

Sokrates

By Willow Browne (1900158)

Sokrates is a 46-year old freedman. According to MacDowell (1978:82) freedmen were former slaves whose owners have released them, often in exchange for money – usually borrowed from friends – or by order of their owner’s will. As Athenodoros, Sokrates’ former master is still alive, this implies that Athenodoros was the one to release him.

However, according to Fisher (2010:337) there were slaves, particularly those working in workshops like Sokrates might have as a shield-maker (Hom. Il. 18:478-82), who were trusted to be autonomous and run their master’s workshop for them (Fisher 2010:337). They payed ‘agreed amounts of profit to their owners’ (Fisher 2010:337) and could keep the rest for themselves. In this case it would be possible for Sokrates to buy his own freedom without needing to borrow money (as MacDowell (1978:82) suggested he would need to) to pay Athenodoros. To me, this method is supported by his stated goal of raising enough money to buy and free Elate, a slave he is in a relationship with.

Alternatively, there are examples of the State releasing slaves, usually those who fought in large battles such as the ‘battle of Arginousai’ in 406 BCE (Fisher, 2010:333). While Sokrates is old enough to have participated in one of these battles (assuming the Game starts in the first half of the fourth century BCE), it is unlikely he did so as he still works as an overseer for his former master, Athenodoros. To me, this suggests that one of the other two methods above were how Sokrates gained his freedom.

Sokrates works as an overseer for his former master, Athenodoros. He could have chosen to remain working for Athenodoros for several reasons. This includes staying of his own free will. Nick Fisher describes the relationship between slave and master:

‘that the combination of the constant fear and reality of whippings, along with signs of paternalistic concern and the setting of moral standards by the master, often produced an acceptance of legitimate punishment and a deferential loyalty, as well as a bitter sense of injustice at arbitrary whippings.’ (Fisher, 2010:335)

This implies that Sokrates may have stayed with Athenodoros out of gratitude for the ultimate reward for a slave – freedom – or because he saw it as his duty to repay him. Alternatively, Athenodoros may have demanded the condition of Sokrates’ employment as part of his condition for freedom or refused to sponsor him for metic status if Sokrates refused to remain (MacDowell 1978:82).

As an overseer, Sokrates would have been charged with making sure that the workshop he managed produced profit for Athenodoros (MacDowell 1978:81). Xenophon of Athens said, ‘Consequently it is the business of a good estate manager to know how to deal with enemies so as to derive profit from them too.’ (*Oec.* 15) At the time the game is set, this quote would be fairly recent so is reflective of the duties Sokrates would have. Taken in this context, it implies that Athenodoros would not be heavily involved in the running of the workshop and responsibility would be on Sokrates for the business of that workshop to be successful.

Athenodoros would have employed overseers because wealth was associated with ‘the leisure class’ (Davies 1980:10). The ‘poor’ were ‘those who have to work for a living’ (Davies 1980:10) while the ‘rich’ where the people who had people to work for them. By this description, Athenodoros is rich while Sokrates is poor.

As a freedman Sokrates could have gained the status of a metic with his former master’s sponsorship (MacDowell 1978:82).

Most metics were formally registered, resident foreigners (Fisher, 2010:339). According to Fisher (2010:339) each polis had a different system for handling metics with some creating separate social and legal classes for them. In Athens, Fisher (2010:339) says both resident foreigner and freed slaves were in the same social class and when registered as a metic had the same legal rights.

According to Aristotle (Aristot. Pol. 1275a 14-16) metics were ‘only citizens in the manner in which children who are as yet too young to have been enrolled in the list and old men who have been discharged.’ which most likely refers to the records held in each deme of the citizens who were born that area and had reached the age 18. What this quote implies is that despite not having political rights, metics received the same sorts of interaction socially and the non-political rights of the average citizen. They could not become a juror or be a member of the Assembly, but they could have their cases heard in the Athenian courts of law (MacDowell 1978:76). Therefore, if Athenodoros sponsored Sokrates as a metic, Sokrates has the legal rights of foreign residents.

However, there were some additional restrictions on metics that citizens did not have, such as not being able to own land or marry female Athenian citizens (MacDowell, 1978:75-6). Also, metics had higher taxes than ordinary citizens, having to pay ‘one drachma a month’ (Fisher 2010:339) for males and ‘half for females’ (Fisher 2010:339). Reduced taxes were sometimes offered as a reward, for example for exemplary military service (Xen. Hell. 1.2.10) which was required of every metic who was eligible. Therefore, if Athenodoros sponsored Sokrates as a metic, Sokrates would be required to serve in the army and pay additional taxes.

According to Fisher (2010:339) they were also expected to contribute to some of the liturgies, or lesser festivals, which was normally done by wealthier citizens as it required ‘expenditure of money, time and effort’. On the other hand Davies (1980:11) suggests that sources from Athens that ‘speak of ‘the wealthy’ ... or of ‘those who possess property’ ... as a group virtually identical in composition to ‘the trierarchs’ or to ‘those who perform liturgies’.’ (Davies, 1980:11; me: excluded Ancient Greek translations). As metics could not own property (MacDowell, 1978:75-6) this implies they were not involved in the liturgies at all.

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Sokrates is working to raise the money to buy the woman he is in a relationship with, Elate, who is a houseslave and nurse to Athenodoros’ baby daughter. He might be doing this as an attitude presented in ancient sources about slaves is that ‘of tools some are lifeless and others living’ (Aristot. Pol. 1253b 29-30). This is reflected in the legal status of slaves which was as property (MacDowell 1978:80). This means, as Elate is a slave, she cannot own anything for herself and could be sold or given away at any time (MacDowell 1978:80). It would also be impossible for her marry if Sokrates asked, which is unlikely as marriage was always about providing children (Pl. Leg. 774c) and it is unlikely that Elate, who is in her late thirties, will be still able to have children by the time Sokrates has raised enough money to buy her.