

Chapter Title: CHATTEL SLAVES

Book Title: Status in Classical Athens

Book Author(s): DEBORAH KAMEN

Published by: Princeton University Press. (2013)

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctt2855c8.6>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <http://about.jstor.org/terms>



Princeton University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Status in Classical Athens*

CHAPTER 1

CHATTEL SLAVES

ALTHOUGH WAR AMONG THE VARIOUS GREEK POLEIS WAS COMMON, THE Greeks were nonetheless (in principle) averse to the enslavement of their fellow Greeks (see, e.g., Pl. *Rep.* 469b–c; Xen. *Hell.* 1.6.14, *Ag.* 7.6).¹ Most chattel slaves, therefore, were of “barbarian”—that is, non-Greek—origin, acquired mainly through Mediterranean trading networks.² In the archaic period (ca. 630–480 BCE), slaves were primarily Scythians and Thracians, coming from areas northeast of Greece. After the Persian Wars, traders began to acquire more slaves from the east, particularly from those areas (like Caria) near the Greek cities of Asia Minor. And in the fourth century and into the Hellenistic period (323–330 BCE), slaves came from all over Asia Minor, with the number of slaves from Africa also increasing.³ Augmenting these regular supplies of slaves were those captured in war or, less frequently, by pirates or bandits.⁴

For classical Athens, some of our best evidence for the sources of slaves is epigraphic. So, for example, gravestones attest to the various ethnic origins of foreigners living (and dying) in Attica, many of whom were slaves.⁵ The Attic Stelai, records of property confiscated from Athenians convicted in the sacrilegious Defamation of the Mysteries and Mutilation of the Herms incidents of 415 BCE, preserve the names of thirteen Thracian slaves and ten Anatolian slaves; and in the funerary and dedicatory inscriptions from the silver mines at Laureion, many of which date to the fourth century, the names of twenty Anatolian slaves and two Thracian slaves are recorded.⁶ The picture we get from inscriptions is complemented by Aristophanic comedy, which presents slaves of a wide range of ethnicities.⁷

¹ For this aversion, see Garland 1987, 17–19, and 1988 [1982], 47–53; and Rosivach 1999, who credits Philip of Macedon with the “innovation” of enslaving Greek men, in addition to women and children. For “antidotes to the enslavement of Greeks,” see Garland 1987, 19–23; see also Ducrey 1999 [1968], 235–46; Pritchett 1991, 245–97.

² On the slave supply, e.g., Finley 1981 [1962]; Garland 1987; Klees 1998, 52–56; Braund 2011.

³ For concise summaries of sources of slaves in Greece, see Garland 1988 [1982], 46–47; Bähler 1998, 14–17; Fisher 2001 [1993], 36–37.

⁴ On the acquisition of slaves in warfare, see Ducrey 1999 [1968], 74–92, 131–40; Garland 1988 [1982], 47–48; Garland 1987; Pritchett 1991, 223–45; Klees 1998, 20–50. For the relationship between piracy/banditry and slavery, see Ducrey 1999 [1968], 171–93; Garland 1987 and 1988 [1982], 48–49, with further bibliography in n37; and Klees 1998, 50–52.

⁵ See, e.g., Bähler 1998, 69–198.

⁶ For all of these numbers, see Morris 2011, 184. For a discussion of the slaves in the Attic Stelai, see Pritchett 1956, 276–81. For the origins of the slaves at Laureion, see Lauffer 1979, 129–39.

⁷ On slaves in Aristophanes, see Ehrenberg 1943, 123–41, esp., on their ethnic origins, 127–28.

