicized conflict involving the various imperial powers struggling for colonial territories and their interest in keeping several forms of forced labor mobilized there outside the scope and concerns of the *Convention*.

Meanwhile, in 1956 came the *Supplementary Convention on the Abolition of Slavery, the Slave Trade and Institutions and Practices Similar to Slavery*. In its draft form the *Convention* was called *On Slavery and Servitude*, but the final version replaced the last term with the expression “practices similar to slavery” referring to four types: debt bondage, serfdom, servile marriage and child exploitation. This option reflected the growing hegemony of the Western slavery/freedom dichotomy and the vocabulary and conceptual impoverishment associated with it, ending up intensifying already existing problems, full of legal and political consequences, about how to classify various other existing forms of human bondage, both “old” and “new” and especially outside the Western world. These ambiguities facilitated a more expansive interpretation of the legal definition of slavery in the second half of the twentieth century and the subsequent emergence and progressive consolidation of the notion of “modern slavery.”

For minimal credibility and legitimization, neo-abolitionism needed a new definition of slavery, whose starting point had to be the possibility of de facto individual enslavement regardless of the social admission of *de jure* chattel slavery. As a result, the recognized legal ownership of a human being lost conceptual relevance and the criterion of domination, which of course had never ceased to be presupposed and disputed (think of the liberal discussion force *vs* consent), ended up being more and more explicitly put as the “most essential.” The notion of property is not completely unequivocal, but it has long allowed a relatively stable representation of slavery as essentially a *reduced or entirely separate social status*, more or less institutionalized and “easy” to identify historically, within which slaves were excluded from all “rights” and

protections but could have *variable individual experiences* depending above all on the personal actions of their master (which makes empirical generalizations very difficult). Differently, the notion of domination seems to imply unlimited shades of gray and is commonly represented in the modern West as a continuum or spectrum in which slavery tends to appear as a kind of *extreme or special experience*. Thus represented, one might say that the main question has been: “What specific form of domination constitutes a relationship of slavery?”

Decades before the current controversies, Orlando Patterson attempted to provide an answer through a comparison of more than sixty pre-1900 “social systems” where “slavery” was an institutionalized social status: “the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons.” Here the criterion of property is intentionally avoided and highlighted not only the personal, violent and permanent nature of the domination but also (and apparently with equal relevance) the specific social attributes of the individual victim (an uprooted outsider or a fallen insider that Patterson summed up in the concept of “social death”). Thus, the personal subjugation of the slave to the master seems to be a necessary but not sufficient condition of slavery, since the slave must also stand in a particular position in relation to society as a whole; only the set of all these characteristics constitutes genuine slavery, and any phenomena possessing only some of them always fall short. But Patterson’s approach is also somewhat ambiguous about the mediation between the social and the interpersonal and the exact role of violence, opening the door to “less sociological” interpretations: considering the facets of the power relation of slavery, Patterson states that “[t]he first is *social* and involves the use or threat of violence in the *control of one person by another*”; while slavery is presented as “*social death*” it is also considered “*primarily* a relation of *personal* domination.” This leads to a doubt: is slavery “a liminal state of social death” or the “permanent and violent domination” of one individual over another who is “socially dead”?²

Personal domination and control will become central for neo-abolitionism. Here the criterion of legal ownership is eliminated to account for the criminal character of slavery, but, significantly, the need for any social attributes of the enslaved is also erased for good; specificity is thus fundamentally in terms of the *relation of domination between two abstract individuals* (following legal rationality). Thus, similarly to other trends that also emerged in historiography, neo-abolitionism conceptualizes slavery not as a “social institution” but more abstractly as a “practice.” In Kevin Bales’ view and that of neo-abolitionism generally, “[t]he key characteristics of slavery are not about ownership but about how people are controlled”³; other attributes are also addressed but the most essential is the “control of one person (the slave) by another (the slaveholder or slaveholders),”⁴ something that is considered the common “matter” of all its “forms” and which occurs regardless of the existence of legal norms admitting such a relationship or any social particularities of its victim. “Defining slavery in all its forms” means defining its “matter”; thus, despite the frequent use of the term “form,” the “essence” is understood only

as the minimal abstract matter shared by all relations seen as “slavery” and both as not only analytically distinct but also separate from the form, which is actually treated as completely *inessential* (a “packaging” according to Bales). The problem is that at the phenomenological level there is no matter without a form; it is in fact the relation between matter and form that makes a “thing” what it really is, which is why in the real world both are *equally essential* (something neo-abolitionists realize when they try to practically “eradicate” a determinate “form of slavery”). We can mentally distinguish control from its form, but in actual reality control always has a particular form. Thus, since human beings can be controlled in various ways, one might ask: is there a form of control that always specifies “slavery” regardless of everything else? Usually, one tends to think in violent and physical forms of control; on the other hand, it is also known that historically this has not always proved to be a necessary or permanent condition for the control of slaves. Ambitioning trans-historical definitions, neo-abolitionists tend revealingly to oscillate between three different but partially overlapping attributes: the fact that the enslaved “are” controlled, the “way” they are controlled (alternating between the use of physical violence and its mere possibility) and the degree of control (“total,” “complete,” “overarching” are common predicates).

These and other ambiguities are inherent in a definition of slavery that is simply too abstract and naturally admits several “forms” or “manifestations”; if retro-applied in history it would significantly increase the number of “slaves.” But this is less the result of an epistemologically dubious process of abstraction than of a political-activist strategy to influence the matrix of public perception of personal domination, eventually muddying both popular taxonomies and the somewhat more formalized classification systems of the social and legal sciences. People in general tend to see slavery as a species of the genus human servitude or bondage, Marxists as a sub-class of “unfree labor” and the ILO as a sub-category of “forced labor.” Neo-abolitionists tend to pull “slavery” ever higher up the taxonomic hierarchies; it must continue to elicit the visceral and chilling reactions of a species (like “serpent”) but also have the degree of generality of a genus (like “animal”). But the fact that estimates of “modern slavery” rely on established classification systems ultimately gives rise to logical inconsistencies. Since 2013, GSI reports have included “slavery” and “slavery-like practices” as a sub-type of “modern slavery” and it is already common to refer to it as an “umbrella term” (as in GSI 2018). Meanwhile, the ILO, which for decades classified slavery as “a form of forced labor,” in its 2017 report⁵ adopted the nomenclature of its neo-abolitionist new partner (*Walk Free Foundation*), presenting “modern slavery” as an “umbrella term” and the genus of the species “forced labor” which in turn has a sub-type of “work imposed in the context of slavery”; slavery is thus both above and below the category “forced labor.” Surprisingly, “slavery” and “practices similar to slavery” “are not included explicitly in the estimates.”⁶ Thus, although the neo-abolitionist project has gained international visibility with uninterrupted declarations that

“modern slavery is real slavery,” these inconsistencies, its questionable statistics and the systematic use of the expression as a portmanteau have made it completely evident that it is “something” else.

CLASSIFICATION STRUGGLES AND THE THRESHOLD OF SLAVERY

Fierce classification struggles soon arose. Two critical approaches can be highlighted, very close to tendencies already present in the anti-slavery debates throughout the twentieth century: “strict equivalence” and “sufficient similarity.”⁷ Against neo-abolitionism’s transhistorical definition of slavery, a severe, fundamentally relativist and anti-essentialist critique was raised, based not on an alternative concept of slavery but rather on the transatlantic prototype; in this field we can highlight Julia O’Connell Davidson. Her critique, somewhat aporetic in this respect, is more or less as follows: it is not possible to universally define slavery because the result is always a political construct and a moral judgment, but it is absolutely certain that transatlantic slavery was slavery; since “none of the phenomena today described as such [‘modern slavery’] are the equivalent of transatlantic slavery”⁸ then none of them can be called “slavery” either. It is not clear what we are to understand by “equivalent” (functional? experience?) but the whole procedure seems to imply that the only genuine slavery was the exceptional transatlantic system of *de jure* chattel slavery and that there never really was slavery anywhere else or any time. Against the trivialization of the term “slavery” by neo-abolitionism an all-or-nothing game is played here that risks making it almost a forbidden word outside the transatlantic context.

A more moderate critique follows an epistemological trend derived from the Wittgensteinian concept of “family resemblances” (which inspired prototype theory). Patterson’s revision of his definition of slavery in his first reaction to the “modern slavery” controversy fits here: slavery is “the violent, corporeal possession of socially isolated and parasitically degraded persons.” Minimizing the differences with the previous formulation, Patterson also states that “there is no reason to demarcate an ‘old’ from a ‘new’ form of slavery.” Quite significantly, whereas his earlier understanding saw slavery as a class of objects with a restricted bundle of attributes necessarily in common, Patterson now admits a polythetic understanding, that is, a class where objects “have many but not all properties in common” and “more or less belong to such a class.” Although Patterson considers neo-abolitionist definitions and claims problematic, he also argues that “there are relations of domination today that have enough of these properties to justify being designated slavery.” Here, as before, it seems that the different properties of slavery continue to be seen as equally essential but now their quantification for class membership is admitted. A question arises: how many properties are “enough”? Patterson argues that “[p]olythetic definitions [...] have their limits” and that “other forms of forced labour and servitude in the world today may share some slave-like properties [...] but

they are not slavery, which is quite distinctive in its perfidy and its social, economic, cultural and psychological attributes.”⁹ But if it is “quite distinctive” it is not clear why a polythetic definition is needed whose “limits” seem to be subjectively determined, and which is exactly what allows for the expansive approach of neo-abolitionism. Meanwhile, Patterson’s replacement of “domination” with “corporeal possession” reflects a recent collective conceptual development.

Modern attempts to conceptualize slavery-in-general following the worldwide illegalization of chattel slavery have long since seemed to have an implicit central challenge: finding *the abstract point where the “domination” and “property” of a human being meet* (something already present in the Roman concept of *dominium*). Anticipating a topic of the current controversy, H. J. Nieboer argued in 1900 that slavery requires the “peculiar kind of compulsion, that is expressed by the word ‘possession’ or ‘property,’” arguing thereafter “to prefer the term ‘property’ that, better than the other term, conveys the notion, not only of a virtual subjection, but of a subjection considered legal in those communities where it exists.”¹⁰ Implicitly Nieboer’s formulation placed possession as a possible criterion of slavery (carefully qualified as virtual) on a strictly phenomenological and interpersonal level and in an extralegal context. In 2012, to clarify the legal definition of slavery in international law and to give some consistency to its use by neo-abolitionism, a research network of legal and social science scholars produced the *Bellagio-Harvard Guidelines on the Legal Parameters of Slavery* drawing precisely on this distinction between possession and property.¹¹ The *Guidelines* developed the consensual basis of neo-abolitionism with the interpretation that the 1926 legal definition of slavery, with the concepts of “status” (social) and “condition” (individual), perfectly accommodates both the old legal form and the current criminal form of slavery, and that the fundamental criterion is thus not the legal recognition of property but rather the factual exercise over an individual of the “powers attaching to the right of ownership,” with “possession” being conceivable without a legal system and the fundamental presupposed “power” of all the others (“use, management, profit, transfer or disposal”). In this sense, according to the *Guidelines*, “possession is foundational to slavery” and “[w]hile the exact form of possession might vary, in essence it supposes control over a person by another such as a person might control a thing. Such control may be physical, but physical constraints will not always be necessary to the maintenance of effective control over a person”; thus, slavery supposes the “control of a person tantamount to possession” (*Guideline 3–5*), possession being understood here *as a fact, not as a right*. The argument combines property with domination and seems both to clarify the terms of the 1926 definition and to reinforce the general neo-abolitionist transhistorical understanding that slavery is the existential condition of one individual controlled by another.

Meanwhile, it is highly significant that the *Guidelines* assume that slavery implies not a *form* of control but rather a *threshold of its intensity* (“tantamount to possession”); its measure is given by a metaphor (“such as a person might control a thing”), supplemented by a succession of other “examples” to compensate for cognitive uncertainty (*Guideline 4*). The “complete control” of the neo-abolitionists, which applied to humans is always a virtuality, finds its representation in a threshold of control where possession is achieved. But possession is a concept as pertinent as it is complicated, especially when applied to the special “things” that are living human beings. The now common analogy of a kilo of heroin¹² to show the difference between property and possession (and de jure and de facto slavery) may be legally instructive, but it is difficult to see the point of its application to human beings without more careful determinations. The *Guidelines* attempt to circumvent this ambiguity by repeatedly naming the threshold of control with a philosophical term that suggests something much more solid: “substance” (*Guidelines 5, 8–10*). Despite centuries-old disputes, it is consensual in the philosophical tradition that substances have relations but not the other way around, and it is difficult to understand what exactly is meant by the “substance of a relation” between two persons. This seems like an option with more rhetorical than analytical value. It is also not helpful that the *Guidelines* present what is in fact *another definition* of slavery: “control over a person in such a way as to significantly deprive that person of his or her individual liberty” (*Guidelines 2 and 3*). “Significantly” allows for subjective interpretations and it is symptomatic that the different scholars subscribing to the *Guidelines* end up diverging in their understanding of the threshold of control, with the consequence of guesstimates of modern slaves varying in the tens of millions. With these ambiguities around the relevance of the “form” of control and the differences between “effective control,” “control tantamount to possession” and “significant loss of liberty,” the *Guidelines* stimulate new uncertainties.

Despite the ambiguities (or because of them), the *Guidelines* acknowledge that slavery requires a necessarily empirical, a posteriori verification. But this is a requirement that very few neo-abolitionists actually comply with. Indeed, their success has always depended on a diametrically opposite orientation, and it does not seem to have changed one bit with the precisions attempted by the *Guidelines* (which is often evoked for legitimation purposes). Thus, for example, in flagrant contradiction to the spirit and content of the document, Kevin Bales and Monti N. Datta state that “[t]hese guidelines conceptualize slavery as an umbrella term,”¹³ seeking to reinforce once again their strategy of classifying certain relationships a priori as “forms of slavery.”

Also inspired by the *Guidelines* but strongly against the use of “modern slavery” as an umbrella term, Patterson and Zhuo have proposed the revitalization of “servitude” as the most generic term of the field, a term which has also long been used by other researchers to refer to the various non-Western hierarchies of personal dependency.¹⁴ Disagreeing with the terminology but assuming the estimates of the 2017 ILO report, the authors argue that more

than 40 million persons worldwide are presently in *servitude* but also that certain extreme forms “may be sufficiently slave-like to justify being called modern slavery”: “that condition in which one or more individuals or organizations exercise complete control and possession of a person’s body, labor, capabilities and movement through the overt or threatened use of violence or other forms of coercion.” According to the authors, “what is badly needed now is an approach that [...] attempts to estimate the differences between voluntarily initiated, though exploitative, relationships on the one hand and the cross-over to genuine slavery on the other.”¹⁵ The fact that Patterson and Zhuo present a concept of “modern slavery” but not “slavery” makes it difficult to understand how this new approach articulates with Patterson’s earlier definitions, not least for three reasons: (i) “modern slavery” is justified as a category because some relations “may be sufficiently *slave-like*,” but at the same time it is argued that some “cross-over to *genuine* slavery”; (ii) the criteria associated with “social death” is left out entirely for the first time and (iii) the focus is now on “complete control” and “corporeal possession,” following neo-abolitionist concerns with legal–criminal criteria.

