

HOMER, HESIOD, AND THE « ORIGINS » OF GREEK SLAVERY*

Edward M. HARRIS**

Résumé. – Selon E. Meyer et M. I. Finley l’esclavage ne jouait pas un rôle important dans l’économie grecque avant le V^e siècle av. J.-C. Cet article écarte cette hypothèse et montre que premièrement le statut des *dmoes* et de *dmoai* dans l’*Iliade* et dans l’*Odyssée* n’était pas différent de celui des *douloi* et des *oiketai* (esclaves) de la période classique (500-300) ; deuxièmement que les esclaves étaient déjà très nombreux dans la société des poèmes homériques, et finalement que le travail des esclaves était très important pour les basileis du huitième et septième siècle avant notre ère.

Abstract. – According to E. Meyer and M. I. Finley slavery did not play an important role in the economy of ancient Greece before the sixth century BCE. This article rejects this view and shows that 1) the status of the *dmoes* and the *dmoiai* of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* was not different from that of the *douloi* and *oiketai* (slaves) of the Classical period, 2) slaves were already very numerous in the society depicted in the Homeric poems, and 3) the labor of slaves was very important for the basileis of the eighth and seventh centuries BCE.

Mots-clés. – Esclavage, société homérique, économie de la Grèce ancienne, E. Meyer, M. I. Finley.

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** Durham University, edward.harris@durham.ac.uk

In modern societies the rights of one individual over another are strictly limited by law. In ancient Greece, however, a master could exercise almost unlimited power over his slaves. In what period of Greek history did this kind of power of one individual over another individual become widespread? When did ancient Greece become a slave society? Although scholars have engaged in a vigorous debate about the role of slavery in Greek society over the past hundred years, there has existed a strange consensus about the « origins » of slavery in Greece during the late Archaic period. Despite their differences, scholars of different persuasions, both political and intellectual, have generally tended to agree that slavery was not significant in the Homeric period, that is, the century or two before the archonship of Solon in 594 BCE. Several scholars have therefore attempted to account for the « rise of Greek slavery » in the sixth century BCE. This paper is an attempt to rethink our approach to the question of « the origins of Greek slavery ». I preface my essay with a brief summary of the scholarship on the topic, sketching the views of the two most influential writers on the topic, Eduard Meyer and Moses Finley, and placing them in their political and intellectual contexts (Part I). Part II addresses the problem of defining slavery, then examines the status the *dmoes* and *dmoai* of the Homeric and Hesiodic poems and shows that their status is virtually identical to that of slaves in Classical and Hellenistic Greece. Part III attempts to measure the number of slaves both in elite and in less wealthy households in the Homeric poems and to compare them with the size of slave holdings in Classical Athens. Part IV studies the role of slave labor in the Homeric society and its contribution to the elite's struggle for power and status.

I

Modern debate about the rise of slavery in Ancient Greece begins with the publication of Edward Meyer's lecture, *Die Sklaverei im Altertum*. Although there were several studies of Greek slavery before this, the most significant being H. Wallon's *Histoire de l'Esclavage*, Meyer's essay has exerted the most influence on modern scholarship and provoked the sharpest reaction. Meyer delivered his lecture in Dresden on 15 January 1898¹. Meyer was reacting against contemporary views about progress in human history and the relationship between Antiquity and contemporary Europe. Although Antiquity was once regarded as an ideal period worthy of imitation and the Middle Ages a dark period of barbarism between Antiquity and the present, a shift of opinion occurred during the Romantic period. There was a reaction against the Classical Ideal and a growing tendency to search for the roots of the modern world in the Middle Ages. This led to a belief in the continuity of historical development and a reevaluation of the Middle Ages as a higher stage in human progress. If the Middle Ages were the youth of civilization, Antiquity was its childhood. The Greeks and Romans never progressed beyond the household economy (« Hauswirtschaft ») in which

1. E. MEYER, *Kleine Schriften zur Geschichtstheorie und zur wirtschaftlichen und politischen Geschichte des Altertums*, Halle 1910, p. 169-212. On the intellectual background of Eduard Meyer see the essays in W. M. CALDER and A. DEMANDT eds., *Eduard Meyer : Leben und Leistung eines Universalhistorikers*, New York-Copenhagen-Cologne 1990.

all economic activities from production to consumption took place within the closed circle of the household. According to this view, ancient society depended on slave labor because citizens found manual work demeaning and preferred to devote their time to politics and warfare. This later gave way to serfdom in the Middle Ages during which the peasant was bound to the land or to his lord. In the Modern period the characteristic form of production was the labor contract of the free worker. Here Meyer was taking aim at the views of the National Economists, who included Friedrich List, J. K. Rodbertus, and G. von Schmoller. This group held that economic development could be divided into a series of stages, each one characterized by a distinctive mode of production².

Meyer was quick to make several objections to this series of stages. First, he observed that slavery did not die out in the Middle Ages, but actually increased in southern Europe during the 15th and 16th centuries and in the 18th century was widespread in the Americas. In fact, slavery was not abolished in most European countries and North America until the 19th century. He also pointed to early nomadic peoples like the Scythians, Thracians, Caucasian tribes, Celts and Germans ruled by nobles that derived their wealth from cattle and treasures. These nobles had followers who looked after their herds and fought under them in war. In these societies there were few slaves obtained mainly through raids.

Meyer then turned his attention to Israel after the conquest of Palestine, Homeric Greece and Italy during the period of Etruscan power and during the kingship at Rome, whose social structures in his opinion shared the same basic features. In these areas the leaders held large tracts of land and extensive herds. There were many free people who owned land and were full members of the community, participating in feasts and festivals. Craftsmen and hired laborers were often free persons but outside the community. Meyer found that many were in feudal relationships with nobles and others such as the *clientes* of Archaic Rome. In other cases there were dependent communities like the Helots of Sparta and other groups in Thessaly and Argos, who paid tribute in return for protection.

In this period slavery played a subordinate role and was not the dominant mode of production. Most were prisoners of war, captured in raids, or women bought from abroad. The last category served mainly to satisfy the sexual needs of their masters and fulfilled a role later played by prostitutes. Other women helped the mistress of the house and her daughters with tasks for which there were no skilled craftsmen such as the preparation of meals, weaving and sewing. Some men worked as butchers and in producing wine, but male slaves were far less numerous for two reasons : first, there were free craftsmen to do special tasks and, second, a defeated enemy was hard to control. Besides few warriors were taken as prisoners, and those that were often gained their freedom through ransom. As a rule, war

2. For a brief summary of their views see A. BRESSON, *L'économie de la Grèce des cités : Les structures et la production*, Paris 2007, p. 10-11.

aimed at the destruction of the enemy, not acquiring a labor supply. Most of the male slaves in Homer are captured in raids or sold as children and are few in number, serving mostly as personal attendants. Work in the fields was carried out mainly by the farmer and his wife³.

In the age of the tyrants during the seventh and sixth centuries BCE the peasants acquired their freedom, but economic problems arose. Many indebted farmers lost their land or could not compete with cheap grain imported from abroad. Part of this new proletariat found work on public building projects ; others set themselves up as independent craftsmen. For the rest there was the possibility of working in industry, but there were obstacles. First, it was difficult to transform a peasant into an industrial worker, and free men did not wish to learn a craft and live under another's command. For the capitalist, free workers were too expensive to hire and had to be trained. Besides there was no guarantee they could bring a return on the investment made in their training. On the one hand, the free poor did not want to live like slaves by working in industry ; on the other, the industrialists required cheap labor that they could easily manage.

Here lay the root cause for the growth of Greek slavery. Slaves cost relatively little and were under their owner's absolute control. This need for industrial labor led to raids for slaves and the slave trade. Slaves were acquired partly in war, partly by trade with the East, but mainly from areas like the unsettled parts of the West and the regions around the Black Sea. Chios was the first to acquire slaves by purchase, and this development went hand in hand with the advance of industry. Meyer's view were followed closely by W. L. Westermann, both in his essay on slavery published in the Pauly-Wissowa *Realencyclopädie* in 1935 and in his book of 1955⁴. J. Vogt also endorsed his analysis in an article published in 1962⁵ and K. Christ praised it in a book published in 1972⁶.