Although the population of chattel slaves was evidently at times quite high in Greece, exact numbers are nearly impossible to ascertain. Even for classical Athens there is no direct evidence for slave numbers; the closest we come is Athenaeus's (third-century CE) account of the census taken at the end of the fourth century BCE:

Ktesikles, in the third book of the *Chronicles*, says that in the 117th Olympiad [312–308 BCE], there was a census taken by Demetrius of Phaleron of those residing in Athens, and 21,000 Athenians, 10,000 metics, and 400,000 slaves (*oiketōn*) were found. (Athen. 272c–d)

This passage is quoted nearly every time scholars hazard a guess as to the number of slaves in classical Athens, but both its meaning and validity are contested.⁸ Also often cited by scholars are two other passages: Thucydides's report that after the Spartan occupation of Dekeleia in 413 BCE, 20,000 slaves (*andrapodōn*) deserted from Attica (Thuc. 7.27.5), and a fragment of Hyperides suggesting that more than 150,000 slaves "from the mines and the countryside" be enlisted to fight (fr. 29, Jensen). Drawing cautiously from these ancient accounts of slave numbers, coupled with modern estimates both of the total population of Athens⁹ and of rates of slave ownership, scholars have proposed a range of estimates for classical Athens, varying from a low of 20,000 slaves to a high of more than 150,000; the most likely number falls somewhere in the middle, representing 15–35 percent of the total population. Moreover, these numbers do not remain constant throughout the classical period, but fluctuate: slave numbers were at their highest immediately before the Peloponnesian War, fell dramatically during the war, and began to increase again afterward.¹⁰

Orlando Patterson has famously argued that slaves experience a process of desocialization and depersonalization, which he refers to as "social death."¹¹ In this chapter, I demonstrate some of the ways in which chattel slaves in Athens were socially dead (their "social status"), in addition to being deprived of nearly all legal and political rights (their "legal status"). There is no question that slaves were desocialized: in most cases torn from their natal communities, they were deprived of all family and community ties.¹² Chattel slaves were also depersonalized, in a process Igor Kopytoff describes as "commoditization." Once enslaved, an individual "is stripped of his social identity"—that is, desocialized—"and becomes a non-person, indeed an object and an actual or potential

⁸ See Garland 1988 [1982], 56n51 for bibliography on the reliability of Athenaeus's numbers.

⁹ For a summary of the scholarly debates (up to 1998) about the population of Attica, see Scheidel's addendum in Garnsey 1998, 197–98.

¹⁰ For concise summaries of the debate on slave numbers in Athens, see Garland 1988 [1982], 55–60; Fisher 2001 [1993], 34–36.

¹¹ O. Patterson 1982 borrows this term from Meillassoux 1975, 21–22; see also Meillassoux 1986, 106.

¹² On the desocialized nature of the slave, see Finley 1968; Garland 1988 [1982], 41; Garnsey 1999 [1996], 1.

commodity.”¹³ In fact, Aristotle calls the chattel slave “animate property” (*ktēma ti empsukhon*) (*Pol.* 1253b32), and scholars have defined the chattel slave either exclusively or at least in part by his or her status as a piece of property.¹⁴ In this capacity, a slave could be bought and sold, hired out (*Xen. Poroi* 4.14–16), or bequeathed in a will (e.g., *Dem.* 27.9). In addition to being conceived of as a possession, however, the slave was also recognized as a person (of sorts) with limited legal rights, as we shall see.

Finally, chattel slaves in classical Athens, as in many other slave societies, were almost entirely stripped of honor (*timē*),¹⁵ rendering them the very lowest social and legal status group on the spectrum of statuses.¹⁶ But even within the legal category of “chattel slave,” there existed a large range of sub-statuses,¹⁷ generally dependent on the type of labor the slave performed (and related to this, their economic status).¹⁸ This labor, in turn, was sometimes correlated with the slave’s ethnicity: so, for example, Thracians and Anatolians generally performed manual labor, Scythians served as policemen-archers, and Phoenicians were at least sometimes bankers and traders (see chapter 2).¹⁹ This correlation did not always hold, however: a striking example is the Thracian slave-overseer Sosias, who was wealthy enough to lease 1000 mining slaves from the general Nicias (*Xen. Poroi* 4.14).

In this chapter, I will focus on the legal and social status of the “basest” chattel slaves—that is, those performing the basest forms of labor, like working in the mines or mills.²⁰ I will reserve for chapter 2 discussion of what have (rightly or wrongly) been called “privileged” slaves, who exercised greater independence despite their legal status as chattel.