In summary, it can be said that property (with its apparently recognizable silhouette) and domination (represented as a continuum of intensity) have been synthesized in the concept of possession, implying a devaluation of the understanding of “slavery” as a status of “total social range” and easily leading to an interpersonal abstraction based on the threshold of control of one individual by another (or others), *but each scholar seems to have a distinct understanding of what this means, of its exact measure, of the necessity of physical violence and of the possibilities or not of assuming a priori its presence in certain known forms of contemporary servitude.* In this sense, the expression “threshold of slavery,” which increasingly appears throughout the field, seems just a thoughtless compromise on which everyone agrees to disagree, being very difficult to reconcile with a general and almost obsessive impulse to urgently and a priori identify and count modern slaves.

Meanwhile, even if we follow the level of abstraction that characterizes the debate (in terms of an abstract dyad of slavery-in-general), all these approaches seem to demonstrate a longstanding difficulty in fully assuming slavery’s *relational character*. The relation of slavery does not exist without the relation of mastery, or rather they are the same relation observed from different points of view: the master–slave relationship. We must therefore consider what it necessarily implies and how it presents itself for each of the poles, but this is not exactly how modern thought tends to approach the problem. Theoretical analysis is haunted by the questions “What is slavery?” and “What is a slave?” Conversely, “What is mastery?” or “What is a master?” are rather rare explicit questions and hardly seem to disturb modern thought. At the same time, slavery tends to be represented as just the product of the objectifying practice of the master—the master is form and cause and the slave matter and effect (and do not the terms “enslaved” and “slaving” accentuate this understanding?); slavery is thus defined unilaterally by the abilities of the master.

The resulting paradox is that if one reads carefully some of the best-known definitions of “slavery” they seem much more like definitions of “mastery.”

This perspective is reinforced if we think of slavery as essentially a crime. The neo-abolitionist understanding is fundamentally guided by legal concerns and so the focus is on the criminal action of the slaveholder on the victim of enslavement. Without going beyond this framework, definitions of slavery cannot but continue to assume the master’s point of view, to emphasize his will and the purpose of his criminal practice and to represent the slave as a *liminal and metaphorical figure of objectification*; the so-called “substance” of slavery turns out to be just the power of the master. At the same time, neo-abolitionists make the master disappear, forget that no one is really a slave by themselves and present slavery as a “state of being” (comparing it to being “ill, lost, happy, recovering” which are *strictly individual conditions*).¹⁶ Hence, such definitions tend to assume the master’s point of view while removing him/her from the equation, thus giving the appearance of purely objective definitions.

Even assuming that complete control and the reduction of an individual to a mere possession are always the ultimate horizons of the master’s domination, we must acknowledge that this is only one side of the abstract dyad. Domination is a form of *interaction*, only a side of the domination–submission relationship, which in slavery means a violent dialectic of *command* and *forced obedience* (something that pre-modern thought knew all too well and that slave codes have always tried to guarantee). But the full implications of this dialectic tend to get lost amidst an ongoing struggle between a perspective that overemphasizes the reification of the slave and another that only sees the slave’s agency in resistance, insurrection, escape or even suicide. The former tends to reproduce the modern master’s representation of the ideal slave as an automaton, *as if* the slave were literally just a “thing” or his/her will could really be “appropriated,” “transferred” or an “extension” of the master’s will¹⁷; the latter seems to ignore the unfortunate truth that *submission is also an action* and that *obedient agents remain agents*, albeit through a paradoxical form of activity that appears to include passivity in itself (perhaps one of the reasons why the figure of the slave continues to intrigue Western metaphysics). The formulation “control tantamount to possession” aligns with the first perspective, but most neo-abolitionists make such a loose interpretation of it that slavery becomes the genus of the most disparate species of personal “unfreedoms.” Others try to prevent this expansion by emphasizing “corporeal possession.” But is this not also a logical pleonasm? What kind of possession of human beings would be if it were not “corporeal”? And will not slavery thus become indistinguishable from some conditions of detention and certain intimate forms of violence (abduction, kidnapping, prisoners of war, rape, etc.)? Historically, these phenomena are closely associated with enslavement (and may even be worse!) but such an emphatic concept of possession seems to imply the complete annulment of their conceptual differences with slavery. This ambiguity also exists in the *Guidelines*: it is not entirely clear

whether the “control of a person tantamount to possession” is considered a *precondition of slavery or in itself already slavery*.

Therefore, even at the level of the abstract dyad, unless we think that someone’s immobilized captive is immediately a slave, it seems that we cannot dispense with obedience. It is precisely obedience that allows the notion of a “maintenance of effective control over a person” (*Guidelines*) without the effective use of violence and “physical constraints,” *a threshold of complete control without implying a particular form of control*. And unless we think that all slaveries are mere variants of the Robinson Crusoe/Friday model, we also need to acknowledge that, although the slave is forced to obey the master, their dyad does not exist in a vacuum, and so the forces or powers at play are never only those of the master as an individual but also those of a certain *social context*, forces that he/she himself/herself did not create or control but that undeniably favor him/her, even when they do not legally support him/her.

These very general considerations are not intended to specify “slavery” (“modern” or otherwise) but just to remind us that *whatever the threshold of slavery, it will always be mediated by the slave’s obedience and a particular social whole*. A concept of slavery primarily concerned with *post factum* determination of criminal responsibility will tend to ignore or downplay these mediations and, conversely, to emphasize the slaveholder’s strategic action as *the main cause of both entry and permanence* of the “enslaved” in bondage; but for a significant part of the phenomena represented as “modern slavery” this can be a very problematic framework. At the heart of the controversy over the threshold of slavery is, first, the difficulty in conceptually dealing with the widely documented and recognized fact that *the most frequent entry point* into the relationships labeled “modern slavery” is a convergence between a desperate job search or an opportunity for a slightly better life and a more or less fictitious or fraudulent offer of any kind, through a process in which violence is very rarely present. Secondly, there is the acknowledged fact that, on many occasions, it is far from obvious that *the permanence of the “enslaved”* in bondage and its “effective control” depends fundamentally on the exercise of violence or even on its threat. There are powerful impersonal forces at play here, the same social forces that condemn a growing part of humanity to misery and destitution and confront them with impossible choices. For this reason, perhaps it was too hasty to abandon the notion of “social death.”

FRAMEWORKS AND ROOT CAUSES: HOW WIDE AND HOW DEEP?

“Modern slavery,” “human trafficking,” “modern servitude,” “forced labor”: the terminology is not neutral and reflects different agendas, but the long and intense controversies surrounding the umbrella term clearly contrast with the small space dedicated to explanations of phenomena and even a certain formal consensus regarding what in the field is often called “root causes.” Here we are at the level of theory, not classifications, and whatever the generic

term, the common central challenge seems to be in explaining the current growth of the number of individuals living and working daily under more or less violent forms of personal domination through their mediation with the objective structures of the contemporary global economy. It is impossible to adequately present the complexity of the different positions here, but we can sketch some contrasts.

By root cause we can understand the underlying, fundamental, deep and not directly visible cause of a certain phenomenon or event; its determination is carried out through careful abstraction and requires a theoretically oriented reflection that considers the objectivity of the global social process and goes beyond appearances and immediate factuality which, however, cannot fail to be the starting point of reflection. Usually, these causes are distinguished from proximate causes, which are the more immediate, particular and contingent conditions or decisions that trigger the phenomenon or event. This distinction arises across the field but there are different understandings of what it means and what its content is. Poverty and globalization are unanimously considered the main root causes of “modern slavery”; to these are often added others such as demographic growth, government corruption, migratory movements, labor market deregulation, racial, caste and gender discrimination, etc. Some authors classify as proximate all the previous factors that involve national state policies of any scope, corruption or poor law enforcement¹⁸; others seem to regard as proximate causes exclusively the immediate criminal activities of “slaveholders.” In many neo-abolitionist authors, rhetoric and the lack of clarity can lead to an immediate identification between underlying and proximate causes, when, for example, the human greed of “traffickers” is presented as a root cause; this confusion is accentuated when the representation of slavery as a millenary practice of malefic slaveholders is accompanied by mathematical models that supposedly predict the crime of “modern slavery,” leading to parallel and contradictory accusations of both subjectivism and objectivism.

What does it mean to say that poverty is a root cause of “modern slavery”? The idea seems to be that poverty somehow “pushes” free individuals into “modern slavery.” In itself this is not new; after all, historiography has long shown that poverty is one of the main reasons for self-enslavement or the “selling” of children in pre-modern societies. But is this poverty the same poverty we have today? And is the wealth of pre-modern societies the same wealth that we have in global contemporary society? Poverty and wealth are indeterminate abstractions; nothing is specified with these terms without considering a particular social form. And is not there also a close historical relationship between what is generically called “globalization” and the peculiar modern forms of poverty and wealth? And do not these root causes have also historical roots?

It seems relatively consensual that the global economy is a capitalist economy, that capitalist economy is a money economy and that capitalism is based on a socially generalized competitive process of transforming money into more money. Exactly how this purpose is achieved and the social effects

it has are what seem to be the motives of the most heated controversies. Even so, it can hardly be disputed that historically the constitution and development of world capitalism has always entailed the progressive monetization of social relations. Retrospectively and seen in the long run, the general trend was the historical metamorphosis, certainly asynchronous but real, of the most diverse relations of personal dependence and obligation into more abstract relations increasingly mediated by money and the socially objective presence of the market. This supposed “civilizing process” was far from peaceful and always combined indirect coercion and direct organized violence on an international scale, both private and state-led, with the fundamental purpose of expropriating populations from their immediate means of subsistence and pushing them to commodity-producing labor. Many times, this strategy even accompanied the formal abolition of chattel slavery. The “civilizing mission” of twentieth-century Eurocolonialism usually meant: “No one will be your legal owner anymore, but you will work, be it the easy way or the hard way!”; the “easy way” usually involved the monetization of taxes to coerce local populations into wage labor, and in non-existent or still incipient monetary national economies the very “hard way” was the norm. It is not difficult to see that the practical international success of abolitionism, especially when it aimed at something more than the simple juridical ban on chattel slavery, has always been fundamentally dependent on the implementation and expansion of the monetary economy, some form of paid labor and the historically specific capitalist *social nexus between labor and money* that today permeates the world as a whole. At the same time, this process of worldwide imposition of the market economy was accompanied by the territorialization of the national state form. Of the one hundred and ninety-five existing states, more than one hundred were constituted during the twentieth century, implying more than one hundred and thirty thousand kilometers of new borders; this means that more than half of the border perimeters existing today in the world emerged more or less in the last hundred years, demonstrating that the globalization of market freedom has historically been accompanied by an unprecedented deployment of new boundaries and control systems of human mobility. Together, *the transnational economic form of capital and the territorialized political form of the nation-state constitute the fundamental structure of the contemporary world*, and there are no “traditional” relationships or remote villages that have not been touched or affected by this global complex.

It is the systemic character of this planetary social totality that allows the very idea of prediction models of modern slavery. But although modern slavery is declared to be global, the data, results and matrix of interpretation usually follow methodological nationalism, that is, they have countries as the unit of analysis and explanation (countries have slaves, economies, poverty, etc.). But do statistical correlations between national estimates of “modern slaves” with poverty indexes or corruption rankings make the root causes “visible”? And does not methodological nationalism cause serious distortions? For

some time now, “modern slavery” has been called “the underside of globalization,” but by reducing globalization to the degree of national openness to world trade and the like, some authors now try to statistically demonstrate that “modern slavery” prevalence is much lower in those countries that are more globalized.¹⁹ So, if we ask what is the cause of poverty, some neo-abolitionists immediately answer “modern slavery.” Indeed, one of the tendencies is to *represent “modern slavery” as a cause of its own root causes and several other global problems.* Is this dialectical or circular reasoning? Kevin Bales argues that “modern slavery” is “a major cause of depressed economies,” what “best explains differences in human development between countries,” “one of the world’s largest greenhouse gas producers” and “a leading cause of the natural world’s destruction.”²⁰ These arguments seem to herald a metamorphosis of the “modern slavery” framework into a worldview.

Critics of the “modern slavery” framework tend in general to opt for the term “forced labor,” inserting the phenomena in a *critical analysis of neoliberalism* and sometimes showing thoroughly its relations with the deregulation of labor markets, public disinvestment, global commodity chains, immigration laws, etc. Although not shared equally by all, perhaps the key argument here is that “the root causes of forced labor are fundamentally and inherently *political.*”²¹ But is not this another way of immediately re-identifying root causes with proximate causes, this time at the level of governing elites? It is undeniable that political power and decisions partially shape or condition the evolution of events and in some countries forced labor is even state-driven (and as such should be fought on principle), but the idea that the root causes of forced labor that proliferates in the private economy throughout the world are “fundamentally political” seems an attempt to change the very meaning of the concept of root cause. And is there not here also some illusion as to the power of political will and the purpose and capacity of states? Is “modern slavery” fundamentally a consequence of decades of neoliberalism, reversible with new neo-Keynesian reforms, or rather the expression of a deeper problem in the capitalist social form of which neoliberalism was already a symptom?

Over the years Kevin Bales has insisted that the modern demographic explosion is the main root cause or push factor of “modern slavery”; this thesis is rarely adopted by other neo-abolitionists, but, surprisingly, it is also not theoretically refuted by their critics, who overwhelmingly ignore it or simply dismiss it with short comments. Bales uses a Malthusian argument and the principle of supply and demand to cover five thousand years of human history and sustain that the number of “modern slaves” is above all determined by the rapid population growth of the twentieth century, especially in the Global South, which combined with poverty have “flooded the market with potentially enslavable people” and caused an unprecedented slave price collapse.²² But what exactly is a “potentially enslavable person”? One thing is certain: he/she is not a *de facto* slave yet. So, which “market” is it that is “flooded”? A labor market saturated by the supply of “free” and cheap self-owners. But this means there is also something deeply wrong with the “freedom”

that neo-abolitionism promises. Neo-abolitionists argue frequently that freeing “modern slaves” is a “great investment,” that “freed slaves” are an “asset” that will “pump the economy” and stimulate national markets; but why are not still “free” “potential slaves” doing this? The answer is implicit in other moments of Bales’ argument: “The sheer volume of people in the developing world compared to the number of new industrial jobs means that many of them are [...] ‘redundant.’”²³ So it is not just about population growth but also and simultaneously the size of the industrial labor market. This dual character of the problem is far from being specific to the “developing world”; what has not been noticed is that this is exactly what Karl Marx called “the absolute general law of capitalist accumulation,” the fact that globally the “working population always increases more rapidly than the valorization requirements of capital,” creating an ever-increasing share of a “stagnant” and “consolidated surplus population” that is more abandoned than exploited by capital.²⁴

Unlike the classical abolitionism of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, which had a whole world-historical horizon of several decades of expansion of the monetary economy and industrial development, enabling the massive increase in “free” wage labor and the corresponding creation of domestic markets, twenty-first century neo-abolitionists face the consequences of the Third Industrial Revolution of microelectronics and increasing automation that for the first time in the history of capitalism start to create far fewer jobs than those they eliminate, all this in a fully monetized global economy where the social nexus labor-money has become naturalized as a mediation between individual human beings’ physical existence and their social recognition. An increasing mass of human beings is thus objectively dismissed from the labor market and at the same time objectively coerced into competing with each other for the “free” sale of their labor power; obviously, this contradiction has terrible barbaric potential.