Moses Finley came from a very different intellectual background from that of E. Meyer, but his views about slavery in Homer bear a striking similarity to those of the German scholar⁷. In his *World of Odysseus*, Finley agrees with Meyer on several main points and accords little

3. Meyer's view was based on a questionable reading of Hesiod *Works and Days* 405. He deletes the next line, which reveals that the « woman » in 405 is not a wife (*ou gametên*), but a slave (*ktêtên* « bought »). M. L. WEST, *Hesiod : Works and Days*, Oxford 1978, p. 259 believes that the line refers to a wife, but Hesiod discusses marriage later in the poem (695-705). Furthermore, he recommends marriage around age thirty, but lines 405-406 contain advice to a farmer who is starting out (*protista*). Some editors delete line 406 because Aristotle, *Politics* 1252b11-12 and [Aristotle] *Oeconomica* 1343a21 quote line 405 without 406, but the line was known to other authors in antiquity and is found in most manuscripts.

4. W. L. WESTERMANN, « Sklaverei », *RE* Supplementband, 1935, 6, cols. 894-1068 and W. L. WESTERMANN, *The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity*, Philadelphia 1955, p. 1-5.

5. J. VOGT « Die antike Sklaverei als Forschungsproblem – von Humboldt bis heute », *Gymnasium* 69, 1962, p. 271-272, reprinted in J. VOGT, *Ancient Slavery and the Ideal of Man*, trans. T. Wiedemann, Oxford 1974, p. 178.

6. K. CHRIST, *Von Gibbon zu Rostovtzeff*, Darmstadt 1972, p. 293, 308-311.

7. Several witnesses testifying under oath stated that Finley was a member of the Communist party. When summoned before the Senate Subcommittee on Internal Security headed by Pat McCarran on 28 March 1952, Finley refused to answer questions on the grounds that his testimony might incriminate him. His refusal led to his dismissal from his position at Rutgers University. See E. W. SCHRECKER, *No Ivory Tower : McCarthysm and*

importance to their role in Homeric society⁸. First, he found few male slaves in the Homeric poems : « There was little ground, economic or moral, for sparing and enslaving the defeated men. The heroes as a rule killed (or sometimes ransomed) the males and carried off the females, regardless of rank⁹ ». Second, he followed Meyer about the role of slave women producing primarily for the household : the « place of slave women was in the household, washing, sewing, cleaning, grinding meal, valeting ». Third, Finley followed Meyer in considering that one of the main functions of female slavery was to satisfy the sexual needs of their masters : « If they were young, however, their place was also in the master's bed ». Finley went further than Meyer and held that the lowest status in the Homeric world was that of the *thes* or free laborer. Finley drew attention to the speech of Achilles' ghost in Hades to Odysseus in which he declares that he would rather be « working as a *thes* for another than be ruler over all the dead who have perished » (*Odyssey* 11.489-91). He concluded from this passage that « A *thes*, not a slave, was the lowest creature on earth that Achilles could think of. The terrible thing about a *thes* was his lack of attachment, his not belonging¹⁰ ».

Finley differed with Meyer about the factors accounting for the rise of slavery in the late Archaic and Classical periods. In his *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* Finley harshly criticized Meyer's explanation for the rise of slavery in the late Archaic period, which he called « a succession of *ex cathedra* assertions, in highly rhetorical dress, without either evidence or a discussion of the views under attack¹¹ ». He held that slavery arose not as a result of conquest, but because there existed a demand for their labor. This demand arose from three conditions : 1) « private ownership of land », 2) « sufficient development of commodity production and markets », and 3) « the unavailability of an internal labour supply¹² ». In Attica there was « a measure of urbanization and some commodity production » before 600 BCE¹³. Solon then provided the vital negative condition : « there can be no denial that after Solon debt-bondage and other non-slave forms of involuntary labour effectively ceased to exist in

the Universities, Oxford 1986, p. 172-79. M. NAFISSI, *Ancient Athens and Modern Ideology : Value, Theory, and Evidence in Historical Sciences : Max Weber, Karl Polanyi, and Moses Finley*, London 2005, p. 245-246, notices the similarities between the views of Meyer and Finley but does not analyze them in detail.

8. M. I. FINLEY, *The World of Odysseus*, rev. ed, London 1978, p. 34, 54-55, 57-59, 71 discusses slaves only very briefly. His remarks on p. 55 suggest that slaves were not very numerous.

9. M. I. FINLEY, *op. cit.* n. 8, p. 54, 59 (« There was little mating of slave with slave because there were so few males among them. »). Finley overlooks the six children of Dolios by his slave wife and the fact that Eurykleia must have had children of her own to be able to lactate and nurse Odysseus. One should also note the incentive given to Eumaeus and other slaves of gaining a wife and a house – see *Odyssey* 14.61-7 and 21.213-16.

10. M. I. FINLEY, *op.cit.* n. 8, p. 57.

11. M. I. FINLEY, *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, 2nd edition rev. by B. D. SHAW, Princeton 1998, p. 47.

12. M. I. FINLEY, *op. cit.* n. 11, p. 86.

13. M. I. FINLEY, *op. cit.* n. 11, p. 86.

Attica ». As a result, the « Eupatrids and presumably some non-aristocratic wealthy families now required a labour-force to replace those they had lost through the Solonic reforms ; they were unable to find it internally and they turned to outsiders, which means to slaves¹⁴ ».

Despite his criticism of Meyer's ideas, Finley's analysis of the rise of Greek slavery has many points in common with that of the German historian. Both locate the rise of slavery in the sixth century BCE and attribute this development to the rise of trade and the liberation of the peasants. They also share the belief that slavery arose from the lack of an internal labor supply for large-scale production, which compelled the wealthy to look abroad for slaves to fill this need.

Finley's views about the rise of slavery in ancient Greece have not received any serious challenge and have been followed by several recent scholars¹⁵. One of these scholars is the French Marxist Y. Garlan, who tentatively questions some of Finley's main tenets, but generally appears reluctant to deviate from his analysis¹⁶. He seems to side with Finley about the small number of male slaves, then shies away from fully endorsing his position : « the greater number of women than men among the slaves in the *Odyssey* is largely an optical illusion, which it is easy to correct if one remembers that most of the action takes place inside the royal houses, a domain reserved for the domestic female sphere ». Yet still Garlan believes « it is impossible to assimilate the Homeric slaves to the Athenian slaves of the classical period because of the patriarchal nature of the relationships binding the former to their master within the *oikos* » and the « strong sense of solidarity » in the family¹⁷. In

14. M. I. FINLEY, *op. cit.* n. 11, p. 87. The view that Solon's reforms abolished debt-bondage is no longer tenable – see E. M. HARRIS, « Did Solon Abolish Debt-Bondage? », *CQ* 52, 2002, p. 415-430 = E. M. HARRIS, *Democracy and the Rule of Law in Classical Athens*, Cambridge-New York 2006, p. 249-269.

15. See, for example, A. MELE, *Società e lavoro nei poemi omerici*, Naples 1968 and N. R. E. FISHER, *Slavery in Classical Greece*, London 1993. T. E. RIHLL, « The origin and establishment of ancient Greek slavery » in M. L. BUSH, *Serfdom and Slavery : Studies in Legal Bondage*, London 1996, p. 89-111, questions some of Finley's analysis but accepts the traditional view that slavery only became important in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. She attributes the rise of slavery to increased levels of trade. Cf. T. E. RIHLL, « Classical Athens » in K. BRADLEY, P. C. CARTLEDGE eds., *Cambridge World History of Slavery*. Volume I : *The Ancient Mediterranean*, Cambridge 2011, p. 69-72. This work does not contain a chapter on slavery in the Homer and Hesiod. Similar views are to be found in J. ANDREAU, R. DESCAT, *Esclave en Grèce et à Rome*, Paris 2006, p. 33-49 and R. DESCAT, « *Argyrônetos* : Les transformations de l'échange dans la Grèce archaïque » in P. VAN ALFEN ed., *Agoranomia : Studies in Money and Exchange Presented to John H. Kroll*, New York 2006, p. 21-36. See also R. OSBORNE, « Archaic Greece » in W. SCHEIDEL, I. MORRIS, R. SALLER eds., *The Cambridge Economic History of the Ancient World*, Cambridge 2007, p. 300 : « chattel slavery at Athens (...) appears to be a feature of the sixth century » ; P. CARTLEDGE, « The Political Economy of Greek Slavery » in P. CARTLEDGE, E.E. COHEN, L. FOXHALL eds., *Money, Labour and Land : Approaches to the Economies of Ancient Greece*, London 2002, p. 156-166, and J. ANNEQUIN, « Esclavage et dépendence : Chronique 2011 », *DHA* 37, 2011, p. 173-74.