Chattel slaves in Greece had no legal claims to property, either moveable or unmoveable. They also, in theory, had no power over their labor or movement: they performed the tasks that were assigned to them and

¹³ Kopytoff 1986, 65.

¹⁴ Finley defines the chattel slave in two (coexistent) ways: as property, from a legal point of view, and as an outsider, from a sociological point of view (1968). See also Garnsey 1999 [1996], 1: “A slave was property. The slaveowner’s rights over his slave-property were total, covering the person as well as the labour of the slave. The slave was kinless, stripped of his or her old social identity in the process of capture, sale and deracination, and denied the capacity to forge new bonds of kinship through marriage alliance.” Cf. Vlassopoulos 2011, who stresses the understanding of slavery as a relationship of domination.

¹⁵ See Fisher 1995.

¹⁶ For overviews of the status of the slave, see Morrow 1939, esp. 73–89 (with a focus on Plato’s *Laws*); Harrison 1968, 163–80; MacDowell 1978, 79–83; Hansen 1991, 120–23; Todd 1995, 184–94; Hunter 2000a, 5–15.

¹⁷ “It is apparent that, though household servants, slaves with a *peculium* and slaves working in chains on a large farm all fell within a single juridical category, the legal status masked the economic and social differentiations among them” (Finley 1973, 64).

¹⁸ “We distinguish several kinds [*doulou . . . eidē*] of slave, as their employments are different” (Arist. *Pol.* 1277a37–38). For slave professions, see Finley 1981 [1959].

¹⁹ On Phoenicians as bankers and traders in Athens, see Bäbler 1998, 119–22.

²⁰ On mining slaves, see Lauffer 1979; see also Rihll 2010, who stresses the skilled nature of some mining work.

engaged in no movement that was not mandated by their master or mistress. In practice, this ideal behavior was not necessarily realized: although specific tasks were assigned to slaves, the ways in which they conducted these tasks were within their control, and many slaves (particularly in households with few slaves) were “multitaskers” who presumably had some degree of control over which tasks they did when, and how. That said, to the extent that they did not choose their occupations, and did not own the means or fruits of their production, slaves, at least ideologically, had no control over their labor. Slaves’ movement, too, was notionally circumscribed by their masters, and there were certain public places from which they were barred, including citizens’ *gymnasia* and *palaistrai* (Aesch. 1.138; Plut. *Sol.* 1.3).²¹ However, the realities of slave labor necessitated that slaves exercise some autonomy over their own movements. Take, for example, the labor of domestic servants, which encompassed, among other things, “child-minding, caring for the sick, answering and guarding the door, cooking, woolworking, carrying messages, fetching water, [and] shopping.”²² For slaves sent out to the marketplace to buy food, their task was set but their path probably was not.²³ Stephanie Camp’s work on geographies of resistance in the American South has illuminated the ways in which slaves can carve out their own spaces and movements even while appearing to follow the rigid guidelines set out by their masters.²⁴ Moreover, some slaves (as discussed further in the next chapter) were leased out by their masters to work in the mines or to do other dangerous labor; while this often involved extremely unpleasant tasks, it also represents a case where the slaves’ movements were, by necessity, not overseen by their immediate master.

Chattel slaves were defined at least in part by the fact that, unlike free people, they had to answer for their wrongdoings with their bodies (*sōmata*) (see Dem. 22.55, 24.167).²⁵ One way in which this manifested itself was through corporal punishment by their masters, who were permitted to inflict nearly any form of violence on their slaves. Physical abuse could take a number of different forms: whipping, flogging, hitting with sticks, fettering, rape, tattooing, and branding.²⁶ A vivid description of such violence, apparently written by a young male slave, can be found in a fourth-century lead tablet from the Athenian Agora: “I

²¹ There were, however, exceptions in practice: see Golden 2008, ch. 2. On the limited participation of slaves in Greek athletics more broadly, see Crowther 1992; Golden 2008, ch. 2.