However, neither the neo-abolitionists nor their critics hypothesize that the phenomena of “modern slavery” are an expression of *a deep and irreversible structural crisis of capitalism*, although their positions express the real contradictions of the situation and their research seems to describe in detail its very effects: *a global crisis of labor, a logic of social superfluity and the violent containment of “redundant” populations.*²⁵ The crisis does not manifest itself with equal intensity and scale everywhere and so we must in no way ignore the real differences, not only in terms of social stratification but also gender, “race,” age, nationality and geographic location; but these are differences within *a global trend of negative development*, giving rise to an unstable *hierarchy of superfluity* that crosses world society from one end to the other and feeds all types of social Darwinism and exclusion ideologies. Thus, instead of continuing to consider “developing” countries as delayed in their modernization or globalization and as places where slavery “still exists,” it might be better to understand them as the most advanced stage of the ongoing crisis of capitalism, a process that in one way or another will inevitably reach the “developed” world as well.

CONCLUSION

The clarification about the truth of contemporary relationships loosely subsumed in the umbrella term “modern slavery” has become hopelessly entangled in a discussion about what slavery has always been, as if this distillation was simultaneously more true and more real than what is transitory and new. Devaluing the *historical and social dimensions of both phenomena and our perception of them*, the discussion intends to reach a minimum content common to all relational forms considered “slavery,” while seeming to ignore that the result can only be a general abstraction, a master key that enters all locks but does not actually open any door. The question rapidly becomes whether a large and diffuse set of phenomena “justifies” or “deserves” a particular name, with all the political, legal and emotional effects that such a name implies (and it is probable that if the umbrella term was “modern servitude” the controversy would not even have started), but beyond a tactical moral discomfort that raises the profile of many of these practices, the naming itself seems to add very little real knowledge about what is happening.

NOTES

1. Franz B. Steiner, “A Comparative Study of the Forms of Slavery” (PhD thesis, University of Oxford, 1949), 74.
2. Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982), 1, 13, 50, 293.
3. Kevin Bales, *New Slavery: A Reference Handbook* (Santa Barbara, California: ABC-CLIO, Inc., 2004), 3.
4. “Slavery in Its Contemporary Manifestations,” in *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*, ed. Jean Allain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 370.
5. ILO, Walk Free, and IOM, *Global Estimates of Modern Slavery: Forced Labor & Forced Marriage* (Geneva: ILO, Walk Free Foundation, IOM, 2017).
6. *Ibid.*, 17.
7. Joel Quirk, “The Anti-Slavery Project: Linking the Historical and Contemporary,” *Human Rights Quarterly* 28, no. 3 (2006): 569.
8. Julia O’Connell Davidson, *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 207.
9. Orlando Patterson, “Trafficking, Gender & Slavery: Past and Present,” in *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary*, ed. Jean Allain (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 322, 329, 359.
10. H.J. Nieboer, *Slavery as an Industrial System. Ethnological Researches* (Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1900), 4, 31.
11. Jean Allain, ed., *The Legal Understanding of Slavery: From the Historical to the Contemporary* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 375–81.
12. Jean Allain and Kevin Bales, “Slavery and Its Definition,” *Global Dialogue* 14, no. 2 (2012): 3.
13. Kevin Bales and Monti Datta, “Slavery as a Social Institution,” in *International Encyclopedia of the Social and Behavioral Sciences* (2^oed.) (Elsevier, 2015), 43.

14. Orlando Patterson and Xiaolin Zhuo, "Modern Trafficking, Slavery, and Other Forms of Servitude," *Annual Review of Sociology* 44 (2018): 410.
15. *Ibid.*, 410, 411, 430.
16. Jean Allain, "Identifying a Case of Slavery," in *The Antislavery Usable Past*, eds. Kevin Bales and Zoe Trodd (Nottingham: The Rights Lab, 2020), 221.
17. Neo-abolitionists tend to be contradictory in this respect: they often argue simultaneously that the slave's will has been "transferred" and that he/she works "against his/her will."
18. See, for example, Sally Cameron and Edward Newman, *Trafficking in Humans: Social, Cultural and Political Dimensions* (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2008).
19. See, for example, Todd Landman and Bernard W. Silverman, "Globalization and Modern Slavery," *Politics and Governance* 7, no. 4 (2019).
20. Kevin Bales, *Ending Slavery: How We Free Today's Slaves* (University of California Press, 2007), 219; Kevin Bales and Benjamin K. Sovacool, "From Forests to Factories: How Modern Slavery Deepens the Crisis of Climate Change," *Energy Research & Social Science* 77 (2021): 8–9.
21. Genevieve LeBaron et al., *Confronting Root Causes: Forced Labour in Global Supply Chains* (Sheffield: openDemocracy and the Sheffield Political Economy Research Institute [SPERI], University of Sheffield, 2018), 62.
22. Kevin Bales, "Contemporary Coercive Labor Practices—Slavery Today," in *The Cambridge World History of Slavery. Volume 4: Ad 1804–Ad 2016*, eds. David Eltis, et al. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), 661.
23. Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (University of California Press, 2012), 234.
24. Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy. Volume One* (London: Penguin Books, 1990), 798.
25. See Bruno Lamas, *When Looms Begin to Weave by Themselves: The Decomposition of Capitalism, Automation and the Problem of "Modern Slavery,"* Joseph C. Miller Memorial Lecture Series (Berlin: EB-Verlag, 2021).

FURTHER READINGS

- Brace, Laura, and Julia O'Connell Davidson. *Revisiting Slavery and Antislavery: Towards a Critical Analysis*. New York: Springer International Publishing, 2018.
- Bunting, Annie, and Joel Quirk, eds. *Contemporary Slavery The Rhetoric of Global Human Rights Campaigns*. Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 2017.
- Bush, M.L. *Servitude in Modern Times*. Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000.
- Lebaron, Genevieve, J.R. Pliley, and D.W. Blight. *Fighting Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking: History and Contemporary Policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021.
- Piotrowicz, Ryszard, Conny Rijken, and Baerbel H. Uhl, eds. *Routledge Handbook of Human Trafficking*. New York: Routledge, 2017.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Injection: Modern Slavery and Political Strategy

Joel Quirk 

INTRODUCTION

The last three decades have been marked by a major global investment in the concept of “modern slavery,” which is also closely associated with the related categories of human trafficking and forced labor. These categories mean different things from a legal standpoint, yet the finer distinctions between them routinely get lost, with modern slavery, human trafficking, and forced labor frequently being portrayed as essentially interchangeable and equivalent. Most references to modern slavery are not based on careful historical analysis or expert legal knowledge, but instead draw upon the historical and symbolic notoriety of slavery as an exceptional category. Thanks in large part to the numerous atrocities that defined centuries of transatlantic enslavement, slavery is commonly recognized as epitomizing the absolute “worst of the worst” as far exploitation, vulnerability, and coercion are concerned. When specific practices are described as forms of slavery, or as slavery by another name, this frequently involves politically motivated efforts to strategically harness the historical notoriety of transatlantic slavery to highlight exceptional abuses. Framed in these terms, modern slavery can be best understood as an evocative concept, rather than a clearly defined analytical or legal category, with “slavery” chiefly serving as a symbolic marker, or floating signifier.

J. Quirk (✉)
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg, South Africa
e-mail: joel.quirk@wits.ac.za

This chapter approaches modern slavery from a political and strategic standpoint. This means focusing upon how and why the category of slavery has been applied to different practices and problems, and with the political consequences that have followed from this association. As we shall see, contemporary efforts to establish a dividing line between slave and non-slave, or “free” and “unfree,” will always be an inherently political exercise. Some activists have embraced the language of modern slavery because they believe that classifying specific practices as forms of slavery will help to promote corrective action to combat specific cases of exploitation and abuse. There is an underlying strategic calculation at work here: labeling practices as slavery is assumed to generate levels of attention and investment that would not otherwise be available. However, this calculation is less straight-forward than it might initially appear. Claims about slavery are likely to be treated with suspicion if/when they are applied too broadly and indiscriminately, and conversations about “modern slavery” may also end up diluting or sidelining histories of enslavement and their legacies.¹ As Adelle Blackett observes, “slavery is not a metaphor,” yet it frequently gets treated as such.² At the other end of the equation, there are also numerous occasions where political and economic elites also try their best to restrict the definition of slavery, since they have direct interests in labor systems and other practices which they would prefer not to be associated or equated with slavery. Corporations and employers who mistreat and abuse their workers will still insist that their workers are “free,” and therefore do not require better treatment.

The key point at issue here is the different ways in which claims about modern slavery can end up tacitly legitimating, or at least de-prioritizing, other kinds of practices. Whenever slavery is the yardstick against which other practices are measured then exploitative practices which appear as “bad but not all that bad” can end up appearing unremarkable, or even desirable. Free labor always sounds preferable to slave labor. Who wouldn’t want to be free if slavery was the alternative? However, these frequently abstract alternatives are not always particularly useful in analytical or political terms. The highly sanitized image of “free” labor which is typically found in economic textbooks frequently bears little or no relation to the forms of precarity, vulnerability, exploitation, and abuse endured by huge numbers of people. According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), there were around 24.5 million people subject to forced labor globally in 2016. This estimate is not especially reliable, but it can nonetheless be employed as a rough benchmark. The ILO also recently calculated that over 60 percent of the world’s employed population—or two billion people—were engaged within the informal economy.³ Most labor which gets formally classified as “free” is also routinely defined by exploitation and abuse, inadequate and irregular wages, stigmatization and discrimination, unhealthy and dangerous conditions, and sexual harassment and assault. The Covid-19 pandemic has only further exacerbated this situation.

The first half of this chapter focuses upon the politics of classification and comparison. It explores the ways in which different contemporary practices have been benchmarked against the iconography of transatlantic enslavement. It also identifies two key themes—consent and treatment—which are argued to play a central role in shaping efforts to classify and rank their relative severity. The second section connects this analysis to the political dynamics behind the emergence of the category of modern slavery and the challenges and complications associated with recent policy interventions. The central argument of this section is that targeting specific cases of “exceptional” abuse—modern slavery—will always be more politically appealing than confronting the global systems and interests that currently benefit from highly exploitative forms of “free” labor.

THE POLITICS OF CLASSIFICATION AND COMPARISON

The ambiguity which now surrounds slavery can be traced to the effects of its legal abolition.⁴ Until relatively recently, slavery was a legally recognized category that was officially regulated and defended by governments and religious authorities. While different historical slave systems had different features, they were nonetheless broadly defined by a series of publicly recognized rules which governed the status of the enslaved in a variety of distinctive ways. People who were enslaved were in little doubt as to their status, since there were elaborate systems in place that carefully codified how they could be sold, inherited, or manumitted, along with other extensive powers exercised by their enslaver. These systems were in turn defended by layers of violence and surveillance, which were designed to collectively keep the enslaved in their “rightful” place, and to prevent and punish resistance. Our world today is now organized on very different terms thanks to the passage of numerous laws outlawing slavery throughout the globe. There remains no shortage of examples of exploitation, vulnerability, and coercion, but the elaborate systems that regulated and defended slavery as a distinct status and institution have been almost entirely dismantled, although their systemic legacies persist through systems of racism, discrimination, and privilege.

This creates all kinds of challenges when it comes to applying the category of slavery to contemporary practices. Most conversations about modern slavery chiefly focus upon individual cases, rather than institutional characteristics. This means that the category of “slave” is typically applied to a subcategory of individual cases within a much larger population (although there are some exceptions to this pattern, such as entire populations who are collectively and uniformly subject to forced labor, such as prisoners in North Korean gulags). The logic here is hard to fault. Not all migrants, war captives, supply chain workers, or other vulnerable populations are going to have the same kinds of experiences, so if we want slavery to be a meaningful category then there is a strong case to be made for limiting its scope to exceptional cases of exploitation and abuse. However, this also means concentrating upon differences in

degree, rather than differences in kind. Numerous workers will experience exploitation and abuse, but only a minority of workers are likely to experience levels of abuse which are determined to rise to the threshold associated with slavery.

These kinds of variations in experience are commonly described in terms of a scale or spectrum.⁵ Some practices are said to belong at the pinnacle of the scale, and therefore merit being classified in exceptional terms: modern slavery. Others are instead located further down. In this context, efforts to determine where the category of slavery should be applied typically focus upon two core themes: (1) the absence of meaningful consent combined with (2) high levels of physical and psychological ill-treatment, premature death, unconstrained authority, and hard and unhealthy labor for little or no reward. Consent is not always straightforward, since there are times when it can be difficult to disentangle individual choices from structural constraints. Conversations about modern slavery usually avoid these more ambiguous cases and instead prioritize cases which feature more clear-cut examples; captivity, overt coercion, and/or children. Much the same applies when it comes to treatment, with an emphasis on cases of acute forms of abuse, “disposable people”⁶ and/or “control tantamount to possession.”⁷ Ideas about “innocence” also play a further role. Assessments of relative severity tend to be mediated by notions of vulnerability and culpability, with particular concern being directed toward “women and children” who are not regarded as responsible for their fate.⁸

These twin themes of consent and treatment are strongly linked to inherited images of transatlantic enslavement, which tend to function as the primary (if not always acknowledged) benchmark for comparison when it comes to evaluating the status and severity of different forms of exploitation. As scholars such as Igor Kopytoff have argued, comparisons between transatlantic enslavement and other forms of exploitation tend to be structured around subjective appraisals of “good” or “bad” treatment, which in turn function as imperfect benchmarks for assessing relative severity.⁹ Within this context, transatlantic enslavement is commonly defined in terms of a series of powerful images, spectacles, and testimonials of extraordinary suffering and abuse: chains, ships, whips, auctions, and death. This iconography has a complex and contested history, and it tends to prioritize bodily suffering over the less visible yet still massively harmful psychological and social effects of enslavement. Slavery was not only a system of extreme violence and terror. It was also a system of extreme subordination and discrimination that placed extreme restrictions on movement, community, work, and family. It would still have been monstrous *without* extreme bodily suffering. However, these aspects routinely get lost when it comes to comparative evaluation. Treatment is chiefly understood in terms of acute levels of physical abuse and material deprivation.

This politics of classification and comparison is structured in hierarchical terms. Modern comparisons between transatlantic enslavement and various forms of contemporary exploitation typically locate transatlantic enslavement at an exceptional position at the apex of a hierarchical scale, and then further

argue that there are specific cases of exploitation, vulnerability, and coercion that should be classified as the substantive equivalent of transatlantic enslavement, and thus warrant being classified as examples of modern slavery. This can be visually represented in terms of a triangle (Fig. 38.1), with transatlantic enslavement occupying a position at the uppermost point, and other categories or “levels” of exploitation and vulnerability being located further down the scale based on comparative appraisals of their “lesser” severity. Many historical practices could also potentially be analyzed in similar terms, but for this chapter the main concern is how the contemporary practices are benchmarked against inherited images of transatlantic enslavement.