16. Y. GARLAN, *Slavery in Ancient Greece*, Ithaca 1988, p. 29-37.

17. Cf. P. HUNT, « Slaves in Greek Literary Culture » in K. BRADLEY P.C. CARTLEDGE, *op. cit.* n. 15, p. 26-27, who believes that slavery in Homeric society was « familial » and « paternalistic ».

general, Garland follows Finley in holding that « slavery made, if not its appearance, at least considerable progress, during the time of Solon » and attributes this progress to the same factors¹⁸.

Despite their political and intellectual differences, both Meyer and Finley believed that slavery was of little importance during the Homeric period. Although differing on some points, they stressed two main factors as responsible for the rise of slavery in the sixth and fifth centuries BCE, the increase of wealth and trade and the liberation of farmers from their quasi-feudal duties to the nobles. This led to a demand for labor that could not be met by free workers and compelled the wealthy to look outside the community for slaves to work in their growing workshops.

II

Before examining the status of the *dmoes* and *dmoiai* of the Homeric poems, it is necessary to say a few words about the controversial term « Homeric society ». Anyone who has read the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* quickly realizes that these poems do not present a realistic description of life at the time when they were composed. There are many elements of fantasy in the tale of the Cyclops, the story of Achilles' battle with the Scamander, and the miracle of Paris' removal from the battlefield by Aphrodite. On the other hand, it is safe to assume that the earliest audiences that heard the poems being performed in the late eighth or seventh centuries BCE were familiar with the social practices that shape the conduct of the characters in the poem¹⁹. In other words, the person (or persons) who composed the plot of the *Odyssey* had to take for granted that those who heard his tale would be able to understand social institutions like *xenia* (guest-friendship)²⁰, animal sacrifice to Olympian and Chthonic deities, marriage practices involving gifts and dowry, partible inheritance with a distinction

18. Y. GARLAN, *op. cit.* n. 16, p. 38-39.

19. A. LESKY, « Homeros », *Real Encyclopädie* Suppl. 11, 1967, p. 687-693 ; A. HEUBECK, *Die homerische Frage*, Darmstadt 1974, p. 213-228 ; G. S. KIRK, *The Iliad : A Commentary*. Vol 1, Cambridge 1985, p. 1-10, and J. LATACZ, *Homer : His Art and His World*, Ann Arbor MI 1996, p. 56-65 favor a date in the second half of the eighth century BCE. M. L. WEST, *Hesiod Theogony. Edited with Prolegomenon and Commentary*, Oxford 1966, p. 45-47 ; W. BURKERT, « Das hundertörige Theben und die Datierung der Ilias », *Wiener Studien* 89, 1976, p. 5-21 ; O. TAPLIN, *Homeric Soundings : The Shaping of the Iliad*, Oxford 1992, p. 33-35 ; H. VAN WEES, *Status Warriors : Violence and Society in Homer and History*, Amsterdam 1992, p. 54-58 and J. P. CRIELAARD, « Homer, History and Archaeology : Some Remarks on the Date of the Homeric World » in J. P. CRIELAARD ed., *Homeric Questions*, Amsterdam 1995, p. 201-88 prefer the first half of the seventh century.

20. For the continuity in practices regarding the guest-host relationship between the Homeric world see G. HERMAN, *Ritualised Friendship and the Greek City*, Cambridge 1987 and E. SCHEID-TISSINIER, *Les usages du don chez Homère : vocabulaire et pratiques*, Nancy 1994, p. 115-176.

between *gnesioi* and *nothoi*²¹, the ties that link *hetairoi*, supplication²², etc. Without this basic understanding, the audience would not have been able to make sense of the plot or the motivations of the characters. Indeed, research on oral traditions has shown that singers in oral societies tend to conform their stories to the expectations of the audience and do not depict social institutions with which they are not familiar²³.

Applying this approach to the question of social relations in the Homeric poems, one should therefore ask the following questions : first, how did the audience think that the *dmoes* in the poem would act and what would their relations be with their masters²⁴ ? Was their relationship roughly similar to that between masters and slaves in Classical Athens and other slave societies? Second, how many people of this status did the audience think would normally be found in the household of a wealthy man? Third, what role did the labor of this class of people play in production and in forging the bonds that held society together? In short, did the singer or singers of the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* assume that their audience lived in a slave society and expect that the people in a story told to them would own slaves?

The next question to be addressed is, how to define slavery²⁵ ? Until the 1980s there was general agreement that slavery could be defined as the ownership of human beings, but in 1982 Orlando Patterson challenged the validity of this definition and has tried to substitute one of his own²⁶. This is a large issue with important methodological implications²⁷. Only two points need to be made here. First, Patterson's objections to the traditional definition are based on a flawed understanding of key legal concepts, especially that of ownership. Second, Patterson's own definition of slavery is not incompatible with the traditional one and tends to stress the social effects of slavery rather than legal rights. The two definitions do not conflict with each other but view the relationship from different perspectives. The legal

21. On Homeric marriage practices see W. K. C. LACEY, « Homeric *HEDNA* and Penelope's *KYRIOS* », *JHS* 86, 1966, p. 55-68 and R. WESTBROOK, « Penelope's Dowry and Odysseus' Kingship » in R. W. WALLACE, M. GAGARIN eds., *Symposium 2001 : Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte*, Vienna 2005, p. 3-24.

22. For the continuity in practices regarding supplication between the Homeric world and the society of later Greece see F. NAIDEN, *Ancient Supplication*, New York-Oxford 2006.

23. See J. VANSINA, *Oral Tradition as History*, Madison WI 1985. For the application of the results obtained from the study of oral tradition in Africa and elsewhere see I. MORRIS, « The Use and Abuse of Homer », *ClAnt* 5, 1986, p. 81-138.

24. There is no reason to see any difference in status among those called *dmos*, *oikeus*, or *andrapodon*. See M. NDOYE, *Groupes sociaux et idéologie du travail dans les mondes homérique et hésiodique*, Besançon 2010, p. 212-213.

25. M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p.192-194 discusses slavery in the *Odyssey* at length but avoids the theoretical problem of defining the term. Thalmann's view of slavery in the Homeric poems is close to mine but he also does not address this theoretical problem. See W. THALMANN, *The Swineherd and the Bow : Representations of Class in the « Odyssey »*, Ithaca 1998, p. 50 : « Slaves in the *Odyssey* represent the labour on which the more leisured aristocratic style of living is based. It is their work and its products that support the way of life and the activities of the families at the head of the various *oikoi* : the feasts and sacrifices, the hospitality, and the (primarily horizontal) redistribution of goods in the form of gifts that is the basic mechanism in the functioning of elite society. »

26. O. PATTERSON, *Slavery and Social Death*, Cambridge MA 1982, p. 17-101.

27. My student David Lewis discusses this issue in detail in his doctoral thesis (Durham 2011).

definition of slavery approaches the relationship from the point of view of the master because it concentrates on his rights over the slave²⁸. Patterson's definition lays more emphasis on the social effects of these rights on the life of slaves and their place in society. To strengthen my arguments the following analysis studies the status of the *dmoes* using both definitions.

Even though the legal definition of slavery places more weight on the master's perspective, there are two advantages to using « ownership » to define slavery. First, ownership is a universal concept, shared by all societies from the most undeveloped to the most advanced. A. M. Honoré has shown that despite differences in political beliefs and legal traditions the law codes of countries like France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Italy and even Soviet Russia shared the same basic definition of ownership and recognized an identical set of incidents²⁹. Second, there are some fixed incidents of ownership, which give us some specific criteria to use in determining whether a person exercises the rights of ownership or not. The concept also has some flexibility and recognizes that the rights of ownership may vary from society to society in three main regards. First, who has the capacity to own? For instance, at Athens foreigners could not own land. Second, what can be owned? In the countries that are members of the United Nations, individuals cannot own other human beings. In some countries private citizens are not allowed to own waterways. In the former Soviet Union private individuals were not allowed to own factories. Third, what are the restrictions placed on ownership? In modern societies many restrictions are placed on what owners can do with their property. For instance, those who own cars cannot operate them without a driving license or insurance, drive them at high speeds on roads and highways, or park them anywhere they wish.