²² This catalogue of tasks performed by slaves in the Athenian household comes from Golden 2011, 140.

²³ See also Todd 1995, 187–88, “The moment you send your slave out to do the shopping, you are expecting him or her to take decisions on your behalf.”

²⁴ Camp 2004. See also Joshel and Petersen forthcoming on slave movement in ancient Rome.

²⁵ See, e.g., Hunter 1992; duBois 2003.

²⁶ On the punishment of slaves in Athens, see, e.g., Hunter 1994, 162–73; Klees 1998, ch. 6.

am perishing from being whipped; I am tied up; I am treated like dirt—more and more!” (Ag. Inv. IL 1702, line 4).²⁷

Slaves had some, albeit few, protections against extreme violence directed against them. They could run away to a slave asylum, like the Theseion or the altar of the Eumenides in Athens (Aristoph. *Knights* 1311–12); here they were protected, but rather than being given their freedom, they were sold to a new master.²⁸ There were also some legal measures in place to protect the slave. Technically, a master was not supposed to kill his slave (Ant. 5.47), but if he did, it was unlikely that anyone would press charges.²⁹ Nonetheless, a master who killed his own slave would still want to purify himself, since all bloodshed was thought to be a source of pollution (Ant. 6.4; cf. Pl. *Laws* 868a).³⁰ If slaves were harmed by someone who was not their master, their master could bring a *dikē* (private suit) for *blabē* (damages), under which the slave was viewed, legally, as a piece of property that had been damaged. This is the same suit used if someone hurt your donkey or broke your furniture.³¹ If, however, slaves were *killed* by someone who was not their master, the master could file a private suit for murder (the *dikē phonou*) (Isoc. 18.52, [Dem.] 59.9).³² The case was brought, via the Basileus (the “king” archon, one of the city’s chief magistrates), to a special court called the Palladion and was heard along with cases of unintentional homicide of citizens, as well as the murder of metics ([Arist.] *Ath. Pol.* 57.3; Dem. 23.71; see also Dem. 47.68–73). If a man was convicted of murder at the Palladion, he faced exile (Dem. 23.72; [Dem.] 59.10).³³ Finally, the master, or any other citizen in Athens, could in theory bring a public suit, called a *graphē hubreōs*, against someone who committed an act of *hubris* against a slave—that is, an assault against the slave’s honor.³⁴ Many scholars have struggled to account for the fact that slaves were included in the law against *hubris* despite their lowly status.³⁵ Was it that slaves were protected *qua* vehicles

²⁷ This lead tablet was first published (and translated) by Jordan 2000. Jordan, however, believes that the letter writer is either a metic or a citizen, arguing that the word *despotai* (“masters”) in line 2 “evidently has a looser sense” than literal masters (98). See also Harris 2004, who argues convincingly that the writer is in fact a slave.

²⁸ On the Theseion as a slave sanctuary, see Christensen 1984.

²⁹ Since only relatives or the owner of the deceased could bring a murder charge (*dikē phonou*) (Dem. 47.70), and since slaves could not initiate suits and a master was extremely unlikely to incriminate himself, such cases were likely never brought to court.

³⁰ On the pollution caused by bloodshed, see Parker 1983, 104–43.

³¹ On the *dikē blabēs*, see Todd 1995, 279–82.

³² On the murder of slaves in Athens, see Morrow 1937 and MacDowell 1963, 20–22, 69, 94–96, 104, 126–27.

³³ But cf. Lycurg. 1.65, which implies that a fine was the penalty.

³⁴ “*Hybris* [*hubris*] is essentially the serious assault on the honour of another, which is likely to cause shame, and lead to anger and attempts at revenge” (Fisher 1992, 1). For this and other interpretations of *hubris*, see Fisher 1992, esp. 1–5 with bibliography.