This contemporary focus is reflected in the other categories which have been included here: “lesser” forms of servitude, exploitative “free” labor, and “normal” labor and living conditions. None of these categories are straightforward or clear-cut. Firstly, we have servitude, which is an umbrella term that is usually understood to include slavery as a subcategory, with other forms of servitude including serfdom, pawnship, and indentured, bonded, and forced labor. The language of “lesser” servitudes, which comes from the work of international lawyer Jean Allain, refers to practices that are said to fall just short of slavery, but which nonetheless said to share core features in common.¹⁰ The most important touchstone here is the 1956 United Nations Supplementary Slavery Convention, which expanded the scope of international obligations against slavery by including additional provisions specifically targeting “practices and institutions similar to slavery.”

Next comes highly exploitative “free” labor. Whenever free labor gets compared to slavery—or “unfree” labor more broadly—the terms of the comparison almost invariably end up casting free labor in a highly favorable

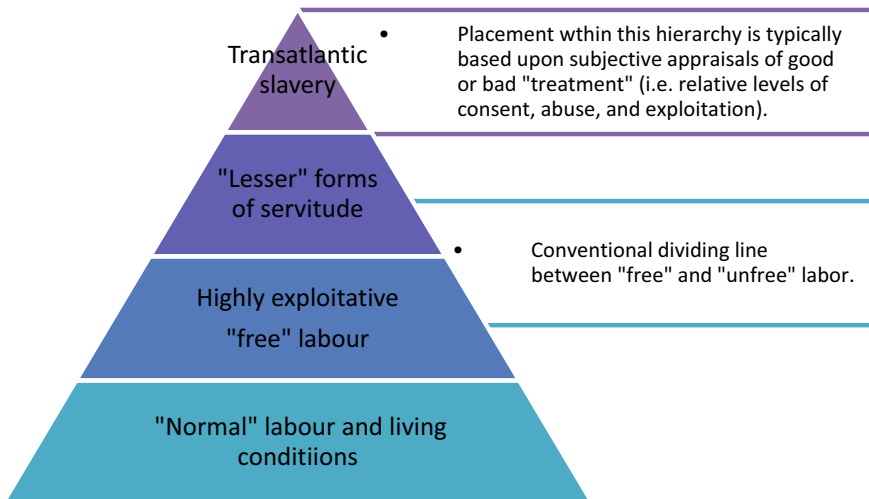


Fig. 38.1 Benchmarking contemporary practices against transatlantic enslavement

light. This is politically significant, because it portrays “free” labor as a condition which is positive or desirable, and in turn suggests that people should be thankful to be “free.” Although freedom is commonly associated with many positive virtues, the accompanying language of “choice” or “consent” can sometimes end up obscuring more than it reveals.¹¹ In theory, free labor involves workers negotiating a deal with an employer regarding their service. If the employer uses direct coercion to compel them to start work, or to continue to work, then their labor is said to be “unfree.” However, there will be countless examples where desperate workers lack viable alternatives, and therefore “freely” consent to highly exploitative conditions.

There are currently hundreds of millions of “free” laborers across the globe who endure terrible and irregular wages, unsafe and unhealthy workspaces and homes, sexual harassment and assault, and bullying and abuse. They may well be formally free to leave, in the sense that they retain the capacity to seek out other forms of work, but their capacity to exercise any kind of individual “choice” nonetheless remains severely constrained by their precarious status and a shortage of viable alternatives. It is also worth noting here that the triangle can be potentially misleading, since highly exploitative “free” labor is actually much more common than the “normal” labor and living conditions located at the bottom end of the scale. In this context, “normal” can be best understood as a marker for the highly privileged wages and living conditions enjoyed by most people in wealthy developed countries. Normal does not mean widespread, but instead refers to privileged circumstances that appear as “normal” from the vantage point of activists and organizations in the Global North, who have the largest voice within modern slavery conversations.

Some of the issues at stake here can be usefully illustrated by thinking about labor practices in global supply chains. As is well known, the last three decades have seen numerous international corporations engage in a “race to the bottom,” with most aspects of production processes and supply chains being relocated to countries in the Global South with lower wages, less regulation, and fewer workplace protections. For corporate executives, the main goal of the global supply chain is to maximize corporate profits while minimizing their political and legal liability by subcontracting and outsourcing. Major corporations exercise their market power to drive down costs per unit, since their suppliers in the Global South have limited capacity to bargain for better returns or less demanding production cycles.¹² This combination of low prices and high expectations means that companies down the chain are under sustained pressure to minimize wages and working conditions. Contracts get subcontracted and then subcontracted again, creating multiple layers between the corporation and the worker produces the goods required.

How should workers toward the bottom of these global supply chains be classified? Do they belong in the “free” labor category, or do their circumstances sometimes rise to the threshold of slave or unfree labor? When faced with the question of classification should we focus upon similarities with slavery (i.e., exceptionally bad treatment), and thereby advance an argument

that exploitative working conditions endured at the bottom of the chain should be classified as the same as, or as bad as, slavery. Should we alternatively concentrate upon differences, and thereby advance a counterargument that supply chain workers cannot be equated or associated with slavery, and therefore should be positioned at a lower point on the scale? How specific practices get classified is rarely neutral or disinterested, but instead gets influenced by competing agendas and interests. It should come as no surprise that corporations and supply chain subcontractors favor the second approach, since no modern company wants to be known for sanctioning or practicing slavery.

Questions of classification usually involve both *de jure* (in law or policy) and *de facto* (in practice or substance) considerations. Corporations and governments who insist that their conduct should not be compared to slavery usually emphasize *de jure* arguments which concentrate upon the design of law and policy, where they can argue that official regulations that have been designed very differently to legal slavery. By contrast, activists who seek to establish connections with slavery usually concentrate upon *de jure* arguments which emphasize similarities in lived experience, where it is maintained that regulations are frequently ignored and/or selectively enforced, and that any credible classification should therefore be based upon what actually happens in practice.

These dynamics can be found in many contexts. Another notable example is the legal arrangements which typically govern migrant workers who travel internationally to work on constructions project or in private households. These workers are regulated by employment contracts and visa arrangements which are laid out in laws and policies, but they also continue to be subjected to exploitation and abuse. Various historical parallels can be drawn here. When the transatlantic slave trade was legally abolished, the British, French, and Portuguese turned to indentured labor schemes, which saw millions of workers from India and elsewhere sign contracts that operated in ways which resembled slave trading. How much weight should we assign to contracts and consent? How important are the lived experiences of workers? How should we respond when some workers are treated in one way while others have different experiences?

There are an estimated 23 million migrant workers in the Middle East, and many millions in other parts of the world. They are not always treated the same, yet the systems under which they labor have been designed to leave them in vulnerable situations. Migrant workers usually need work visas in to travel, and these visas usually come with numerous restrictions, making it very difficult for workers to change employers while also leaving them vulnerable to threats of deportation. This does not mean, however, that these workers should be reduced to the status of passive victims of arbitrary power. In her recent work on migrant domestic workers in the United Arab Emirates Rhacel Parreñas cautions against an “absolutist perspective.” She carefully documents the effects of “legal infantilization,” but also argues that domestic workers are more likely to “encounter considerate employers than sadistic ones,” and that

their experiences are “morally mediated.”¹³ Like all forms of labor, domestic work continues to be highly gendered.¹⁴

Two main themes can be extracted from this analysis. Firstly, it should be evident that there will always be competing positions regarding how specific practices should be classified, and the terms on which they should be compared with other practices. We should not expect to reach a lasting consensus when it comes to whether any number of exploitative practices currently found in our world today should be classified as the same as, similar to, or entirely separate from slavery, and therefore deserve to be equated with or distanced from transatlantic enslavement. Laws and regulations can sometimes help to clarify the terms of this debate, but they are unlikely to provide a definitive resolution, since they will invariably be further disagreements regarding how they should be applied in practice and/or whether they actually correspond to lived experiences. Secondly, there will always be any number of practices which will fall short of an underlying “worst of the worst” threshold. Does focusing upon exceptional cases run the risk of normalizing—or minimizing—other forms of everyday exploitation? Millions of workers are subject to highly exploited “free” labor. Should the main priority be all vulnerable workers or only workers abused to an exceptional degree? As Janie Chuang has argued, the parameters of slavery and trafficking have been marked by “exploitation creep,” where they are stretched beyond their legal meanings for activist purposes.¹⁵ Despite this expansion, the vast majority of cases of exploitation, vulnerability, and abuse still fall outside the remit of campaigns focusing on modern slavery. This is crucial to their political appeal.

MODERN SLAVERY AND THE POLITICS OF EXCEPTION

The last three decades have been marked by increasing awareness and investment regarding the global challenges associated with severe labor exploitation and other related abuses. These abuses have been classified and analyzed using a range of overlapping categories, with some of the most popular of these categories being forced labor, human trafficking, the worst forms of child labor, and modern slavery. None of the practices associated with these categories are new. They all have complex historical roots, yet they are now being talked about in distinctive ways, with the link with slavery playing a major role when it comes to generating new forms of attention and investment.

Numerous campaigns and policies have been introduced as part of global efforts to combat modern slavery and human trafficking. In 2018, the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime reported that 168 states (around 93 percent of 181 states in their database) “have legislation in place that criminalizes trafficking in persons,”¹⁶ marking a remarkable jump from a reported 33 states in 2003.¹⁷ This proliferation of new legislation forms part of substantial investment in criminal justice mechanisms. Common measures include the introduction of new criminal offenses, enhanced penalties for offenders, new cooperation agreements, specialized taskforces and bureaucratic processes, and

additional measures for victim protection and repatriation. Thanks to these and other related reforms, there is now an increasingly dense global network of legal standards, specialized agencies, and bureaucratic procedures which are formally structured around categories such as modern slavery, human trafficking, and forced labor.

These official reforms have both built upon and been further reinforced by a series of new international instruments from the late 1990s that have been negotiated and ratified by numerous states. Firstly, we have the 1998 Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court, which paved the way for a qualified capacity to charge individuals with the crime of enslavement, which was recently applied to the conviction of Dominic Ongwen (2021), from the Ugandan Lord's Resistance Army. The crime of enslavement is defined in terms of "any or all of the powers attaching to the right of ownership over a person and includes the exercise of such power in the course of trafficking in persons," and also includes provisions pertaining to "Rape, sexual slavery, enforced prostitution, forced pregnancy, enforced sterilization, or any other form of sexual violence of comparable gravity."¹⁸ This definition of enslavement found in the Rome Statute is drawn from the earlier 1926 Slavery Convention, which was relatively moribund during the later twentieth century, but which has recently resurfaced as a widely accepted benchmark for thinking about slavery today.

None of these recent instruments are specifically or exclusively concerned with slavery. They instead position slavery as one among a series of associated practices which are listed together (i.e., slavery and "lesser" servitudes). One key example of this pattern is the 1999 Convention Concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour. This Convention targets "all forms of slavery or practices similar to slavery, such as the sale and trafficking of children, debt bondage and serfdom and forced or compulsory labor, including forced or compulsory recruitment of children for use in armed conflict."¹⁹ Similarly, we also have the 2000 United Nations Protocol to Prevent, Suppress, and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, which aims to combat "the exploitation of the prostitution of others or other forms of sexual exploitation, forced labor or services, slavery or practices similar to slavery, servitude or the removal of organs."²⁰ Other recent instruments do not mention slavery as a specific issue, such as the 2011 Convention Concerning Decent Work for Domestic Workers, which targets "the elimination of all forms of forced or compulsory labor"²¹ and the 2014 Forced Labour Protocol, which speaks of "effective measures for the identification, release, protection, recovery and rehabilitation of all victims of forced or compulsory labor."²²

These assorted instruments may look impressive on paper, but their practical impact tends to be constrained by numerous factors. Governments routinely sign up to international agreements which they then fail to implement, and the doctrine of sovereignty ensures that they typically face few sanctions for their failures. However, we also need to recognize that this is

not simply a question of governments struggling to achieve virtuous goals. Many problems persist as a direct result of official policies, so there is usually much more going on than failures to prevent private criminal activity. Governments have always played a central role in creating and sustaining systems of exploitation, and this dynamic has continued to this day. Official policies in areas such as migration, gender, and employment consistently manufacture favorable conditions for exploitation. Many workers and migrants remain vulnerable *because of*, rather than in spite of, government policies.

As this example helps to illustrate, governments regularly say one thing and then end up doing something else entirely. During the nineteenth century, the Brazilian government passed numerous anti-slavery laws that were chiefly understood by insiders to be “só para o inglês ver,” or “just for the English to see.” The main goal of these laws was to alleviate external pressures, so they were designed to create the appearance of change while leaving the core features of established systems in place. Many new laws against slavery and trafficking follow a broadly similar pattern, with the US government playing a similar role to the British in the nineteenth century. Since 2001, the US State Department has been publishing annual Trafficking in Persons reports that assign rankings to governments across the globe—from Tier One to Tier Three—based upon often controversial assessments of their efforts to combat trafficking. Thanks to these rankings and other initiatives, governments have been under considerable pressure to signal a commitment to the cause.²³ The most common response has been to pass new laws and other criminal justice reforms, but these laws mean little in practice if they are not effectively enforced. Earlier optimism that new laws would yield major returns has increasingly eroded, since research into global prosecution rates has reported that comparatively few prosecutions have taken place.

Despite their well-documented limitations, criminal justice mechanisms continue to dominate conversations regarding ways of combating modern slavery and human trafficking. However, there have also been a growing number of voices who have questioned the wisdom of handing over primary responsibility to criminal prosecutors, police, and immigration agents. This is partly out of concerns that their activities have not always been beneficial, and partly out of a recognition that criminal justice mechanisms primarily focus upon symptoms, rather than underlying causes. How much effect can prosecutions have if the behavior which is being criminalized is a symptom of much larger structures of poverty, scarcity, vulnerability, and discrimination?

This has in turn contributed to a recent move to approach modern slavery and trafficking as human development issues, rather than criminal justice issues.²⁴ This move is still fairly new, so it is not yet entirely clear what it means in practice. However, there have been some significant initial steps. When the United Nations finalized their new Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in 2015, these goals included a specific provision—target 8.7—which mandated:

immediate and effective measures to eradicate forced labor, end modern slavery and human trafficking and secure the prohibition and elimination of the worst forms of child labor, including recruitment and use of child soldiers, and by 2025 end child labor in all its forms.²⁵

The SDGs expand upon the earlier Millennium Development Goals (2000–2015) and comprise an extremely ambitious program of action—including 169 distinct targets—incorporating themes such as poverty, hunger, health, education, equality, decent work, and the environment. In keeping with the longer history of development schemes, the SDGs envisage improvements in one arena having flow-on effects into other areas, contributing to a better world for all.