Yet although various societies may place different restrictions on the rights of ownership, the basic incidents of ownership remain constant from one society to the next. In all societies ownership is « the greatest possible interest in a thing which a mature system of law recognizes³⁰ ». The Romans grouped the rights exercised by an owner under three main headings, the right to use (*ius utendi*), the right to enjoy the fruits (*ius fruendi*), and the right to « use up » (*ius abutendi*), that is, the right to consume or alienate. Modern legal theory breaks these into the following rights and duties : (i) right to possess, (ii) right to use, (iii) right to manage, (iv) right to income, (v) right to capital, (vi) right to security,

28. K. RAAFLAUB, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece*, Chicago-London 2004, p. 291, note 54 claims that a discussion of slavery in terms of social status « seems appropriate since in this early period legal forms were undeveloped and relationships based on power and influence predominated ». This view rests on a misunderstanding of the nature of law, which is found even in communities with low levels of technological and social development. Raaflaub overlooks the work of E. CANTARELLA, *Norme e sanzione in Omero. Contributo all protostoria del diritto greco*, Milan 1979, and K. BURCHFIEL, « The Myth of "Prelaw" in Early Greece » in G. THÜR ed., *Symposium 1993 : Vorträge zur griechischen und hellenistischen Rechtsgeschichte*, Cologne-Weimar-Vienna 1994, p. 79-104, who demonstrate the existence of legal norms in Homeric society. Even if one prefers not to follow the legal definition of slavery, the *dmoes* and *dmoi* of the Homeric poems still fit the sociological definition of slavery offered by Patterson – see below.

29. See A. HONORÉ, « Ownership » in A. G. GUEST ed., *Oxford Essays in Jurisprudence*, Oxford 1961, p. 107-121.

30. *Ibid.*

(vii) transmissibility, (viii) absence of term, (ix) prohibition of harmful use, and (x) liability to execution. The Athenians and the citizens of other Greek *poleis* clearly recognized that owners exercised these powers over objects that belonged to them and that masters possessed all these rights over their slaves³¹. For instance, masters exercised complete physical control over their slaves : they could beat them, chain them up, starve them (Xen. *Mem.* 2.1.16), employ them as prostitutes ([Dem.] 59.18-23), or even castrate them (Hdt. 8.105). All money earned by slaves belonged to the master ([Dem.] 53.20), and likewise all contracts made by the slave were the responsibility of his master (Hyp. *Ath. passim*). If the master fell into debt, he could offer to hand over his slave to the creditor as compensation ([Dem.] 53.20-21), or if the master had his property confiscated by the *polis*, the *poletai* would seize his slaves and sell them³².

Masters in the Homeric poems exercise all the rights of ownership over individuals referred to as *dmoes*, *dmoai*, and *douloi*. Masters have the right to exclusive possession of their slaves and can punish those who interfere with this right by using them without their master's consent. For instance, Odysseus justifies his killing of the suitors in part because they have slept with his slaves against his will and thus violated his right to exclusive use (*Odyssey* 22.35-41)³³. Achilles objects to Agamemnon's taking of Briseis against his will and refuses to fight alongside him because his rights as owner have been violated (*Iliad* 1.292-303). Masters have the right to use slaves as they wish. Hesiod advises masters to give orders to slaves, not to ask them to perform tasks or persuade them to work through a promise of wages or other benefits (*Works and Days* 502, 597-603). It is the owner who decides what the slaves will do and manages their labor. Free workers have the right to receive a *misthos*, but slaves in the Homeric poems must work because they are forced (*anangke*)³⁴. Laertes has the power to use Eurycleia for sex even though he does not exercise the right out of respect for his own wife (*Odyssey* 1.425-33). They even have the right to kill them if they wish. Achilles slaughters over the grave of Patroclus the Trojan princes captured in war, who have become his slaves (*Iliad* 18.336-37 ; 23.175-76). Masters exercise their right to the « fruits » of slaves by exercising the rights of ownership over their children. For example, Melanthius and Melanthe, the children of the slave Dolios, become the slaves of Laertes and Odysseus (*Odyssey* 17.212, 18.320-25)³⁵. All the benefits of work done by slaves belong to the master ; the work done by Eumaeus and his fellow slaves is all for the benefit of their masters Odysseus,

31. For the powers of ownership in Greek Law see A. KRÄNZLEIN, *Eigentum und Besitz im griechischen Recht*, Berlin 1963.

32. For slaves confiscated by the *polis* as a punishment see *IG I³ 421*, lines 34-49, 422, lines 196-199 ; 426, lines 10-20.

33. The adverb *biaiôs* must refer to violence done to Odysseus' possessions, not to the slave girls, who willingly went to sleep with the suitors. See *Odyssey* 21.1-16. Cf. W. THALMANN, *op. cit.* n. 25, p. 72 : « for the suitors to sleep with them is a blow at Odysseus' property, an implicit claim of rival ownership. »

34. See M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p. 274-276.

35. Melanthe is clearly a slave because she is one of the women who sleep with the suitors (*Odyssey* 20.1-16) and who are called *dmoai* by Eurycleia (*Odyssey* 22.419-27).

Telemachus, and Penelope. Nowhere in the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* is it stated that masters pay wages to their slaves for the work they do (for wages paid to free men see *Iliad* 21.445-50). When slaves are sold, it is the master who receives the price paid for them and thus has the right to capital (*Iliad* 7.472-75 ; *Odyssey* 14.296-7 ; 15.427-29, 452-3, 483). Masters have the right to security of ownership in regard to their slaves. This means that slaves cannot be taken from them without their consent. The best example of this is Agamemnon's seizure of Achilles' slave Briseis. When Agamemnon threatens to take her, Achilles protests against this violation of property for which he worked and which he received from the Achaeans (*Iliad* 1.161-2). Nestor considers this wrong and advises Agamemnon not to take Achilles' property (*Iliad* 1.275-6). After Agamemnon gives Briseis back to her rightful owner, he admits that he was wrong to take her in the first place and offers to pay compensation for his offense (*Iliad* 19.74-144. Cf. 9.115-20).

There is no limit in time to a master's power over his slave, who remains in under his control as long as he lives. Laertes bought Eurycleia when she was young and attractive, but still remains a slave in the family household in old age (*Odyssey* 1.427-38). When his master dies, he does not gain his freedom but falls under the control of his heirs³⁶. For example, when Odysseus is away from Ithaca for twenty years and presumed dead, Eumaeus, Philoetius and Eurycleia do not become free but obey commands from Odysseus' son Telemachus (*Odyssey* 16.146-53 ; 21.80, 381). Achilles assumes that after his death his slaves will belong to his son Neoptolemus (*Iliad* 19.330-33). Finally, when a master wrongs another free person, he can give one or more of his slaves as compensation to the victim. When Agamemnon admits that he was wrong to take Briseis and wishes to pay compensation to Achilles, he offers to make a payment of seven tripods, ten talents of gold, twelve cauldrons, twelve horses, and seven slave women from Lesbos (*Iliad* 9.122-30, 262-72). The slaves are treated exactly the same as the other objects belonging to Agamemnon and promised to Achilles, who will become their owner if he accepts them. A study of the evidence from the *Iliad*, *Odyssey*, and *Works and Days* therefore shows that masters exercised the same rights of ownership over their *dmoes* and *dmoai* as masters did over slaves in the Classical and Hellenistic periods. The legal relationship between masters and slaves therefore remained fundamentally the same from the seventh century through the second century BCE³⁷.