³⁵ For an excellent discussion (and resolution) of this “apparent paradox,” see Fisher 1995. For a brief summary of the issue, see Todd 1995, 189–90.

of their masters' honor?³⁶ Was it that they themselves possessed some small degree of honor, *qua* human beings?³⁷ Was it that the protections offered by the *hubris* law were simply a byproduct of the burgeoning ideology of Athenian democratic inclusiveness?³⁸ The Greeks themselves suggested (Dem. 21.47–49; Aesch. 1.16–17) that the protection of slaves was (at least in part) a means of demonstrating how serious the Athenians were about prosecuting any and all acts of *hubris*.³⁹ Since we have very little evidence for *graphai hybreōs* actually being brought to court on behalf of slaves,⁴⁰ the question is perhaps more interesting on an ideological than on a practical level. That is, the fact that slaves *could* be protected by this suit implies that, at least by the period under consideration here, they were conceived of as having some honor—even if it was only a small amount, or only by proxy—worth protecting.

In terms of legal personality, the chattel slave had very few rights. Plato's Kallikles describes slaves as those who, when treated unjustly, cannot defend themselves or anyone else they care for (*Grg.* 483b). They could be neither a plaintiff nor a defendant in court, though a case could be brought on their behalf (see above). Legally (as well as conceptually), they were the equivalent of a minor,⁴¹ represented by their master just as a father or other guardian represented his children's legal interests. If slaves incurred a debt, their master was liable, as we see most clearly in the case of a slave who ran up huge debts running a perfume business for his master (Hyp. 3). If slaves committed a private offense, their master was generally held responsible (Hyp. 3.22; [Dem.] 53.20), though the master could in turn punish the slave. It may be the case that slaves could be directly sued, but our only evidence for this practice cites it in the context of saying that it is inappropriate to do so, since (the logic goes) slaves act only on the orders of their masters (Dem. 37.51, 55.31). For public offenses, on the other hand, slaves had to assume liability for their own actions, and most often the punishment entailed being whipped by a representative of the state. Thus, for example, a slave who became the lover of a freeborn boy was punished with fifty lashes (Aesch. 1.139).⁴²

While slaves could not serve as witnesses (*martures*), their statements could be elicited by judicial torture (*basanos*) and used as evidence (see Is. 8.12 for an explanation). However, although litigants are attested

³⁶ E.g., Mactoux 1988, 336–38; Ostwald 1990, 145.

³⁷ This is the main argument of Fisher 1995.

³⁸ See Ober 2005 [2000], who classifies such protections as “negative liberties.”

³⁹ See again Fisher 1995.

⁴⁰ Cf. Christensen 1984 (esp. 25), who suggests that slaves may have been resold following a master's conviction in a *graphē hybreōs*, and that these trials may have been held at the Theseion itself.

⁴¹ See Golden 1985 on the use of “*pais*” to describe both children and slaves, who occupied a similar status in the Greeks' minds.

⁴² On the public whip more generally, see Hunter 1994, 155–62.

challenging their opponents to produce slaves for torture, in almost all cases the challenge is rejected, and there is little evidence of *basanos* being carried out (but see Dem. 37.20–22; Aristoph. *Frogs* 618–22). As a result, scholars have debated whether *basanos* ever actually took place.⁴³ For our purposes, however, the “reality” of this practice is less important than its ideological ramifications; that is, whether or not it was performed, the presuppositions underlying *basanos*—namely, that slaves were lesser beings capable of “speaking” only through their bodies—served to reinforce the slave’s already base status.⁴⁴ In certain exceptional cases, slaves were called upon to offer information (*mēnusi*) before a magistrate, presumably without torture, in return for which they were given their freedom.⁴⁵ After the Mutilation of the Herms and Defamation of the Mysteries in 415 BCE, slaves were encouraged to give information in exchange for their freedom (Thuc. 6.27.2; Andoc. 1.12–18, 27–28); slaves were assured manumission for informing against their masters in cases of sacrilege or damage to sacred olive trees (*hierosulia*) (see Lys. 5 and 7); and in Plato’s ideal city in the *Laws*, slaves are to be freed for informing on those who steal treasures or neglect their parents (914a, 932d).