Numerous organizations have invested in this specific provision within the SDGs. This most significant initiative to date has been Alliance 8.7, which is an international partnership coordinated by the International Labour Organization (ILO). Alliance 8.7 currently includes 26 “pathfinder” countries and 374 organizational partners (as of April 2022), incorporating international organizations, philanthropic foundations, and civil society organizations. In addition, it also includes four thematic “action groups,” which specifically focus upon supply chains, migration, rule of law and governance, and conflicts and humanitarian settings. To help launch Alliance 8.7 the ILO published new global estimates of modern slavery and child labor in 2017. According to these estimates, around 40.3 million people were subject to modern slavery, with 24.9 million being subject to forced labor and 15.4 million being subjected to forced marriage as a form of slavery. These estimates emerged from a unique collaboration between the ILO, the Walk Free Foundation (a civil society organization), and the International Organization for Migration. The slavery estimates were initially presented as a platform for measuring progress against modern slavery, but they were not adopted as a credible measure within the SDG system. Only the child labor estimates remain.

Comparable estimates have circulated since the 1990s. Some prominent examples include 27 million slaves (1999), 600,000–800,000 trafficking victims crossing international borders annually (2004), 12.3 million forced laborers (2005), 20.9 million forced laborers (2012), and 29.8 (2013), 35.8 (2014) and 45.8 (2016) million modern slaves. The last three examples on this list have all been produced by Walk Free, who have also published elaborate tables which attempt to quantify both national slave populations and government responses. While many journalists, activists, and politicians have taken these figures at face value, researchers such as Anne Gallagher have also identified serious problems with both data collection and data production.²⁶ The 2016 estimate produced by Walk Free was chiefly based on representative surveys using small samples from 25 countries, which generated 459 affirmative responses to survey questions concerned with forced marriage and forced labor (slavery is not mentioned in the survey). The primary data was then used to extrapolate estimates for another 140 countries, using complex

modeling which included numerous other estimates and rankings. Once all these formulas were applied the 459 responses were transformed into a total of 45.8 million. This is a very limited methodological foundation.

Several issues can be highlighted here. Firstly, it is worth emphasizing that modern slavery, trafficking, and forced labor are frequently treated as equivalent and interchangeable, despite their different legal meanings. This has the effect of complicating already difficult questions about where slavery begins and ends. Second, these global estimates are much better at generating publicity than guiding policy. While quantitative research into specific locations and industries can generate valuable information, it is extraordinarily difficult to effectively measure a concept as challenging as slavery on a global scale. It therefore remains an open question whether the very limited data used to produce global estimates plays a useful role in targeting specific interventions in specific locations. Their most significant effect has instead been to attract media interest and public attention. For many decades now, journalists have been publishing sensational reports regarding the existence of “X” million slaves today. These reports are commonly accompanied by other pseudo-statistical claims about how there are “more slaves now than any point in history,” or how “modern slavery is one of the fastest growing criminal enterprises.” The main function of these types of claims is to advance the case that modern slavery should be treated as an exceptional problem, which deserves urgent and immediate attention. They are rarely checked for accuracy.

These and other related activities have helped to propel modern slavery to the front ranks of global conversations about human rights and exploitation. In a world which has no shortage of horrific abuses, this is one topic which has attracted an unusual level of public interest and institutional investment. One of the most important effects of this elevated political profile has been the degree to which a diverse range of problems has recently been repackaged in anti-slavery or anti-trafficking terms. Activists seeking resources and recognition have learnt to speak in new concepts, and to build new alliances, since additional support can be secured by describing specific practices as slavery or trafficking. When the 2000 Trafficking Protocol was negotiated in the late 1990s the main focus was the exploitation of international migrants by organized criminals for the purposes of commercial sex. The years that have followed have been marked by the rapid expansion of introductory lists of forms of modern slavery and trafficking to include all kinds of practices.

Thanks to this ongoing proliferation, efforts to combat modern slavery and trafficking are now widely understood to include issues associated with the following themes:

- commercial sexual exploitation
- hereditary bondage and descent-based discrimination
- bonded labor (or debt bondage) and exploitation
- migration and exploitation
- child labor and exploitation

- domestic labor and exploitation
- global supply chains and exploitation
- wartime captivity and wartime abuses
- forced and early marriage
- forced labor by the state/prison labor.²⁷

This list comes with all kinds of complications and challenges—both politically and analytically—yet it nonetheless provides a representative snapshot of the diverse range of themes which have recently been included within the modern slavery agenda. When trying to make sense of this ambitious agenda, it is important to keep in mind that it only directly applies to a minority of cases within a larger population (e.g., not all marriages are forced marriages). Identifying and targeting these exceptional cases tends to be an extremely challenging exercise in logistical terms, which is further complicated by the ways in which individual circumstances frequently change over time.

Not all of these themes fit together comfortably. Activists campaigning against the abuse of migrant laborers in the United States have little to do with their counterparts seeking to combat hereditary bondage in West African countries such as Mali, Mauritania, or Niger. Uighurs subject to forced labor in Xinjiang are not directly linked to bonded laborers in Pakistan and India who make bricks. There are sometimes broad similarities in the types of abuses which take place in different contexts, but a great deal of a creative aggregation and extrapolation is still required to weave together these different issues under the global banner of combating modern slavery. There are also sharp differences at a diagnostic level. Some activists and organizations favor a highly technocratic approach, with the goal being to leverage technology, corporate support, and regulators to nudge business in better directions. Others instead primarily think in terms of covert criminal conspiracies, which increasingly means viewing the cause through a lens grounded in “pizzagate” and “Qanon.” Viewed in these terms, human trafficking and modern slavery primarily—and falsely—relate to the ritual sacrifice of trafficked children by a “deep state” cabal of politicians and celebrities. These conspiracy theorists are unlikely to embrace the efforts of the technocrats to alter business models.

This creates significant tension between political rhetoric and political practice. Some of the themes listed above have attracted a great deal of interest and investment. Others get mentioned rhetorically yet this rhetoric is only rarely translated into practice. There is one theme in particular that has attracted the most attention and investment: commercial sexual exploitation. Sex has always proved to be controversial, and this issue is no exception. The main point at issue here has not been slavery per se, but the status of commercial sex. Some activists and governments view all forms of commercial sex as inherently exploitative, and therefore advocate for policies that target the purchasers and purveyors of commercial sex. Other instead argue that sex work should be treated the same as any other kind of work, and that most abuses can be traced to the criminalization of sex work. This position was recently endorsed

via a decision by Amnesty International to treat sex worker rights as human rights. Many organizations and institutions who focus upon commercial sex are relatively unconcerned about labor abuses in other contexts.

The other theme which has attracted a great deal of attention is migration, which has been primarily understood in terms of movements across international borders, rather than internal movements within individual countries. International migration has become a major focal point for political debate in many parts of the world in recent years, with populism by way of racism and nativism playing major roles in the growth of political parties and platforms. The most notorious example here is former President Donald Trump in the United States, whose signature goal was to “build a wall” with Mexico. Trump is the most notorious example of a larger trend which has seen the need to prevent slavery and trafficking being repeatedly invoked to justify policies decided on non-humanitarian grounds: “border protection” infused with xenophobia.²⁸

Instead of trying to help all migrants, governments and campaigners have once again sought to concentrate their energies upon a small number “exceptional” cases of exploitation and abuse associated with migration. In this context, modern slavery (or human trafficking) has been incorporated into an established body of refugee law, with legal protections being awarded to specific individuals who satisfy relevant legal criteria as victims of slavery. While this may sound good in theory, it has ultimately proved to be subject to all kinds of problems in practice. A small number of exceptional victims have been given limited protections while a much larger migratory population remains subject to arrest, deportation, exploitation, vulnerability, and abuse. Everything that doesn’t count as “exceptional” is tacitly regarded as “normal,” and it has become normal practice for governments to treat most international migrants—both legal and illegal—atrociously. One of the most notorious examples of this much larger dynamic is the recent refugee crisis in the Mediterranean, where the language of slavery and trafficking has been harnessed by governments to justify and legitimate policies designed to make life harder for African migrants seeking sanctuary. Since 2015 the European Union has spent nearly six billion US dollars trying to prevent migration from Africa. Half a billion dollars has been spent in Libya, with funds going to support a network of profit-making prisons run by private militias where abuses are endemic.²⁹

As this example helps to illustrate, efforts to combat modern slavery can sometimes look good on paper, yet then end up doing more harm than good in practice. Researchers have come to describe this disconnect between aims and outcomes in terms of “collateral damages,” which broadly refers to situations where state—and sometimes also private—interventions end up damaging marginalized and vulnerable populations that they are formally designed to help.³⁰ As Elizabeth Bernstein has argued, these interventions can be traced back to the logics of “carceral protection” and “militarized feminism.” For Bernstein, dominant strands within anti-trafficking serve to

“facilitate, rather than to counter, the carceral controlling arm of the neoliberal state.”³¹ Common examples of damage involve police abusing those they are supposed to be assisting, immigration systems mistreating migrants with impunity, and individuals who have been “rescued” being subjected to forms of incarceration, exploitation, and abuse. Many governments and activists remain reluctant to grapple with the full implications of these collateral damages. While this reluctance is understandable on one level, since no one wants to hold their hands up and acknowledge that their actions have been not beneficial, it has also made it difficult to have already challenging public conversations regarding less damaging approaches.

As we have seen, the narrow focus on “exceptional” cases has been crucial to the appeal of the modern slavery cause, but it also creates serious logistical challenges, since it can be very difficult to identify and assist a relatively small minority of “exceptional” cases among much larger populations. In these circumstances, there will always be two major paths available when it comes to reform: (1) trying to identify, isolate, and assist a small number of exceptional cases, or (2) trying to improve rights and protections for *all* workers and migrants. The second of these options holds out much greater prospects of lasting success in addressing *both* exceptional and everyday abuses, yet this would also require major improvements to migrant and worker rights which governments and corporations are not inclined to support. So they instead tend to gravitate toward politically “safe” solutions which do not impinge too deeply or directly upon their interests, and/or strategically harness the language of anti-slavery to support pre-existing goals, such as border protection.

CONCLUSION

Substantial political energies have been marshaled under the banner of combating modern slavery and human trafficking since the mid-1990s. These energies have translated into a series of overlapping responses, including extensive criminal justice reforms, new international instruments, awareness campaigns and training, abstract technocratic schemes, and QAnon-style conspiracy theories and moral panics. This rapid promotion to the front ranks of the human rights agenda has also created incentives for campaigners to reclassify all kinds of practices as modern slavery and trafficking, contributing to a rapidly expanding agenda. This agenda commands a great deal of rhetorical support throughout the globe, with government officials, civil society activists, religious leaders, and corporate executives of every possible background publicly declaring their shared commitment to combating modern slavery. However, these commitments tend to be unevenly and episodically translated into practice. Commercial sexual exploitation remains the main priority for many campaigners and organizations, while levels of interest and investments tend to be much weaker in many other areas. Combating modern slavery is not a cohesive and singular political cause. It can instead be best

understood as a high-profile political platform which has been built by loosely aggregating a range of issues.

The question of what “counts” as slavery today will always be an inherently political exercise. There will always be different opinions regarding whether different practices should be classified as the same as, similar to, or different from transatlantic enslavement. Many of these differences of opinion can be traced to competing interests. Governments and corporations who are directly implicated in systems of exploitation routinely declare that that it would be a mistake to associate or equate their own activities with slavery. Political campaigners frequently embrace an expansive approach to classification in the hope that the language of slavery will help to mobilize additional support and recognition for their causes. These competing positions are rarely grounded in a careful reading of the history of legal enslavement, but instead usually boil down to subjective assessments of crude levels of “good” or “bad” treatment, with slavery being widely regarded as epitomizing the worst of the worst when it comes to overall levels of coercion, captivity, and exploitation. Practices which are said to fall short of this exceptional threshold can often appear as either lesser evils or positive goods thanks to this process of classification via comparison. By narrowly focusing upon “exceptional” cases recent campaigns targeting modern slavery ultimately run the risk of reinforcing—rather than politically contesting—our profoundly unjust global order.

NOTES

1. Karen Bravo. “Exploring the Analogy between Modern Trafficking in Humans and the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade,” *Buffalo International Law Journal* 25, no. 2 (2007): 207–21, Lyndsey Beutin, *Trafficking in Antiracism: Modern-Day Slavery, White Indemnity, and Racial Justice* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2023).
2. Adelle Blackett, with Alice Duquesnoy, “Slavery Is Not a Metaphor: U.S. Prison Labor and Racial Subordination Through the Lens of the ILO’s Abolition of Forced Labor Convention,” *U.C.L.A. Law Review* 67 (2021): 1504–35.
3. International Labour Organization, *Women and Men in the Informal Economy: A Statistical Picture* (Geneva: International Labour Office, 2018), 14.
4. Joel Quirk, *The Anti-Slavery Project: From the Slave Trade to Human Trafficking* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011).
5. Klara Skrivankova, *Between Decent Work and Forced Labour: Examining the Continuum of Exploitation* (York: Joseph Rowntree Foundation, 2010).
6. Kevin Bales, *Disposable People: New Slavery in the Global Economy* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2012).
7. Jean Allain and Robin Hickey, “Property and the Definition of Slavery of Slavery,” *International and Comparative Law Quarterly* 61, no. 4 (2012): 915–38.
8. Cynthia Enloe, *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014), 1.

9. Igor Kopytoff, "The Cultural Context of African Abolition," in *The End of Slavery in Africa*, ed. Suzanne Miers and Richard L. Roberts (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1988), 488.
10. Jean Allain, *Slavery in International Law: Of Human Exploitation and Trafficking* (Leiden: Brill, 2012).
11. Judy Fudge, "Modern Slavery, Unfree Labour and the Labour Market: The Social Dynamics of Legal Characterization," *Social & Legal Studies* 27, no. 2 (2018): 414–34.
12. Genevieve LeBaron, *Combatting Modern Slavery: Why Labour Governance Is Failing and What We Can Do About It* (London: Polity, 2020).
13. Rhacel Salazar Parreñas, *Unfree: Migrant Domestic Work in Arab States* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2021), 23 (first quote), 150 (second quote), 47 (third quote).
14. Eileen Boris, *Making the Woman Worker: Precarious Labor and the Fight for Global Standards, 1919–2019* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019).
15. Janie Chuang, "Exploitation Creep and the Unmaking of Human Trafficking Law," *The American Journal of International Law* 108, no. 4 (2014): 609–49.
16. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (Vienna: UNODC, 2018), 45.
17. United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime, *Global Report on Trafficking in Persons* (Vienna: UNODC, 2016), 47–53.
18. The United Nations Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (2001), Library of Congress, <https://www.loc.gov/item/lcwaN0018822/>. Accessed 25 April 2022.
19. International Labour Organization, *Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention* (1999), C182, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C182. Accessed 24 April 2022.
20. United Nations, *Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons Especially Women and Children, supplementing the United Nations Convention against Transnational Organized Crime*. Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (2020), <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-prevent-suppress-and-punish-trafficking-persons>. Accessed 25 April 2022.
21. International Labour Organization, *Domestic Workers Convention* (2011), C189, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C189. Accessed 24 April 2022.
22. International Labour Organization, *Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930* (2014), Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/instruments-mechanisms/instruments/protocol-2014-forced-labour-convention-1930>. Accessed 24 April 2022.
23. Sally Engle Merry, *The Seductions of Quantification: Measuring Human Rights, Gender Violence, and Sex Trafficking* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2016).
24. Prabha Kotiswaran, "Trafficking: A Development Approach," *Current Legal Problems* 72, no. 1 (2019): 375–416.
25. United Nations, *Transforming our world: The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development*. Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 25 September 2015. A/RES/70/1.