36. Cf. M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p. 248.

37. Pace W. BERINGER, « Servile status in the sources for early Greek History », *Historia* 31, 1982, p. 13-32 ; Y. GARLAN, *op. cit.* n. 16, p. 37 (« Homeric slaves cannot – any more than Mycenaean slaves – be regarded as the direct ancestors of the chattel slaves of the classical period... ») and P. DEBORD, « Esclavage mycénien, esclavage homérique », *REA* 75, 1973, p. 225-240. I. MORRIS, *Burial and Ancient Society : The Rise of the Greek City State*, Cambridge 1987, follows Beringer and bases much of his analysis on his assumptions. Despite his view that slavery in the Homeric poems was mild ; W. L. WESTERMANN, *op. cit.* n. 4, p. 3 recognizes that « From the legal standpoint, custom gave the master complete and arbitrary control over his slaves. »

We turn now to Patterson's approach. Patterson defines slavery as « the permanent, violent domination of natively alienated and generally dishonored persons³⁸ ». In his definition of slavery Patterson emphasizes three basic elements : 1) domination maintained by violence and the threat of violence, 2) dishonor, and 3) natal alienation. By this last term, Patterson refers to the fact that the kinship and family ties of the slave have no force in society. This means that slave parents have no rights over their children, who are under the control of their masters and can be sold to other masters without their consent.

A) USE OF VIOLENCE TO MAINTAIN DOMINATION

A casual reading of the *Odyssey* might give one the impression that slaves in Homeric society were treated rather well and that their masters do not use violence to assert their rights over them. Indeed, Westermann thought that the slavery in the Homeric poems « was so mild that it is difficult to distinguish it at times from patriarchal clientage or serfdom » and that « the treatment of slaves by their owners was notably mild and kindly³⁹ ». Finley thought that in Homer the « slave was better off » than the *thes*, the free man without land and that the « treatment of the slaves » in Homer « looks more patriarchal than the pattern familiar from plantation slavery⁴⁰ ». This is partly a function of literary genre : more elevated genres as a rule do not depict rough treatment of slaves. By contrast, low genres like comedy make frequent references to beating and whipping slaves. Since epic resembles tragedy and is an elevated genre, one would not expect to find many references to the physical abuse of slaves. But Homer nods on occasion and lets the brutal realities of slave life slip through the generic filter in several passages. For instance, when Helen tells how Odysseus made himself look like a runaway slave to enter Troy as a spy, she says that « he marked his body with degrading blows » (*Odyssey* 4.244-46). A small, but significant detail that reveals that normally a slave would bear the signs of whipping and beating⁴¹. When Odysseus, disguised as a beggar, is insulted by Melantho, he says he will tell her master to cut her « limb from limb » (*Odyssey* 18.337-39). Such threats are not reserved for Melantho : afraid that his own nurse will betray him after recognizing his scar, Odysseus tells her to remain silent or « I will not spare you, although you are my nurse, when I kill the other slave women in my halls » (*Odyssey* 19. 489-90). And to punish the slave girls who have defied his authority by sleeping with the suitors, Odysseus orders his son to put them to the sword (*Odyssey* 22.440-45). But Telemachus opts for a less dignified form of execution, slow strangulation by hanging. In

38. O. PATTERSON, *op. cit.* n. 26, p. 13.

39. W. L. WESTERMANN, *op. cit.* n. 4, p. 2-3.

40. M. I. FINLEY, *op. cit.* n. 8, p. 58-59.

41. See M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p. 243-247 for the punishment of slaves. Cf. W. THALMANN, *op. cit.* n. 25, p. 65-66. As Thalmann observes, arbitrary violence disappears in the narrative of the *Odyssey* and slaves are divided into two groups, good slaves, who are treated with respect and rewarded, and bad slaves, who are brutally punished. This reflects the viewpoint of the audience, which contained many slave-masters and naturally wished to be presented with a flattering depiction of their treatment of their slaves.

fact, the poet dwells with on the way the young women struggled « for a while, but not for long » (*Odyssey* 22.462-73). These passages reveal that there was nothing mild and kindly about the treatment of slaves. One should not make a distinction between a patriarchal form of slavery in the Homeric period and a more harsh and industrial one in the Classical period⁴². Masters in both periods resorted to extreme forms of brutality to maintain their power.

One should not be deceived into thinking that slavery in the Homeric poems was « mild » or « paternal » by focusing mainly on the condition of Eumaeus. Eumaeus lives apart from the household and is in charge of herds of swine, but his status is not any different from that of other *dmoes* in the Homeric poems. He has been taken forcibly from his family (*Odyssey* 15.440-84) and clearly does not have the freedom to return home. He cannot take a wife unless Odysseus allows him to (*Odyssey* 14.61-65). The fact that he works independently and not under the direct supervision of Telemachus or Penelope merely shows that he has won the trust of his masters, who allow him to live apart and make decisions about the animals in his care. But the swine that he tends belong to Odysseus, and any increase in their numbers is for Odysseus' benefit (*Odyssey* 14.3-4, 526-27).

B) DISHONOR

Finley noted that when Odysseus sees Achilles in the underworld, the hero says that he would rather work for a man who has no land than be prince among the dead (*Odyssey* 11. 488-91). He assumed that Achilles has chosen the lowest possible status for a person here and concluded that the slave must have ranked above the hired worker. But the assumption is not warranted. No Homeric hero would prefer slavery to death. The hired worker at least has his freedom and some respect. The slave is degraded and without honor, a position that Achilles would have found intolerable. As Garlan notes, « The condition of a thete, which the dead Achilles declares that he would prefer to that of a king in the Underworld, is no doubt simply the worst of conditions reserved by the gods for a free man⁴³ ».

A better indication of the general contempt for slaves is found in Eumaeus' statement that Zeus takes away half a man's value when the day of slavery overtakes him (*Odyssey* 17.322-3). One of the marks of humiliation for the slave was the being forced to wear demeaning clothes (*Odyssey* 14.342-43). When Odysseus, pretending to be a stranger, sees his father poorly dressed, he assumes that he is a slave (*Odyssey* 24.249-50). But perhaps the greatest sign of the slave's lack of honor is the way that his body is treated after death. After killing the suitors, Odysseus treats their bodies with respect and leaves them for their relatives to bury (*Odyssey* 22.446-50). But the body of Melanthius is mutilated and fed to the dogs

42. M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p. 239 argues forcefully against the idea that slavery in the Homeric poems is « patriarchal » and mild.

43. Y. GARLAN, *op. cit.* n. 16, p. 35.

(*Odyssey* 22.474-7). And there is no mention of the bodies of the hanged slave women – their corpses simply disappear⁴⁴. All free men, even enemies, have the right to burial. As degraded individuals, slaves are denied this honor.

C) NATAL ALIENATION

Although slaves may be permitted to cohabit and have children, they have no rights over these children, who become the property of the master. Callicles in Plato's *Gorgias* (483a-b) notes that one of the greatest marks of a slave's dishonor is his lack of power to help those about whom he cares : « For the suffering of injustice is not the part of a man, but of a slave, who indeed had better die than live ; since when he is wronged and trampled upon, he is unable to help himself, or any other about whom he cares. » The most telling indication of the lack of recognition for the kinship ties of slaves in the *Odyssey* is the different reactions to the deaths of the suitors and those of Melanthius and Melanthe. When the suitors are killed, Odysseus expects that their kin will come to avenge their deaths (*Odyssey* 23.362-65). In fact, the male relatives of the suitors gather in Ithaca and march to Odysseus' house (*Odyssey* 24.463-71). But when the children of Dolios, Melanthe and Melanthius are killed, Odysseus does not worry that their father and brothers will come to punish him for their deaths. Dolios greets his master as if nothing had happened, and he and his sons fight by the side of the men who have killed two of their relatives (*Odyssey* 24.496-501). While the kinship tie is strong for the families of the suitors, it does not exist for Dolios and his children⁴⁵.

One should also note that Dolios and the Sicilian woman owned by Laertes have six sons. He is called their father, and she is called their mother, but the Sicilian slave woman is never called Dolios' wife. This stands in contrast to the other women in the poem who are given the title of « wedded wife. » These two slaves cohabit and have children, but their marriage does not exist because Dolios has no rights over the woman, nor over his children, all of whom belong to Laertes (*Od.* 24.383-90)⁴⁶.