In the course of the fourth century BCE, practical considerations led to a gradual improvement in the legal capacities of at least some slaves. Probably due to their increased involvement in mercantile affairs, it appears that starting around 350 BCE slaves could bring lawsuits and be prosecuted in certain kinds of commercial suits dealing with imports and exports (*dikai emporikai*) (see chapter 2). Most likely, the slaves participating in these *dikai* were “privileged slaves,” to be discussed in the next chapter. Legally speaking, however, this right was open to all chattel slaves, even if they were not in a position to exercise it.

Slaves had virtually no rights in the areas of sex and marriage.⁴⁶ Female slaves in particular were at the sexual disposal of their masters (e.g., Xen. *Oik.* 10.12).⁴⁷ Slave-prostitutes of lower status (*pornai*) were whored out by brothel-keepers,⁴⁸ themselves often freedwomen ([Dem.] 59.18;

⁴³ For opposing views, see, e.g., Mirhady 1996 and Gagarin 1996. The former (following Headlam 1893) argues that *basanos* likely did take place and functioned as a dispute-ending procedure, an alternative to the *dikastērion*. The latter (following Thür 1977) argues that *basanos* was essentially a legal fiction, a way of making one’s opponent look bad by issuing a challenge he would have to reject. For slave torture in the context of institutionalized “dares,” see Johnstone 1999, ch. 3.

⁴⁴ See duBois 1991, who argues that slave torture was a way of drawing the line between slave and free, marking the slave as “other”; cf. Hunter 1992, who makes a similar argument about the ideological role played by the whip. See also Mirhady 2000 for Athenian justifications for slave torture.

⁴⁵ According to R. Osborne 2000, these exceptional cases, at least in Athens, always pertained to religion; cf. the suggestions that *mēnusi* was used in “certain cases with serious religious and/or political consequences” (Todd 1995, 187) and “cases of treason, sacrilege, or theft of public money” (Harrison 1968, 171).

⁴⁶ See Klees 1998, ch. 5.

⁴⁷ On sexual relations with slaves, see Klees 1998, 161–75; Golden 2011, 146–51.

⁴⁸ Cf. Glazebrook 2011, who contends that Athenian brothels were multipurpose spaces, which (like *pornai*) were not necessarily low-class or marginalized.

Is. 6.19). Male slaves, unlike male citizens, were banned from pederastic relationships with citizen boys (Aesch. 1.139; Plut. *Sol.* 1.3). Slaves were not allowed to marry, but cohabitation with their slave-partners was occasionally granted as a reward (Xen. *Oik.* 9.5; [Arist.] *Oik.* 1344b17–18).⁴⁹ It was, however, most likely only “higher-up” slaves (managers and overseers) who were offered this sort of perk for good service. Children born to female slaves belonged to the master, who could either keep them in his household as slaves or sell them. However, despite the fact that slave “marriages” and “families” were not legally protected, later epigraphic evidence indicates that slaves themselves may have recognized relationships with their slave-partners and children. So, for example, some inscriptions attest to slaves and former slaves paying for the manumission of their slave-children, or to “husband”-“wife” pairs being freed together.⁵⁰

Social mobility depended greatly on the type of chattel slave. A slave working in the silver mines of Laureion, for example, not only was unlikely to be freed, but also had little chance of attaining a higher-status profession as a slave. Domestic servants, on the other hand, were closer to the category of “privileged slave”—we might call them “semi-privileged”—and accordingly had more opportunities for advancement. If their work was respected, they might be elevated in the household status hierarchy, perhaps rising to the rank of overseer. Moreover, if they had a particularly intimate relationship with their owner or their owner’s children, as was especially the case with wetnurses and male *paidagōgoi* (tutors),⁵¹ they might even be granted their freedom (see chapter 3). This was generally done either upon the master’s death or when the slave was too old to be of much use in the household. In the case of a nurse, this might be when she could no longer provide wetnurse services or when the children of the family had grown up (see, e.g., Dem. 47). Other frequently freed slaves are high-class prostitutes (e.g. [Dem.] 59) and attractive slave-boys (e.g. Hyp. 3), both of which groups I would characterize as at least semiprivileged. Citizenship, unlike manumission, was a near impossibility for slaves, particularly for the types of slaves who occupied the lowest rung of the slave hierarchy. We will turn to slaves who became citizens in chapters to come; these individuals invariably started at a “high” level of servitude, often as serving as bankers or performing other duties of a “privileged” nature.