26. Anne Gallagher, "What's Wrong with the Global Slavery Index?," *Anti-Trafficking Review* 8 (2017): 90–112.
27. Adapted from Annie Bunting and Joel Quirk, "Contemporary Slavery as More than Rhetorical Strategy? The Politics and Ideology of a New Political Cause," in *Contemporary Slavery: Popular Rhetoric and Political Practice*, ed. Annie Bunting and Joel Quirk (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press), 5–35.
28. Julia O'Connell Davidson, *Modern Slavery: The Margins of Freedom* (London: Palgrave, 2015), 109–32.
29. Ian Urbina, "The Secretive Prisons That Keep Migrants Out of Europe," *The New Yorker*, 6 December 2021.
30. Mike Dottridge, ed., *Collateral Damage. The Impact of Anti-trafficking Measures on Human Rights Around the World* (Bangkok: Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women, 2007).
31. Elizabeth Bernstein, *Brokered Subjects: Sex, Trafficking, and the Politics of Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019), 72.

FURTHER READINGS

- Bernstein, Elizabeth. *Brokered Subjects: Sex, Trafficking, and the Politics of Freedom*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2019.
- Davidson, Julia O'Connell. *What Do We Know and What Should We Do About Slavery?* London: Sage, 2022.
- LeBaron, Genevieve. *Combating Modern Slavery: Why Labour Governance Is Failing and What We Can Do About It*. London: Polity, 2020.
- Mai, Nicola. *Mobile Orientations: An Intimate Autoethnography of Migration, Sex Work, and Humanitarian Borders*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2018.
- Miers, Suzanne. *Slavery in the Twentieth Century: The Evolution of a Global Problem*. Walnut Creek: AltaMira Press, 2002.
- Swanson, Elizabeth, and James Brewer Stewart, eds. *Human Bondage and Abolition: New Histories of Past and Present Slaveryes*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2018.
- Walia, Harsha. *Border and Rule: Global Migration, Capitalism, and the Rise of Racist Nationalism*. Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2021.

WEBSITES

- Global Alliance Against Traffic in Women (GAATW), <https://www.gaatw.org/#resources>
- Global Labour Justice, <https://globallaborjustice.org>
- Global Network of Sex Work Projects, <https://www.nswp.org>
- Human Rights Watch (Exploitation, Forced Labor & Trafficking), <https://www.hrw.org/topic/refugees-and-migrants/exploitation-forced-labor-trafficking>
- International Labour Organisation (Forced Labour, Modern Slavery and Human Trafficking Section), <https://www.ilo.org/global/topics/forced-labour/lang-en/index.htm>
- openDemocracy.org, Beyond Trafficking and Slavery, <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/beyond-trafficking-and-slavery/>

The Bellagio–Harvard Guidelines on the Legal Parameters of Slavery, https://glc.yale.edu/sites/default/files/pdf/the_bellagio-_harvard_guidelines_on_the_legal_parameters_of_slavery.pdf

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (Trafficking in Persons), <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/data-and-analysis/glotip.html>

United States, Department of State (Trafficking in Persons reports), <https://www.state.gov/trafficking-in-persons-report/>

Women in Informal Employment: Globalizing and Organizing (WIEGO), <https://www.wiego.org>

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter's Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter's Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.





Conclusion: Situating Slavery Studies in the Field of Global History

Juliane Schiel 

The chapters of this handbook presented slavery both as a global practice having existed from Old Babylonia to the present day and as an institution with globalizing effects connecting people, places, and commodities, sometimes over great distances. The contributions have shown how people have entered enslavement, been exploited as slaves, and attempted or managed to exit slavery across time and space. At any given time, people have been born into slavery and captured or kidnapped by soldiers, warriors, or pirates. They have been sentenced to slavery or sold themselves into it to escape poverty or debt. In all parts of the world, slaves' bodies and their ability to perform labor have been violently exploited; they have lived in segregation or side by side with other coerced people, and they have served the needs and pleasures of their masters and the respective slaving systems. And throughout history, people have struggled to leave this status of total submission by working and negotiating for their ransom or manumission, or by planning their escape or revolt.

Obviously, all these individual and collective stories of enslavement cut across linear narratives tracing slavery from the Graeco-Roman context directly to Atlantic slavery and abolition. Rather than appearing as a human institution following a simple path of gradual evolution and dissolution, slavery proves to be a chameleon, quickly adapting to shifting circumstances and frameworks

J. Schiel (✉)

Economic and Social History, University of Vienna, Vienna, Austria

e-mail: juliane.schiel@univie.ac.at

by devising new modalities capable of translating proven logics of exploitation into new forms. What, then, can nevertheless be learned from such a broad overview encompassing slaving contexts from many different periods and world regions? What is the scientific benefit of a diachronic and transregional perspective on slavery—apart from acknowledging how many different forms it could assume in its various settings, and how versatile and adaptable existing systems of enslavement were and still are to changing conditions?

This handbook will not conclude with yet another attempt to provide the reader with a revised definition of slavery. While the introduction set out the analytical framework for the study of global slavery, the final chapters on modern slavery have strikingly delineated the dilemmatic discussions on a catch-all term permanently at risk of explaining too much and too little at the same time. What this conclusion will attempt to do in turn is to identify and distinguish logics, modes, and parameters of enslavement across time and space, relating these observations to broader research agendas in historiography.

GLOBAL SLAVERY: FOUR LOGICS OF ENSLAVEMENT

Four distinct logics of enslavement emerge from the slaving practices presented in this handbook's chapters. Each of these logics has its own rationale and its own implications. Notwithstanding the different forms each individual logic could assume, the main rationales appear as sets of converging criteria that may be found throughout history and in all parts of the world. Very importantly, however, one logic does rarely dominate everything, and boundaries between these logics are sometimes blurred. In most settings, two or more logics exist side by side within a specific period and region, and one slave may experience settings of enslavement that belong to different logics.

The first logic of enslavement, which I propose to call the *output-oriented logic of enslavement*, is centered on the demand for cheap and hard workers. In this logic, the main purpose of enslavement is the extraction of labor—in particular, work that no one else is willing to do. As a consequence, the degree of social stratification and labor division based on status is generally high. Slaves are categorized and valued for their labor capacity and physical fitness, and prices for male slaves therefore tend to be considerably higher in these settings than for female and underage slaves. Slaves work primarily in capital- and labor-intensive industries, often implying hard physical labor in areas such as construction, mining, or plantation industries, or the military sector. The slaveholders may be large landowners and entrepreneurs as well as public institutions such as an emperor, governor, or the state. Depending on the size of the respective construction or production site, slaves often live in social segregation, supervised by overseers. In most of these contexts, land exists in abundance, and wealth and power are expressed through the control of people. Controlling and coercing strong, young men to hard physical labor that no one else will voluntarily perform requires clear restrictions to

their mobility and a high degree of (threat of) physical violence and punishment with accordingly significant mortality rates. At the same time, there is a constant risk of escape attempts, sabotage, and rebellion.

The second logic of enslavement, to be called the *logic of complementary enslavement*, seeks to complement the stock of people at their owners' disposal and contribute to the economic well-being and social power of the master's household. The main rationale is to obtain individuals who serve and obey all sorts of needs defined by the slaveholder. Depending on the fields of activity and the socioeconomic position of the owner, these slaves work side by side with other dependent people, without a clear division of labor, in all sectors ranging from domestic services and agricultural work to handicraft and manufacture as well as knowledge production and curation. Slaves are thus not a distinct categorial group within the slaveholding society, even though some services may preferably be delegated to slaves if potential owners can afford their purchase. Despite generally being officially declared unskilled workers, slaves' specific expertise—be it given or acquired—often becomes difficult to replace in these settings. The owners are mostly private individuals, and the primary reference point is the owner's household; the slaves may or may not live within this household depending on the specific historical and geographic setting. Their individual destinies depend strongly on the personal relationship with their owners. They can endure the harshest forms of exploitation and violence or be entrusted with the most confidential duties implying a high level of loyalty, such as messenger, treasurer, teacher, or doctor. The personal relation between slave and slaveholder implies an ambivalent intimacy fluctuating between hostility and familiarity; yet the slave is primarily considered a human being, more or less well suited to adapting and converting to the master's conditions. In these contexts, the majority of slaves are usually female, and female slaves are generally priced higher than men. (Potential) sexual exploitation is a constant epiphenomenon of this slaving rationale. The absolute power of the household master means that the presence of female slaves can be employed to produce heirs, to reproduce slaves, to increase income by renting them out as wet nurses, or simply for the sexual gratification of the male household members. High manumission rates correlate with the high costs of subordination in this setting, and slaves' hope for improvement and the promise of freedom function as subtle tools of suppression to command obedience. This is doubtless the most common logic and form of slavery in history.

The third logic of enslavement can be called the *logic of conspicuous enslavement* as it aims to increase the social prestige of the high elites. Here, slaves are marketable surplus products, objects of desire, and luxury goods that are primarily used as status symbols and gifts as well as for personal pleasure and (sexual) gratification. The body of the slave and his or her gender and physical appearance is at the center of this rationale. In many of the societies where the logic of conspicuous enslavement applies, we encounter eunuchs as the highest expression of beauty, obedience, discretion, and loyalty. Given the brutality

and the high mortality rate of castration processes, eunuchs are almost always slaves—and by far the most expensive group among them. In the same vein, the beauty of the female body is prized for its capacity to allow concubinage and the maintaining of a harem, while the body of a child is valued for the possibility to impose docility. Exotic criteria such as skin color, body height, or physiognomic anomalies can also play a role in the pricing process. In this rationale, prices do not correspond to any real value; rather, they mirror the cultural capital of the slave owner and the fashion trends of the respective social elites. Most slaves in these settings are traded over long distances, and their place is at court, respectively, in the palaces and other luxury residences of the highest elites of society.

The fourth logic of enslavement is the *asset-oriented logic of enslavement*. Here the underlying rationale is not focused on the slave as a source of labor, obedient servant, or status symbol; instead, he or she is used and viewed as an object—as a commodity or placeholder functioning as collateral for loans, as means of payment, as a financial asset, or as a way of extracting revenues for further investments. The body of the slave is traded and invested in to create guarantees and to generate and increase wealth. The slave's gender and physical appearance as well as his or her labor capacity is secondary to this rationale. The trading parties are mostly merchants and entrepreneurs along with representatives of public institutions. The asset-oriented logic of enslavement is either related to the fact that currency as a means of payment is scarce or to the circumstance that slaves are part of commodification processes and long-distance commodity chains connecting production and consumption sites in distant locations. It is mostly encountered in mercantile societies.

HISTORICIZING AND SPATIALIZING SLAVERY: TEMPORAL MODES AND SPATIAL PARAMETERS

Although these four logics of enslavement can be found throughout all periods of history and in all areas of the world, the history of global slavery is naturally not irrespective of historical change and local settings. Three temporal modes and spatial parameters emerge from the chapters of this handbook that cut across these rationales and help to conceptualize long histories of slavery and localize its patterns.

Other than the well-established linear story from the Graeco-Roman context to the Atlantic system and its abolition, it seems that three modes can be distinguished which fundamentally shape the form a specific rationale of enslavement could take: the unregulated mode of slaving, the institutionalized mode of slaving, and the de-legalized mode of slaving. In the *unregulated mode*, slaves are not a clear-cut social group, and the terminology is blurred. Slaving is a well-known and commonly accepted practice in society with little need for legal regulation. The *institutionalized mode* of slaving mostly goes hand in hand with a growing influence of central powers such as empire,

religious authority, or the state. Criteria of enslaveability establish and maintain the social order by distinguishing potential slaves from people protected against enslavement. They help to constitute and strengthen the community of the ruling class and define the difference between legal and illegal forms of violence and exploitation, and thus between good and bad forms of slaving. Finally, the *de-legalized mode* of slaving condemns slavery as a codified social institution. The moral discourse on righteous and criminal forms of slaveholding shifts toward a discourse in which the own slaving practices are defended and defined as something other than slavery while those of neighboring or opposing powers are criticized as outlawed and retrograde forms of human exploitation. Very often, the same practices and rationales are simply reframed, mostly depending on the interplay between the state and the ambition of the ruling elites and central powers of society on the one hand and the socioeconomic dynamics of the established logics of enslavement on the other. Not all societies transition through all three modes, and some might move from a de-legalized mode of slaving to unregulated practices again. Therefore, it seems that rather than dividing the history of global slavery into a history before and after Western abolitionism, we should perhaps conceptualize it as a long history of legalization and de-legalization processes in which the three different modes can supplant each other, stagnate, or merge into broader transregional, yet sometimes still distinct abolitionist discourses.

Besides these modes of enslavement that help us to situate slaving practices in historical times, three spatial parameters seem to determine and affect the form the four logics of enslavement can assume. The first of these spatial parameters is the *origin of the slaves*, that is, the question where slaves come from. The way in which the distinct rationales of enslavement are put into practice heavily depends on whether slaves are taken or generated from within society (for example by birth, inheriting the status of their slave parents; through self-sale or the sale of children due to poverty and indebtedness; or as a means of individual or collective punishment and subjection) or whether they are kidnapped, caught, or traded from a conquered enemy or a neighboring or distant region. Whether and in what ratios slaves are bought, traded, and exploited for domestic needs or for export markets, and whether the producer and consumer societies overlap or are connected through long-distance commodity chains, strongly defines the degree of connectivity local slaving practices are embedded in. The second parameter is the *density and location of the slaves*. Whether slaves are held in low-density systems as individuals or as one (small) group among others, whether they live as resident slaves in a personal relationship with their masters or form a majority and live in separate high-density habitations, sometimes supervised by overseers, significantly influences the (self-)perception of slaves within society. The third parameter is the *(ex-)slaves' destination*—in other words, the timeline of assimilation. Whether slaves are likely to be ransomed, manumitted, or enfranchised (with or without the option of returning to their original families' origin or starting new families in their own dwellings), or whether the slaving system is instead

characterized by high mortality rates and the permanent mark of enslavement over generations clearly defines the social and spatial mobility of the slave. Comparing the sets of spatial parameters in local settings from antiquity to the present day, it appears that the classical division of the history of slavery into the periods before and after the rise of capitalism and Western imperialism needs to be reconsidered. Commodification processes and commodity chains involving long-distance slave trading can be observed throughout all historical periods, and the degree and development of connectivity have never been linear or irreversible.