III

The next issue to discuss is slave numbers⁴⁷. First a few words about the number of slaves held by wealthier Athenians. Two commonly cited figures come from Xenophon's *Poroi* (4.14) where the author recalls how in earlier times Callias owned 600 slaves and Nicias 1,000. These figures should not be accepted uncritically any more than the figure of

44. Pace W. BERINGER, « Die ursprüngliche Bedeutung von *doulosynen anechesthai* in *Odyssee* 22.423 », *Athenaeum* 30, 1960, p. 65-97, there is no reason to see any difference between the social status of the *dmoes*, who had families of their own, and other slaves used as chattel slaves. See N.R E. FISHER, *op. cit.* n. 15, p. 49.

45. Cf. M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p. 248 : « L'esclave n'a pas de parent hormis le maître. »

46. Cf. M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p. 252 : « Le terme "mariage" au sens social est inadéquat pour les esclaves qui ne peuvent nouer des rapports de filiation avec leurs enfants. Aucun des termes qui désignent l'époux et l'épouse dans le vocabulaire homérique n'est attribué à Dolios ou à la vieille Sicilienne. »

47. M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, does not discuss this topic.

400,000 for Attica as whole found in Athenaeus should be trusted⁴⁸. In this passage Xenophon is deploring the relative poverty of fourth-century Athens and comparing it unfavorably with the Golden Age of the fifth century. To make the contrast effective, Xenophon is inflating the number of slaves held by these prominent Athenians during this earlier period of prosperity. Xenophon was apparently not the only one to exaggerate their wealth – Lysias (19.47-8) reports that their fortunes were commonly believed to be larger than they actually were.

More reliable figures can be found in the speeches of the Attic orators where the speaker provides evidence to support his statements about contemporary estates⁴⁹. In Demosthenes' speech *Against Pantaenetus* (37.4) the defendant is said to have 30 slaves. In the inventory of his father's estate Demosthenes lists two sets of slaves, one group of thirty-two or thirty-three making knives and swords belonging to his father and another of twenty making couches, who have been pledged as security for a loan of 40 *minai* and belonged to another household (Dem. 27.9). Aeschines (1.97) says that Timarchus inherited eleven or twelve slaves from his father, who was in the liturgical class. Lysias and his brother Polemarchus owned 120 slaves (Lys. 12.90), the highest figure in the orators. The shield factory of Pasion brought in a talent a year in revenue (Dem. 36.11), which was twice as much as the slaves making swords and knives in Demosthenes' estate brought in. This would appear to indicate that Pasion had about sixty slaves in this workshop⁵⁰. These figures are the same as, or higher than, those found in the Attic Stelae : the largest number, sixteen, are recorded for the metic Cephisodorus, after that eight for Adeimantus and at least five for Axiochus⁵¹. One must bear in mind however that these figures represent only those slaves who were actually confiscated ; if each of these men was able to hide or transfer other slaves before the *poletai* seized their property, the actual numbers may have been higher. It is also necessary to take the fragmentary state of these inscriptions and the incomplete nature of the *poletai*'s records into consideration. But even if the actual figures are double, they are in the same range as the figures found in the orators. This would indicate that a wealthy Athenian in the Classical period might own between a dozen and three dozen slaves⁵². Plato (*Republic* 9.578e) indicates that only a very wealthy man would own more than fifty. Because Athens was a wealthy community, there is no reason to believe that the numbers were much higher in other *poleis*.

48. On the figure of 400,000 slaves in Attica found at Athenaeus 272-273a see W. L. WESTERMANN, « Athenaeus and the Slaves of Athens », *HSPH* Suppl. 1940, p. 451-470.

49. The best discussion of slave numbers in Athens remains R. SARGENT, *The Size of the Slave Population at Athens during the fifth and fourth centuries before Christ*, Urbana IL 1924, but she is interested mainly in the total number of slaves in Attica during the fifth and fourth centuries BCE.

50. *Ibid.*, p. 97-98.

51. *IG* I³ 421, lines 34-49, 422, lines 196-199 ; 426, lines 10-20.

52. Cf. R. SARGENT, *op. cit.* n. 49, p. 102 : « an average of twenty-two for each family » among the wealthiest Athenians. It is possible that some very wealthy Spartans may have had up to 125 helots, but these holdings were exceptionally large. See S. HODKINSON, « Spartiates, helots and the direction of the agrarian economy : toward an understanding of helotage in comparative perspective » in C. KATSARI, E. DAL LAGO eds., *Systems Ancient and Modern*, Cambridge 2008, p. 285-320, at p. 315.

We now turn to the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. The Homeric poems are not census records. Just the same the poems give us some idea about how many slaves the audience expected a wealthy man to own. At the high end of the scale we have the figure of 10,000 or « countless slaves » (*dmoes ... myrioi*) which Odysseus claims to have owned in one of his Cretan tales, told this time to the suitors (*Odyssey* 17.420). The context here is important since Odysseus is trying to impress Antinoos, who is belittling him for his poverty, and is naturally exaggerating as insecure people often do. But the speech still suggests that people in this period would assume that the rich possessed more than the few slaves needed to attend to their personal needs. More reasonable figures are found elsewhere in the *Odyssey*: Alcinoos is said to have fifty slave women in addition to the males, who for instance ready Nausicaa's wagon for her trip to the river to wash clothes (*Odyssey* 7.103 ; 6.69-70). Odysseus is credited with the same number of female slaves (*Odyssey* 22.421-22). And Agamemnon can promise Achilles eight slave women as a gift without presumably causing a dent in his overall holdings (*Iliad* 9.270-76. Cf. Odysseus' claim in one of his false tales that he gave four slave women as gifts – *Odyssey* 24.279). Only a man with dozens of slaves could afford to make such an offer.

The Homeric poems give the impression that most slaves are women, but as Garland observes, this is misleading, largely the result of the perspective taken by the narrator, especially in the *Odyssey*, who focuses (or focalizes) on activities inside the household, where the suitors are feasting. Since most of the action takes place inside Odysseus' house, attention tends to fall on the female slaves who lived and worked there. But the account of Odysseus' brief stay in Eumaeus' hut provides some valuable details and helps to correct this one-sided perspective. Eumaeus himself is a slave ; he has been kidnapped as a child and bought by Laertes (*Odyssey* 14.59-66). He is accompanied by four other slaves who tend Odysseus' herds (*Odyssey* 14.24-28). But this is not the only livestock held by Odysseus : there are also twelve herds of cattle, twelve flocks of sheep, twelve of pigs, twelve of goats (*Odyssey* 14.100-4). They are tended by herdsmen like Philoitiis (*Odyssey* 20.185), Melanthius, and Eumaeus, all of whom are slaves. If we assign four or five slaves to each group of animals, we arrive at a total of around two hundred or two hundred and fifty male slaves in addition to the fifty females⁵³.

Here one must bear in mind the warning of Thucydides (1.10.3) that the poets tend to exaggerate⁵⁴. Yet even if we reduce this figure by half, we end up with a hundred and twenty five or a hundred and fifty. Let us suppose that Homer got really carried away and increased the normal number of slaves held by a wealthy man by ten times. We still get a figure of twenty-five to thirty, which is comparable for the larger numbers in Classical Athens. On the other hand, one must remember that Ithaca was not renowned for its wealth. This means that

53. Cf. H. VAN WEES, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 253 : « a head-count of Odysseus' servants shows that he owns about as many male as female slaves (...). It would seem that ideally men are slaughtered, while in practice in (*sic*) large numbers of them are enslaved. » Cf. H. VAN WEES, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 49.

54. Cf. M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 24, p. 194 : « grossissement constant chez Homère ».

the poet expected his audience to assume that even the leading man on a small rocky island would have a large number of slaves. To make his story plausible, he portrayed even a man of modest wealth as someone relying heavily on slave labor.

So much for the top end of the scale : did the audience find it plausible for someone less affluent to own several slaves? The *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* are mainly peopled with the wealthiest members of Greek society in the Archaic period, but the last book of the *Odyssey* offers a glimpse of the farm of Laertes, who has fallen on hard times while his son Odysseus is abroad. Despite his straitened circumstances, Laertes still owns Dolios, a Sicilian woman, and their six sons, a total of eight slaves (*Od.* 24.383-90, 497). We might add that once more we find more male slaves than female slaves in the countryside.