Slaves had limited rights in the sacral sphere, but they were not entirely excluded. Sometimes they took part in their masters’ household

⁴⁹ On slave “families,” see Golden 2011, 143–46.

⁵⁰ On family relationships among slaves as attested in Hellenistic manumissions from Delphi, see Tucker 1982, 227–29.

⁵¹ On wetnurses and *paidagōgoi*, see Golden 2011, 141–43; Wrenhaven 2012, ch. 3.

cult practices, as for example in the worship of the household guardian Zeus Ktesios (“Zeus of Household Property”) (Ant. 1.17–19; cf. Is. 8.16). Masters often shared a portion of the sacrificial meat with their slaves, whether out of generosity or in the belief that it was a good way to maintain their slaves’ loyalty ([Arist.] *Oik.* 1344b19–21; Men. *Dys.* 560–69). Some of the household festivals allowing the presence of slaves entailed a (temporary) leveling of status: these included the Anthesteria, a wine-drinking festival at which slaves were allowed to drink (*IG II²* 1672.204–5), and the Kronia, a harvest festival at which slaves shared a banquet with their masters (Macrobian *Sat.* 1.10.22; cf. 1.7.37).⁵² Although slaves played no official role in most civic festivals and were explicitly banned from some (like the all-female Thesmophoria: Is. 6.49; Aristoph. *Thesm.* 294), they were allowed to participate in the Rural Dionysia (Aristoph. *Ach.* 247–50; Plut. *Mor.* 1098b). Finally, at least some slaves were initiated into the Eleusinian Mysteries (e.g., [Dem.] 59.21; *IG II²* 1672.207, 1673.24), though it is unclear whether this represented genuine religious devotion on the slaves’ part or (more likely) was simply a prerequisite for them to perform the labor associated with these rites.⁵³

It is sometimes said that slaves had little or no autonomous religious life apart from their masters.⁵⁴ But religious practices initiated by slaves themselves, rather than by their masters, are in fact attested. Our best evidence comes from fourth-century BCE Laureion: namely, a handful of inscribed dedications by both collectives (*eranistai*) of slaves and individual slaves. Within this small sample set, the most popular gods are Heracles and Artemis, with one dedication made to “a hero.”⁵⁵ There is, moreover, some evidence for slaves consulting the oracle at Dodona. The nature of their queries (about, for example, whether to run away) strongly implies that these slaves were consulting Zeus for their own sake, rather than their masters’.⁵⁶ In addition, it is possible that the gods commonly involved in manumission were particularly attractive to slaves, but unfortunately most of our evidence for manumission, especially of a sacral variety, comes from the Hellenistic period.⁵⁷

⁵² On slave participation in the Kronia, see Bömer 1960, 174–75. See also Zelnick-Abramovitz 2012 on so-called cults of reversal, which she argues were more about equalizing status than status reversal.

⁵³ On slave participation in the Eleusinian Mysteries, see Bömer 1960, 109–118. For the possibility of a practical motivation in initiating slaves into the mysteries (acknowledged even by Bömer), see Parker 2005, 169–70, and 2011, 237.

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Bömer 1960, still the definitive work on Greek and Roman slave religion; see also Mikalson 2010, 143–44, and Parker 2011, 237–38. But cf. Geary and Hodkinson 2012.

⁵⁵ Inscriptions by *eranistai*: see, e.g., *IG II²* 2937–38, 2940; by individuals: see, e.g., *IG II²* 4598, 4633. On dedications by slaves (both communal and individual) in Laureion: Lauffer 1979, 128–31, 176–85. On *eranistai* of mine slaves: Lauffer 1979, 185–92.

⁵⁶ See Eidinow 2012.

⁵⁷ See Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005; Kamen 2012.