SITUATING SLAVERY STUDIES: RESEARCH PERSPECTIVES

In conclusion, a survey of slaving practices with a temporal and geographical scope as comprehensive as the one in this handbook ultimately needs to address the question of what slavery studies stand for today and in which direction this field of research intends or needs to develop. The identification of distinct, but overlapping logics of enslavement with their respective temporal modes and spatial parameters suggests two somewhat opposing scenarios in this context. The first scenario, which I will call the *expansionist approach*, would aim for a refined definition of global slavery that establishes all four logics of enslavement as four strands of a broader field of slavery and dependency studies. This approach would point to the neighboring fields of research as related forms of extreme exploitation, domination, objectification, and commodification and suggest incorporating all of these forms under the umbrella term of slavery and dependency studies. In this scenario, historians of forced and convict labor would contribute to a deeper understanding of the output-oriented logic of enslavement, while historians of domestic service, serfdom, debt bondage, and corvée labor would expand the notion of complementary forms of enslavement. Cultural historians studying forms of self-representation by social elites would help to situate the logic of conspicuous enslavement within the history of elite cultures, and economic historians would position the asset-oriented logic of enslavement within the history of trade and trafficking. The main purpose would be to expand and reassess the character of global slaving practices in comparison and contrast to other related fields of coercion.

The other scenario would be the *diffusionist approach*. Rather than incorporating other fields of research into the realm of global slavery studies, the acknowledgment of distinct but overlapping logics of enslavement may allow historians of slavery to conceive these rationales as elements of broader logics of coercion. From this perspective, global slavery is no longer at the center of an expanding research field but functions as one entry point among others for a new social history. The output-oriented rationale of extreme human exploitation suggests addressing the making and unmaking of *legal and illegal forms of violence* along with the role of public authorities and social institutions in enabling or impeding, defending, or condemning the systematic

mistreatment of humans. In turn, the rationale for complementary enslavement contributes to a deeper understanding of the *metaphysics of power* in all types of labor and kinship relations as well as the interdependent and ambivalent relationship between mastery and domination, between protection and subordination, between promise and obedience. The rationale for conspicuous enslavement targets *processes of objectification* and the intersecting markers of social inequality enabling or impeding these forms of human degradation, while the asset-oriented rationale of enslavement helps to understand the economic conditions of the *commodification of human bodies* as well as its consequences, thereby contributing to a new history of capitalism.

The choice between the two possible directions to take is ultimately a political one. There may be good reasons to maintain “global slavery” as a powerful catchword with the purpose of raising awareness for the most extreme forms of human exploitation, domination, objectification, and commodification in the past and present, hoping to mobilize society at large against their present and future manifestations. Or one might choose to focus on the underlying dynamics that point to the potentials and risks of human exploitation, domination, objectification, and commodification in all social and power relations. In both cases, the respective choice necessitates radical contextualization in order to deepen our understanding of slaving practices and avoid hasty instrumentalizations, no matter how well-intentioned they may be.

Open Access This chapter is licensed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>), which permits use, sharing, adaptation, distribution and reproduction in any medium or format, as long as you give appropriate credit to the original author(s) and the source, provide a link to the Creative Commons license and indicate if changes were made.

The images or other third party material in this chapter are included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license, unless indicated otherwise in a credit line to the material. If material is not included in the chapter’s Creative Commons license and your intended use is not permitted by statutory regulation or exceeds the permitted use, you will need to obtain permission directly from the copyright holder.



INDEX

A

Abolitionism (movement), 340, 349, 352, 355, 470–472, 474, 517, 519, 524, 548, 554, 556, 586, 675, 677, 705

Abolition (of slavery), 55, 229, 297, 313, 334, 351, 362, 389, 422, 430, 441, 451, 473, 536, 540, 542, 547, 548, 559–562, 580, 584. *See also* Slavery, exit from

Abolition (of slave trade), 234, 472, 561

Absconding. *See* Running away

Africa

- Central Africa, 468, 558
- East Africa, 142, 143, 153, 340, 342, 354, 361, 368, 373, 432, 497, 498, 501, 502, 506, 509, 511, 520, 559, 562
- North Africa, 94, 95, 228, 229, 231, 237, 261, 414, 418, 459–463, 465–471, 474, 480
- Southern Africa, 468
- West Africa, 2, 221, 346, 379, 382, 384, 385, 399, 413, 420–422, 432, 459, 479–481, 484, 488, 489, 558, 560, 584–586, 595

African diaspora, 110, 112

Alexander the Great, 44, 72

Algiers, 229, 233, 245, 462, 466

American Revolution, 401, 407, 431, 436, 441, 442, 444, 446, 450, 452, 454, 555, 558

Americas

Caribbean (region), 9, 67, 110, 116, 371, 381–383, 387, 388, 391, 396–403, 408–410, 416, 422, 429, 436, 444, 447, 454, 554, 557, 560, 615

North America, 228, 381–384, 387, 391, 395, 397, 401, 407, 431, 441–446, 452–454, 557

South America, 8, 264, 381, 391

Anatolia, 18, 47, 243, 248, 249

Ancient slavery, 123, 304

Antilles, 230, 231, 380. *See also* Caribbean (region)

Arabian Peninsula, 8, 139, 141, 143, 253, 340, 350, 371, 372, 462, 465, 469, 473. *See also* Middle East (region)

Archaeology (of slavery), 110, 112, 116

Asia

- Central Asia, 149, 180, 182, 183, 247, 520
- East Asia, 339
- Middle East, 414, 415, 459–462, 465, 466, 468, 470, 471, 474, 483, 501, 521, 648, 687
- South Asia, 1, 361, 517, 518, 520–525, 527, 530

Athens, 68–70, 73, 74, 76–79, 270

Atlantic (region), 1–4, 6, 9, 11, 68, 93, 102, 228, 229, 231, 238, 239, 259, 261, 262, 265, 266, 340, 347, 360,

- 363, 379, 382–385, 390, 395, 400, 401, 405, 414, 416, 422, 430–432, 434, 436, 437, 441, 443, 444, 446, 459, 468, 474, 481, 519, 554–558, 561, 562, 576, 615, 663, 701, 704
- Atlantic slave trade. *See* Slave Trade, in Atlantic World
- Azores, 382
- B**
- Babylonia, 2, 17, 22, 24, 35, 701
- Balkans (region), 184, 189, 248, 260, 265
- Baltic (region), 126, 167, 414, 632
- Barbados, 384, 396–402, 408, 409, 434
- Barbary Coast, 234
- Bengal, 342, 344, 345, 349, 354, 522, 523, 530
- Black Sea (region), 68–70, 72, 73, 78, 126, 160–174, 180, 183, 185, 190, 246, 259, 260, 280, 414, 415
- Bosnia, 184, 189
- Brazil, 9, 67, 230–232, 262, 379, 381–383, 389, 391, 416, 418, 429–432, 435–437, 442, 474, 559, 561
- Bulgaria, 184, 646
- Byzantine Empire, 123, 246, 535
- C**
- Caffa, 161–163, 165, 168–172, 183, 246
- Cairo, 150, 164, 220, 460, 462, 464, 465, 472
- Canada, 228, 384, 442, 452, 454, 577
- Canary Islands, 382, 383, 397, 416
- Cape Colony, 344, 348, 373, 557
- Cape of Good Hope, 231, 232
- Cape Town, 343, 372, 557
- Cape Verde, 346, 382
- Capitalism, 431, 432, 434, 435, 459, 460, 466, 467, 474, 560, 583, 653, 674, 675, 677, 706, 707
- Captives, 7, 21, 22, 46, 71, 72, 88, 89, 93, 100, 114–116, 126, 146, 161, 162, 165–167, 169, 170, 172, 183, 198, 199, 201, 229–235, 238, 239, 244, 249, 255, 259, 260, 262, 265, 266, 268, 269, 272, 279, 281, 313, 346, 349, 363–371, 399, 401, 402, 416, 421, 422, 463, 464, 474, 481–484, 521, 588, 683. *See also* Ransom (of captives); Slavery, entry into
- Caribbean (region), 67, 70, 110, 116, 255, 343, 371, 381–383, 387, 388, 391, 396–403, 408–410, 416, 417, 422, 429, 431, 432, 436, 444, 447, 454, 554, 557, 560, 615
- Catholic Church, 180, 236, 558. *See also* Christianity
- Charleston (SC, USA), 449–453
- Child labor, 661, 688, 691
- Children (in slavery), 28, 31, 50, 51, 73, 77, 80, 88, 100, 103, 109, 125, 130, 153, 163, 182, 221, 237, 247, 333, 346, 528, 530, 589
- China, 2, 110, 221, 297–301, 304, 313, 347, 350, 361, 414, 415, 419, 429, 576, 580, 644, 646, 648
- Chosŏn Dynasty (Korea), 322
- Christianity, 92, 124, 125, 130, 131, 171, 172, 553, 555
- Circassian (people), 162, 167, 171, 173, 184, 235, 504, 536
- Coartación*, 5, 390
- Coerced labor (outside of slavery), 6, 8, 42, 45, 47, 48, 53, 55–57, 190, 383, 421, 511, 527, 559, 568, 584, 589, 591, 597, 625, 627
- Coffee, 383, 404, 405, 415–417, 430–432, 434–437, 442, 466, 474
- Commodity chains, 10, 350, 413–419, 421, 422, 432, 676, 704–706
- Communism, 610
- Concentration camps, 605–621, 626
- Concubines. *See* Sexual abuse (of slaves)
- Constantinople, 125, 127, 129, 167, 172, 183, 185
- Convict labor, 343, 568–570, 573–579, 706
- Copenhagen, 263, 264, 271
- Corsairs, 7, 231, 245, 261, 462
- Corsica, 185, 245
- Cotton, 183, 324, 331, 341, 404, 414–416, 419, 421, 429–432,

- 435–437, 442–444, 446, 447, 449, 450, 455, 467, 470, 480, 485–487, 500, 521, 560, 576, 615
- Creolization (in the Americas), 397
- Crimea, 170, 246
- Cuba, 9, 379, 387, 389, 391, 429, 431, 432, 434, 436, 437, 442, 474, 559, 560
- Cyprus, 184, 246, 415
- D**
- Damascus, 254, 462
- Debt bondage, 6, 45, 50, 51, 70, 87, 92, 144, 247, 340, 527, 569, 573, 661, 665, 689, 706
- Denmark, 421
- Devsirme*, 248, 536
- Domestic slavery, 149, 153, 235, 348, 524–526
- Domestic slave trade (United States), 436, 437, 445, 446, 450
- Dutch East India Company (VOC), 264, 343–346, 348, 349, 354, 361, 363, 419
- E**
- Early modern slavery, 68
- Egypt, 41–45, 47, 51, 54–57, 89, 94, 141, 144, 148–150, 152, 166, 168, 172, 180, 184, 229, 405, 406, 460–464, 467–469, 473, 474, 556
- Emancipation, 8, 29, 31, 113, 301, 303, 310–313, 334, 342, 354, 388, 390, 410, 414, 441–445, 452, 455, 465, 473, 489, 506–511, 528, 536–539, 541–545, 547–550, 554, 559, 560, 572, 573, 580, 595. *See also* Slavery, exit from
- Enlightenment, 461, 474, 537, 539, 541, 554, 555
- Enslavement. *See* Slavery, entry into
- Equiano, Olaudah, 401, 558
- Ethiopia, 140, 141, 143, 185, 468, 500, 521
- Eunuchs, 96, 140, 141, 144, 145, 147, 148, 150–153, 166, 168, 172, 221, 466, 469, 470, 474, 484, 518, 521, 522, 524, 526–528, 536, 703
- Europe
- Central Europe, 417, 419, 420
- Eastern Europe, 126, 167, 168, 605, 606, 643
- Southern Europe, 187, 227, 228, 232, 235, 236, 238
- Western Europe, 125, 130, 189, 222, 414, 415, 537
- European Union, 643, 650, 694
- F**
- Florence (city), 187, 218, 219, 416
- Forced labor (outside of slavery). *See* Coerced labor (outside of slavery)
- France, 88, 229, 230, 236, 237, 239, 244, 260, 261, 265, 347, 351, 414, 460–462, 472, 559, 562, 585, 590, 591
- Free labor, 6, 7, 95, 490, 555, 577, 625, 627, 628, 632, 636, 682, 685, 686
- French East India Company, 347
- French Revolution, 555
- G**
- Genoa, 168, 171, 172, 180, 187, 231, 232, 234, 236, 262, 416
- Germany (including German States), 173, 228, 260, 261–272, 416, 505, 559, 605–608, 647. *See also* Holy Roman Empire
- Goa, 229, 342–344, 517
- Gold Coast (West Africa), 403, 418
- Great Britain, 403, 430, 444, 460
- Greece (Ancient), 1, 110, 112, 116, 179
- Gulag (in Soviet Union), 621, 626–637
- Guyanas, 389
- H**
- Haitian Revolution, 389, 390, 410, 430, 554, 560
- Hausaland, 479, 481, 485
- Hawaii, 568, 573–580
- Holy Roman Empire, 259–262, 264, 265, 270–273
- Horn of Africa, 143, 341, 347, 521, 523
- Household slavery. *See* Domestic slavery

Human rights, 8, 11, 35, 123, 124, 555, 644, 692, 694, 695
 Human trafficking (modern-day), 1, 25, 90, 126, 130, 179, 181, 189, 244, 251, 320, 643, 644, 661, 673, 681, 688–691, 693–695. *See also* Slave trade
 Hungary, 160, 164, 165, 168, 184, 246, 647

I

Inca State, 195–197, 200–203, 205, 206
 Indentured servitude, 4, 6, 279, 291, 355, 381, 524
 India (including Indian subcontinent), 143, 153, 185, 341, 342, 344, 346, 347, 350–355, 362, 366, 414, 415, 419, 420, 429, 468, 519, 520, 528, 538, 560, 574, 687, 693
 Indian Ocean (region), 7, 140, 150, 152, 220, 229, 239, 247, 259, 261, 266, 271, 340–347, 350, 351, 353, 359–364, 366, 368–370, 372, 373, 414, 466, 468, 472, 499, 511, 521, 523, 561, 562
 Indonesia (including Indonesian Archipelago), 2, 340, 341, 344, 346–348, 351, 362, 365, 366, 370, 373, 557
 Industrialization, 395, 422, 423, 430–433, 435, 459, 466, 474, 573, 626, 628
 Indus Valley, 18
 International Labor Organization (ILO), 585, 626, 667, 682, 691
 Islam (including Islamic law regarding slavery), 130, 140, 142–145, 151–153, 163, 164, 166, 220, 221, 244, 247, 248, 254, 341, 354, 471, 480–483, 487, 490, 503, 504, 507, 509, 586
 Istanbul, 172, 230, 246, 247, 254, 460, 466, 467, 472, 473, 536
 Italy (including Italian States), 94, 95, 101, 129, 180, 182, 185, 188, 218, 219, 231, 234, 235, 239, 262, 270, 414, 417