These conclusions are strengthened when we compare the evidence of Hesiod's *Works and Days*. Whatever one thinks about the value of the Homeric poems as historical evidence, few would dissent from the view that Hesiod aims to offer practical advice to a contemporary audience. Hesiod is not a member of the top stratum of his society – he grumbles about the *basileis* who lord it over him, devour his payments made for their protection, and pervert the norms of justice (*Works and Days* 38-9). Yet Hesiod assumes that those on his social level will not do all the work on their farms by themselves, but will order their slaves to do it. These slaves are active at all times during the agricultural year – they plough and sow crops (*Works and Days* 405-9, 458-61, 469-71), during summer they build barns (*Works and Days* 502-3), plant vines (*Works and Days* 571), reap the harvest (*Works and Days* 571-73), and winnow the grain (*Works and Days* 597-99). They are clearly distinguished from the hired labor that works only during the harvest (*Works and Days* 600-3)⁵⁵. If Hesiod relied heavily on slave labor, there is no reason to doubt that the *basileis* in his community did so too. This confirms what we deduced from the Homeric poems : in the seventh century there was widespread use of slave labor, not only in the household, but also in the fields with both males and females contributing to production.

Given this evidence, it is not surprising to find that slavery was already well entrenched in Athenian society before the Solon' archonship in 594. When describing the crisis that confronted him, the lawgiver alludes in several passages to constant raiding for slaves and plunder. In one passage Solon says how many poor Athenians have been sold abroad and bound in humiliating fetters (fr. 4.23-5 [West]). In another passage (fr. 36.8-15 [West]) he mentions two groups of slaves, those sold to foreign countries, who no longer remember how to speak the Attic dialect, and those trembling in fear at their masters at home⁵⁶. Solon did not radically change Athenian society by abolishing debt-bondage, which then caused the élite to look elsewhere for dependent labor. Rather he sought to ensure that Athenians would not lose their freedom through the breakdown of law and order⁵⁷. By strengthening the legal and

55. On the meaning of these lines see M. L. WEST, *op. cit.* n. 3, p. 309-310.

56. Note that the Phoenicians imported slaves to the Near East from the Greeks, Cappadocians and Phrygians in the early sixth century – see Ezekiel 27 :13.

57. On the nature of the crisis in early sixth-century Attica and Solon's reforms see E. M. HARRIS, *op. cit.* n. 14.

political institutions at the center in Athens, he hoped to ensure peace and security for average citizens and make sure that the upper classes searched outside of Attica for their supply of slave labor. This of course was no innovation ; the idea that leaders should go outside of their community to capture slaves is present already in Homer⁵⁸.

IV

So far we have found that the *dmoes* and *dmoai* of the Homeric poems were slaves and had the same status from both a legal and social perspective as the *douloi* and *oiketai* of Classical Athens and that in both periods wealthy individuals might own dozens of slaves. But what was their role in the economy? Was the society depicted in the poems of Homer and Hesiod a « society with slaves » or a « slave society, » that is, a society in which the elite depended on goods produced by slave labor to maintain its position in society⁵⁹ ? Meyer and Finley thought that the economy of the Homeric period was based on the household and that all economic activities from production to consumption took place within the context of the family. Because there was little commerce and no markets, there was no place to dispose of a surplus or to acquire bought goods. Neither Meyer nor Finley took into account the need for the elite to produce a surplus in order to acquire power and influence⁶⁰.

The main path to power for an aspiring leader was to fight for his community and lead his *hetairoi* in battle. This not only enhanced his status and protected his community, but might also gain booty, which could be distributed to his *hetairoi* and cement their loyalty⁶¹. During peacetime, however, Homeric leaders had to maintain their position in the community by distributing largesse and gift-giving⁶². A leader was expected to provide feasts for members of the community⁶³. Telemachus arrives at Pylos when Nestor is hosting a lavish meal for his people. The wine and food for the feast come from his property (*Odyssey* 3.390-92). The next day he conducts a sacrifice to Athena and divides the meat from the slaughtered cow to his followers (*Odyssey* 3.418-22). During Odysseus' stay in Phaeacia, Alcinoos gives a feast for his community and distributes wine and food from his stores (*Odyssey* 8.38-9). When Agamemnon is losing face because of the challenge to his authority by Diomedes, Nestor advises him to restore his prestige by holding a feast for his soldiers (*Iliad* 9.141-48).

58. For sources of slaves from outside the community see M. NDOYE, *op. cit.* n. 14, p. 226-239.

59. For the distinction between « society with slaves » and « slave society » see J. ANDREAU, R. DESCAT, *op. cit.* n. 15, p. 23-27.

60. On the circulation of goods outside the household in Homeric society see W. DONLAN, « Scale, Value and Function in the Homeric Economy », *AJAH* 6, 1981, p. 101-117 and W. DONLAN, « The Politics of Generosity in Homer », *Helios* 9, 1982, p. 1-15.

61. For the distribution of booty to companions see H. VAN WEES, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 299-310.

62. Cf. E. SCHEID-TISSINIER, *op. cit.* n. 20, p. 254 : « Ce sont les libéralités qu'il (sc. Ulysse) distribue généreusement qui permettent que s'édifie en retour entre le chef donateur et ses obligés, un réseau complexe d'obligations réciproques qui constituent la base des relations de clientèle inséparables de l'exercice du pouvoir ».

63. On the role of these feasts see H. VAN WEES, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 44-48 ; E. SCHEID -TISSINIER, *op. cit.* n. 20, p. 267-285.

Another means of gaining prestige was to sponsor games. At the end of the *Iliad* Achilles organizes several competitions in honor of Patroclus. To encourage participation and to reward those who win, Achilles gives many gifts. Some of the awards are booty gained in battle such as the arms of Sarpedon (*Iliad* 23.798-800). Yet in other contests the gifts have been acquired by other means. The prize for the foot-race is a mixing-bowl of silver made by Sidonians, which Achilles must have acquired by exchange (*Iliad* 23.740-51). For the winner in boxing he gives a mule and a two-handled cup (*Iliad* 23.654-6). For wrestling one of the prizes is a tripod (*Iliad* 23.704-5). To acquire these gifts Achilles must have had goods to exchange, and these goods must have been produced by the slaves on his estate (*Iliad* 19.330-33)⁶⁴.

While feasts were a means of gaining support within the community, leaders might use the practice of guest-friendship to acquire friends outside the community. Here too gifts were very important⁶⁵. When Telemachus leaves Sparta, Menelaus gives him a two-handled cup, a mixing bowl of silver, and an embroidered robe made by Helen (*Odyssey* 15.101-8). Alcinoos commands other leaders in Phaeacia to give Odysseus twelve tripods (*Odyssey* 13.13-5). He himself donates thirteen each of cloaks, tunics, talents of gold, tripods and cauldrons in addition to one gold cup and one sword with an ivory scabbard (*Odyssey* 8.392, 403, 430, 13.13). The garments appear to be made by female slaves (*Odyssey* 7.103-6), but in all cases the metal goods must have been acquired by a surplus. Because the wealthy do not appear to have used free labor to any major extent, this surplus must have come from the work of slaves.

To strengthen their positions both inside and outside the community leaders would also contract alliances through marriage. Gift-giving played an important role in this social practice. Prospective suitors would pay bride-gifts (*hedna*), and the father of the bride would give a dowry to mark the status of his family⁶⁶. These gifts might be substantial. One suitor is said to have given 100 cattle with a pledge of another 1,000 goats and sheep (*Iliad* 11.244). As we have seen, the herds on Odysseus' estate are maintained by slaves. Agamemnon promises to give his daughter Iphianassa to Achilles with a large dowry (*Iliad* 9.65-75).

Leaders also might on occasion have to pay ransom to rescue family and friends captured in war. To recover the body of his son Hector, Priam brings twelve robes, twelve cloaks, twelve coverlets, twelve mantles, twelve tunics, ten talents, two tripods, four cauldrons, and

64. W. DONLAN, *op. cit.* n. 60, p. 105 : « a surplus beyond domestic needs naturally implies a large and wealthy *oikos*. »

65. For the role of gifts in guest-friendship see G. HERMAN, *op. cit.* n. 20, p. 73-115 and H. VAN WEES, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 228-238.