Of particular interest is the fact that there clearly existed collectives of slave worshippers, even if these groupings sometimes included non-slaves as well. In addition to the *eranistai* at Laureion, some evidence exists for *thiasoi* (cult groups) of slaves. By far the majority of this evidence comes from the Hellenistic period, but an Eleusinian inscription from the late fourth century records a dedication to a god (whose name is not preserved) by a *thiasos* made up at least in large part of slaves (*SEG* 24.223).⁵⁸ In addition, an association of slave (or at least foreign) fullers, albeit not a formal religious group per se, makes a dedication to the nymphs in a mid-fourth century inscription from Attica (*IG* II² 2934).⁵⁹ Through these kinds of group religious activity, it is possible that slaves may have found some sense of community, thus resisting the “social death” imposed on them by their masters. Even if they were for the most part worshipping the same gods as their masters, the fact that these practices were initiated by the slaves themselves indicates that they possessed at least some degree of (religious) agency.

It is easier to make broad statements about the political lives of slaves, or their lack thereof. Chattel slaves of the lowest rung had no role in the political life of Athens, since they lacked both the public rights and the public duties of citizens. They could not hold office, nor could they participate in the Assembly (*Ekklesia*) (Aristoph. *Thesm.* 294) or the Council (*Boule*). This complete lack of participation in the political sphere is one of the features that most clearly separates slaves from citizens.

Finally, slaves’ role in the military sphere is a hotly contested issue. It used to be thought that slaves played no role in the military, an idea substantiated by the near silence on the part of the Greek historians about slave involvement in military affairs. But Peter Hunt has convincingly argued that the historians’ reticence on this topic was ideologically motivated: since Athenian ideology held that it was the citizen-soldier who fought on behalf of his city, any insinuation that the military did not embody the citizenry was to be avoided.⁶⁰ However, we know for a fact that slaves served as personal attendants to their masters in war (Thuc. 3.17.3), and the instances of large-scale manumission of slaves at the Battle of Arginousai and other battles (see chapter 3) indicate that slaves were at least occasionally armed for battle. In fact, Hunt argues that this use of slaves in war was not quite as extraordinary as our sources would have us believe.

⁵⁸ As Parker 2011, 237 points out, however, most attested *thiasoi* including slaves also include free people, and therefore do not represent “slave cults” per se. On noncitizen (including slave) religious associations of various sorts in Athens, see Parker 1996, 337–39.

⁵⁹ For another dedication to the nymphs by a group of slaves, see *IG* II² 4650.

⁶⁰ Hunt 1998; see also Todd 1995, 186.

CHAPTER 1

As we have seen, “socially dead” chattel slaves were denied nearly all rights and privileges, and stripped almost entirely of honor. Moreover, as both foreigners and slaves, they were doubly stigmatized, representing the polar opposite of the freeborn Athenian citizen. Socially and legally, then, the chattel slave represented the lowest rung on the Athenian status ladder. At the same time, however, despite all of the figurative stigmata they bore, many chattel slaves were at least superficially indistinguishable from free people.⁶¹ Aristotle says that while nature aims to make the bodies of free men and slaves different, sometimes slaves have the bodies of free men and vice versa (*Pol.* 1254b27–33). Moreover, lacking any significant somatic or sartorial markers, many of them were not immediately recognizable as slaves, as the Old Oligarch, author of a treatise purportedly by Xenophon, crankily points out ([Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.10). Nor was slaves’ labor an immediate clue as to their status, since many slaves worked alongside metics and citizens on city building projects, as well as alongside their masters in the fields.⁶² As a result, their baseness, since it was not immediately apparent, had to be reinforced ideologically.

⁶¹ For the *literal* stigmata borne by slaves (including marks from corporal punishment as well as tattoos and brands), see Kamen 2010.

⁶² For slaves, metics, and citizens working alongside one another on the Erekhtheion, see Randall 1953. For slaves and owners performing agricultural work together, see, e.g., Jameson 1977/78; R. Osborne 1995. On interactions and interrelationships between slaves, metics, and foreigners in Athens, see also Fisher 2006.