J

Jamaica, 112, 256, 384, 389, 396, 398, 400, 403–405, 407–409, 432, 560
 Janissary, 248, 249, 461, 463
 Java, 341, 343, 365
 Jewish communities, 130, 247
 Jihad. *See* Islam
 Jim Crow. *See* Segregation (US)
 Judaism. *See* Jewish communities

K

Kidnapping, 162, 341, 361, 365, 366, 385, 445, 480, 556, 589, 672. *See also* Slavery, entry into
 Kievan Rus', 161, 280, 281
 Kingdom of Naples, 233
 Korea, 320, 328, 333, 576

L

Lisbon, 228, 230, 232, 233, 235, 262, 420, 524
 Liverpool, 419
 Loanda, 384
 London, 263, 264, 271, 399, 403, 404, 417, 420, 472, 473, 558

M

Madagascar, 341, 344, 346–348, 350–352, 363, 364, 371, 372
 Madeira, 382, 383, 416, 418
 Maghreb (region), 185, 461
 Mali, 168, 421, 479, 484, 586, 587, 693
 Mamluk, 143, 148–150, 166, 168, 173, 180, 460–463
 Manumission, 5, 22, 28, 29, 31, 32, 34, 55, 56, 79, 80, 87, 101–103, 123, 124, 126, 129, 130, 132, 133, 144, 151–153, 165, 169, 171, 182, 187, 188, 205, 218, 235, 237, 244, 248, 252, 253, 256, 270, 289, 291, 330, 331, 341, 342, 344, 352, 390, 391, 408, 409, 441, 443, 450–452, 455, 471, 473, 487, 489, 507, 508, 525, 528–530, 539, 549, 556, 559, 594, 595, 701, 703. *See also* Slavery, exit from

- Maroons (including marronage), 81, 101, 230, 348, 388, 389, 391, 408, 409, 452, 557, 577. *See also* Running away
- Mascarenes (islands), 347, 348, 350, 351, 355, 368
- Master-slave relations, 407, 449, 508, 541, 671. *See also* Slavery, experiences during; Slave punishment
- Mauritania, 479, 693
- Mauritius, 347, 351, 355, 363, 371, 523, 561
- Mecca, 140, 143, 146, 147, 340, 462, 474
- Medieval slavery, 126, 140, 143
- Medina, 140, 144, 146, 147, 152, 462, 470, 474
- Mediterranean (region), 2, 7–9, 18, 68, 69, 72, 73, 78, 88, 95, 101, 123, 125, 126, 169, 172, 179–182, 184, 190, 227–239, 244, 245, 259–262, 265, 382, 397, 414–416, 460–462, 465–468, 472, 473, 694
- Mesopotamia, 18, 34, 42, 110, 116
- Mexico, 390, 442, 452, 454, 469, 694
- Middle East (region), 414, 415, 459–462, 465, 466, 468, 470, 471, 474, 483, 501, 521, 648, 687
- Middle Passage, 342, 360, 385, 401, 445. *See also* Slave trade, in Americas; Slave trade, in Atlantic World
- Military slaves. *See* Slave soldiers
- Minas Gerais, 431, 437
- Ming Dynasty (China), 298
- Modern slavery, 1, 68, 645, 654, 661–665, 667, 668, 670, 671, 673–678, 681–686, 688–696, 702
- Moldavia, 246, 535, 536, 537, 539–541, 543, 545–547, 549, 550. *See also* Romania (including Romanian Principalities)
- Mombasa, 498, 501, 505, 508–511
- Mongols, 160–170, 184, 185
- Moors, 232, 235, 237, 260, 262–272
- Morocco, 462, 466, 468, 469
- Moscow, 173, 174, 281, 283–285, 287, 608, 613, 631, 632
- Mozambique, 342, 346, 350, 364, 367, 368, 371, 373, 500
- Mughal Empire, 346, 354, 517, 527
- Muscovy, 173, 246, 279, 284–288, 290, 292
- Muslim. *See* Islam
- N**
- Nantes, 419
- Native Americans, 68, 263, 264, 432, 433, 577
- Near East. *See* Middle East (region)
- Netherlands, 262, 263, 265, 414, 417
- New Orleans, 431, 436, 449, 450, 452, 453
- NGOs (Non-Governmental Organizations), 584, 589, 595, 644, 661, 662
- Niger, 479, 587, 693
- Nigeria, 401, 445, 479–481, 489, 593
- North America, 228, 381–384, 387, 391, 395, 397, 401, 407, 431, 441–446, 452–454, 557
- North Korea, 644, 646–648, 652, 654
- O**
- Oman, 18, 353, 354, 364, 366, 367, 372, 462, 467, 499, 501
- Orthodox Christianity, 282, 286. *See also* Christianity
- Ottoman Empire, 140, 227–230, 233, 235, 236, 238, 239, 243–248, 250–255, 260, 262, 266, 281, 460–463, 466–470, 472, 473, 535–539, 561
- P**
- Peloponnesian War (431–404 BCE), 81
- Persia, 47, 366, 418, 419, 467, 469, 473
- Persian Gulf, 17, 18, 143, 339, 341, 347, 350, 352, 462, 465, 467, 468, 470, 472, 501, 536, 562
- Plantations, 1, 9, 112–114, 190, 228, 261, 264, 266, 272, 340, 343, 347, 348, 350, 353, 355, 363, 364, 367, 368, 381–384, 386–389, 391,

- 395–401, 403, 404, 406, 407, 410, 413–422, 430–437, 443, 444, 446–448, 450, 467, 468, 470, 482, 484–486, 490, 498, 499, 501–504, 507–509, 511, 524, 556, 557, 560, 561, 569–576, 579, 580, 587, 615, 702
- Poland, 284, 414, 608, 609, 643, 645, 647, 650, 652, 653
- Portugal, 228–230, 232, 233, 238, 261, 262, 417, 418, 524, 561
- Prisoners of war. *See* Captives
- Prostitution, 77, 92, 97, 188, 248, 390, 471, 562, 689. *See also* Sexual abuse (of slaves)
- R**
- Ransom (of captives), 7, 167, 169, 172, 229
- Red Sea (region), 140, 143, 145, 150, 152, 153, 227, 465, 466, 468, 472
- Resistance (to slavery), 348, 349, 408, 554, 557, 559
- Reunion (island), 347
- Rio de Janeiro, 431, 437
- Roman Empire, 87, 88, 90, 92, 93, 96, 97, 111, 123–125
- Romania (including Romanian Principalities), 89, 246, 535–539, 541, 543, 545, 547–550
- Roman law (regarding slavery), 96, 125, 217, 218, 253, 266
- Roma (people), 538, 539, 542–544, 606
- Rome (city), 1, 35, 67, 75, 81, 87–90, 96, 101–103, 110, 112, 116, 130, 231, 235
- Running away, 235, 330, 331, 333, 348, 388, 408, 450, 529, 577. *See also* Slavery, exit from
- Russian Empire, 172, 279, 285, 286, 288, 291, 292, 539
- Sardinia, 88, 185, 462
- Second slavery (concept), 9, 379, 380, 391, 429–438, 442–446, 449, 450, 452, 454, 455, 459
- Segregation (US), 701, 702
- Senegambia, 384, 421
- Serbia, 184
- Serfdom, 4, 246, 267, 270, 279, 285–287, 289–291, 419, 635, 665, 685, 689, 706
- Seven Years' War, 398, 403, 405, 409
- Sexual abuse (including sex slavery), 29, 98, 308, 312, 504
- Siberia, 279, 286, 290, 647. *See also* Russian Empire
- Sicily, 101, 184, 185, 416, 462, 472
- Silesia, 419, 422
- Slave family life, 327
- Slave flight. *See* Running away
- Slave hiring, 49
- Slave labor, 6, 7, 26, 41, 52, 57, 68, 69, 76, 93, 95, 180, 186, 190, 229, 230, 238, 250, 323, 325, 326, 333, 340, 343, 344, 347, 350, 351, 363, 365, 381–384, 399, 429, 432, 436, 445–449, 468, 482, 486, 497, 511, 537, 545, 570, 583, 584, 587–589, 592, 605, 606, 608, 614, 615, 617, 618, 682. *See also* Domestic slavery; Slavery, experiences of; Urban slavery
- Slave punishment, 20, 31, 170, 236. *See also* Slavery, experiences of
- Slavery, entry into
- in Africa, 90, 382, 384, 385
 - in Americas, 380, 383, 384
 - in Ancient Egypt, 42, 47
 - in Ancient Greece, 88
 - in Arabian Peninsula, 139, 141
 - in Black Sea, 126
 - in British Empire, 524
 - in Byzantine Empire, 126, 140
 - in China, 304
 - in Holy Roman Empire, 262
 - in Korea, 319
 - in Mediterranean, 88
 - in Middle East, 501
 - in Modern day, 47, 520
 - in Muscovy
- S**
- Saint-Domingue, 389, 417, 430, 431, 452
- São Paolo, 236
- São Tomé, 382, 383

- in Nazi Germany, 606
- in Ottoman Empire, 140
- in Roman Empire, 88, 140
- in Russian Empire, 539
- in South Asia, 520, 521
- in Soviet Union, 630
- Slavery, exit from
 - in Africa, 271, 472
 - in Americas, 380, 388
 - in Ancient Egypt, 55
 - in Ancient Greece, 80
 - in Arabian Peninsula, 139, 253
 - in Black Sea, 168, 170
 - in China, 310
 - in Holy Roman Empire, 270
 - in Jamaica, 560
 - in Korea, 333
 - in Mediterranean, 169, 187, 472
 - in Middle East, 471
 - in Modern day, 243
 - in Nazi Germany, 606
 - in Ottoman Empire, 236, 472
 - in Roman Empire
 - in Russian Empire
 - in South Asia
 - in Soviet Union
 - in Spanish Empire, 389
 - in United States, 390, 577
- Slavery, experiences during
 - in Africa, 168, 360
 - in Americas, 386
 - in Ancient Egypt, 166
 - in Ancient Greece, 112, 265
 - in Arabian Peninsula, 139, 371
 - in Black Sea, 78, 164
 - in British Empire, 561
 - in Byzantine Empire, 535
 - in China, 648
 - in Holy Roman Empire, 265
 - in Inca State, 205
 - in Jamaica, 386, 560
 - in Korea, 327, 648
 - in Mediterranean, 78, 185
 - in Mesopotamia, 18, 28
 - in Middle East, 648
 - in Modern day, 235, 272
 - in Nazi Germany, 606
 - in Ottoman Empire, 233
 - in Spanish Empire
 - in United States, 560
- Slave soldiers, 143, 146, 148, 149, 166, 180, 474
- Slave trade
 - abolition of. *See* Abolition (of slave trade)
 - in Africa, 126, 143, 168, 185, 227, 259, 261, 341, 364, 397, 414, 418, 421, 429, 432, 437, 444–446, 460, 466, 472, 474, 499
 - in Americas, 379, 382, 429, 441, 472
 - in Ancient Egypt, 89
 - in Ancient Greece, 179
 - in Arabian Peninsula, 143, 350, 473
 - in Atlantic World, 259, 360, 429, 441
 - in Black Sea, 69, 126, 164, 168, 172, 180, 246
 - in British Empire, 437, 556
 - in Byzantine Empire, 246
 - in China, 347, 350, 429
 - in Holy Roman Empire, 259, 264
 - in Inca State, 195, 205, 206
 - in Indian Ocean World, 347, 520
 - in Jamaica, 403, 405
 - in Korea, 333
 - in Mediterranean, 69, 126, 172, 181, 227, 228, 234, 246, 259, 467, 468, 472, 473
 - in Mesopotamia, 18
 - in Middle East, 414, 459, 460, 467, 468, 471, 472, 474
 - in modern day. *See* Human trafficking
 - in Muscovy, 279, 287, 292
 - in Ottoman Empire, 140, 227, 246, 266, 466, 467, 472, 473, 536, 561
 - in Roman Empire, 90
 - in Russian Empire, 279
 - in South Asia, 520, 523
 - in Spanish Empire, 343
 - in United States, 262, 442. *See also* Domestic slave trade
- Slaving. *See* Human trafficking; Slave trade
- Social death (concept), 4, 5, 19, 32, 35, 666, 671, 673
- Societies with slaves/slave societies (concept), 1, 4, 67, 68, 102, 228,

238, 260, 265, 290, 319, 340, 396,
429, 442, 444, 447
Sokoto Caliphate, 479–491
South America, 8, 264, 381, 391
Soviet Union, 609, 626, 630, 637, 647
Spain, 229, 231, 232, 261, 262, 399,
472, 561
Spanish Empire, 343, 389
Sparta, 68–71, 73, 74, 76, 79, 81
Spice trade, 183, 343, 414, 466
Sudan (region), 44, 141, 464–466, 469,
479, 480, 484, 486, 500
Sugar, 249, 347, 348, 350, 382–384,
386, 391, 395–401, 403–406, 410,
414–417, 420, 422, 430–437, 444,
446–450, 466, 474, 560, 568,
573–580, 615
Sulu sultanate, 350, 364, 367, 561
Sumatra, 342, 346, 362, 366
Sunni, 163, 252, 480. *See also* Islam
(including Islamic law regarding
slavery)
Swahili coast, 341, 363, 462, 467, 468,
473, 497, 521
Sweden, 414, 421, 422
Syria, 18, 44, 47, 54, 94, 143, 180

T

Tacky's Revolt (Jamaica), 396
Tatars, 162, 264, 265, 281
Textile trade, 183, 259, 418
Timor, 341, 346, 362, 365, 370
Tobacco, 383, 384, 386, 391, 416, 418,
430–434, 436, 437, 443, 446,
448–450, 485, 615
Transatlantic slave trade. *See* Slave trade,
in Atlantic World
Transylvania, 246, 538. *See also* Romania
(including Romanian Principalities)
Tripoli, 236, 245, 462, 466, 472, 473
Tunis, 185, 229, 233, 236, 245, 462,
466, 467, 469, 472, 473, 556
Tunisia, 461, 465–470

U

Umarian States, 480–487, 489–491
United Nations, 690
United States, 5, 25, 110, 262, 390,
431, 442, 447, 451, 454, 474, 558,
560–562, 567, 568, 570, 571,
573–575, 577, 580, 615, 690, 693,
694
Urban slavery, 448, 497, 499, 501, 502,
511
US Civil War, 436, 443, 444, 446, 452

V

Venice, 2, 130, 184–186, 229, 231,
237, 416
Vienna, 231, 260, 261, 269
Virginia, 113, 228, 384, 390, 431, 434,
436, 437, 443, 444, 451, 452, 454

W

Wage labor, 74, 233, 509, 568, 570,
574, 576, 577, 584–587, 590, 675,
677
Wallachia, 246, 535, 536, 537,
539–543, 545–547, 549, 550. *See
also* Romania (including Romanian
Principalities)
West Indies, 261, 264, 265, 271, 395,
399. *See also* Antilles; Caribbean
(region)
World War I
World War II, 577, 606, 633, 635–637

Y

Yemen, 139–141, 143–149, 151–153,
341, 366, 467

Z

Zanzibar, 143, 353, 363, 366, 368–371,
462, 467, 468, 470, 473, 497–509,
562