66. For the distinction between *hedna* and other gifts in Homeric marriage, see W. K. C. LACEY, *op. cit.* n. 21. On gifts given in marriage see E. SCHEID-TISSINIER, *op. cit.* n. 20, p. 83-114.

a large cup (*Iliad* 24.229-35). The woven materials were no doubt made by the women in his household working with their slaves. To acquire the tripods and cauldrons Priam must have produced a surplus that he could have exchanged to pay metalworkers for these objects⁶⁷.

It would therefore be a mistake to believe that goods in the Homeric economy circulated only within the household⁶⁸. The heroes of the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey* needed a surplus to acquire luxury items from outside the household and to produce much more food and clothing than was required for domestic consumption⁶⁹. This surplus on which the elite relied for their power and influence was produced to a large extent by slaves⁷⁰. Ancient Greece did not become a slave society during the sixth and fifth centuries BCE. As early as the Homeric poems, the elite exploited slave labor to maintain their dominance in society.

Greece was not unusual for its reliance on slave labour in this period (8th and 7th centuries BCE), as a glance at contemporary societies in the eastern Mediterranean and Near East shows⁷¹. For instance, the notion that wealthy individuals would rely upon slave labor is a recurrent theme in a number of Hebrew texts deriving from the monarchical period. The legendary accounts of the patriarchs, the forefathers of the historical Israelites, regularly portray figures such as Abraham and Isaac as wealthy slave-owners⁷². Abraham owns numerous slaves and extensive herds (*Genesis* 16 :1-15 ; 17 : 12-13 ; 17 :23 ; 18 :7 ; 24 :1) and when in Egypt receives slaves and livestock as gifts (*Genesis* 12 :16). Likewise, Isaac is depicted as the head of a large household consisting of such assets (*Genesis* 26 :12) ; and Jacob and Esau are portrayed as wealthy men with large numbers of slaves and animals (*Genesis* 30 :43 ; 32 :6 ; 36 :6). On the one hand, one must note that these are fictional accounts set in the distant (Bronze Age) past ; however, it is difficult to imagine that the repeated connection drawn between large slaveholdings and wealth bears no relation to

67. Cf. H. VAN WEES, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 52 : « Raw metal and metal artefacts would have to be obtained either from local smiths or from abroad by means of raiding, gift-exchange or barter. »

68. For a critique of Finley's view that the elite household of the Homeric period aimed at self-sufficiency see H. VAN WEES, *op. cit.* n. 19, p. 218-228.

69. The elite also relied on contributions from members of the community, who gave them gifts in return for protection, but this could not have produced the entire surplus they needed to maintain their position in society. For these gifts, see E. M. HARRIS, « A New Solution to the Riddle of the *Seisachtheia* » in L. G. MITCHELL, P. J. RHODES eds., *The Development of the Polis in the Archaic Period*, London-New York 1997, p. 103-112.

70. J. BINTLIFF, « Solon's Reforms : An Archaeological Perspective » in J. H. BLOK, A. P. M. H. LARDINOIS eds., *Solon of Athens : New Historical and Philological Approaches*, Leiden-Boston 2006, p. 327, notes that the evidence gained from recent field surveys indicates that « the problem for our recently-discovered class of Dark Age chiefs and upper class farmers was no land shortage or control over international commerce, but people, specifically labour to work their fields *with* them (for the numerous second rank elite) and *for* them (for the chiefly families) ». Yet J. BINTLIFF, *op. cit.*, p. 330 realizes that it would have been difficult to extract a large surplus from peasants (« But to keep the vital labour force in place we need other mechanisms than local threats of violence. »). The findings of this essay reveal that slaves filled this labour shortage, a possibility not considered by Bintliff.

71. The references and the arguments in what follows I owe to my student David Lewis. His doctoral thesis presents a detailed comparison between slavery in the Ancient Near East and in ancient Greece.

72. C. HEZSER, *Jewish Slavery in Antiquity*, Oxford 2005, p. 286-288.

the everyday assumptions of the (monarchical era) writers who composed these stories : as S. Bendor points out, the household structure assumed in these accounts is one dating to the monarchical period (c. 1000-586 BCE)⁷³. Other Hebrew texts reinforce the importance of slavery to elite households. For example, a description of the ideal housewife found in Proverbs 31 :10-31 notes various duties that the wife will perform. These duties include managing the productive activities of the household, such as the weaving of textiles for the market ; this is a household in which slaves are present (Prov. 31:15-22). The fact that female labor in elite households is supposed to be engaged in the production of textiles not only for domestic consumption but for sale implies that, like the « Homeric » household, wives in elite families in Israel would work alongside a number of female slaves in weaving garments. In texts from the historical narratives we may also come to the same conclusion that a wealthy person will own numerous slaves : for example, Gideon takes ten slaves with him to demolish a sanctuary of Baal in *Judges* 6 :27, and Ziba, a steward of Saul, is said to have had fifteen sons and twenty slaves (II *Samuel* 9 :2). These texts imply a comparable model of slavery among the elite to what is found in Homer.

In eighth and seventh century Assyria, slavery also seems to have played a significant role in supporting the dominant position of the elite. A large number of legal transactions survive on clay tablets relating to various members of the court circle in and around Nineveh⁷⁴. The prominence of slavery in these texts is striking. Many of the texts show the acquisition of large numbers of slaves in single, agglomerated lots : SAA VI 57 and 86 both describe sales of twenty people at once ; SAA VI 91 documents the sale of twenty-seven people and a plot of land ; and SAA VI 341 the sale of thirty people in a single batch⁷⁵. Such large-volume transactions evidently hint at much larger overall holdings. Perhaps the best-studied Near Eastern case is Babylonia during the Neo-Babylonian and Persian periods⁷⁶. Slave ownership seems to have been concentrated among the elite, and some slaveholdings in the surviving documentation are extremely large, such as that of the Egibi family, which owned over a hundred slaves ; or the Bābāyas, for which we know that upon a division of property 118 slaves went to one younger brother alone⁷⁷. Contrary to Finley's belief that slave labor played

73. S. BENDOR, *The Social Structure of Ancient Israel*, Jerusalem 1996, p. 46.

74. For the period 744-669 BCE see T. KWASMAN, S. PARPOLA, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh*, Part I, Helsinki 1991 (= *State Archives Of Assyria* VI). For the period 668-612 BCE see R. MATTILA, *Legal Transactions of the Royal Court of Nineveh, Part II*, Helsinki 2002 (= *State Archives Of Assyria* XIV).

75. The proportion of slave sales compared to other transactions is also impressive. SAA 6 contains around 120 slave sale documents, accounting for around half of all sale documents ; slave sales constitute around a third of all sale documents in SAA 14.

76. See M.A. DANDAMAEV, *Slavery in Babylonia, from Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626-331 BC)*, Revised edition translated by V.A. POWELL, Dekalb IL 1984. For an up-to-date and detailed discussion of the Babylonian economy in this period with helpful discussion on slavery, see M. JURSA, *Aspects of the Economic History of Babylonia in the First Millennium BC*, Münster 2010.

77. See M. JURSA, *op. cit.* n. 76, p. 233.

« no role of any consequence » in the Near Eastern world⁷⁸, recent studies are beginning to show that the use of slave labor to underpin the dominance of elites was not, in fact, a Greek discovery. There was thus not only continuity in the importance of slave labour to the elite from the Homeric to the classical periods in Greece ; but in a broader sense, the use of slave labor among elites in Greek societies mirrored similar usage among elites in non-Greek societies elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean and Near Eastern worlds⁷⁹. Nor was the opposition between slave and free a Greek discovery⁸⁰.

78. M.I. FINLEY, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece*, ed. B.D. SHAW, R.P. SALLER, New York 1981 p. 114-115.

79. *Pace* M. I. FINLEY, *op. cit.* n. 78, p. 166.

80. *Pace* K. RAAFLAUB, *op. cit.* n. 28. For a convincing rejection of the view that no concept of freedom existed in the ancient Near East, see E. VON DASSOW, « Freedom in Ancient Near Eastern Societies » in K. RADNER, E. ROBSON eds., *The Oxford Handbook of Cuneiform Culture*, Oxford 2011, p. 205-24.