

SLAVE SOCIETY - SOME PROBLEMS

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HISTORICAL AND BIBLIOGRAPHICAL

The first systematic study of slavery in the ancient world was made under the impact of the abolitionist movement around the middle of the last century. Henri Wallon, Histoire de l'esclavage dans l'antiquite, (1st edition Paris 1847, 2nd edition Paris 1879, Russian translation of 2nd edition, Moscow 1941) is a masterly presentation of the evidence from the literary sources and from such archaeological sources as were available at the time, and it can still be consulted with profit. Wallon's main shortcoming is not his passionate hatred of slavery as an institution, nor his tendency to equate ancient slavery with the plantation-slavery of the Southern United States, the Carribean, and Brazil - both of these were inevitable in his time - but rather his failure to see slavery in the Greco-Roman world as a social and economic structure historically conditioned, and developing according to its own laws. He does not use the term "basic", which corresponds to a Marxist concept. But he never doubts that slavery was a fundamental feature of the ancient economy, and that it permeated the political, legal, and moral systems of the Greeks and Romans, which could not be understood without constant reference to it.

Wallon's book dominated the view of ancient slavery both among classical scholars and among the general public for the rest of the nineteenth century. But by the turn of the century abolition had long ceased to be a burning political issue. And it may be that the growth of imperialism, and the tendency among certain elements of the ruling class to draw false parallels between the Greco-Roman world and their own - the constant comparison between the British and Roman empires is an obvious example - made many scholars unable to deal objectively with the economic and social foundations of a society which they professed to admire. Accordingly we find an increasing tendency to underestimate the role of slavery in Greece and Rome, to work with minimum figures for the slave populations of ancient states, and to suggest - or declare - that the existence of slavery was accidental and of little importance in the ancient world. This tendency was most effectively expressed in a lecture by the distinguished German ancient historian Edward Meyer, 'Die Sklaverei im Altertum' first published in 1898 and republished in his collected works. (Kleine Schriften, 2nd, ed., Halle 1924, Vol. 1, 169-212). In his many-volume Geschichte des Altertums and elsewhere Meyer displays a more balanced and objective view of slavery. But it was this popular article, without footnotes or references to sources, which suited the intellectual climate of the time, and its influence was considerable. In England Alfred Zimmern reflected this influence more and more in successive editions of his Greek Commonwealth. (1911, 1914, 1921, 1924, 1951).

Neither Marx nor Engels wrote a systematic study of slavery as a world-wide phenomenon, though they both made a great many incidental observations upon slavery in the course of, or as a preliminary to, the discussion of other matters. Marx's most important contribution is his 'Formen, die der Kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen', written between 1855 and 1859 - i.e. ten years before vol. 1 of Capital appeared - but not published until 1939; the German text is now most easily available

in Grundrisse der Kritik der politischen Ökonomie, Berlin 1953, 375-413; a Russian translation was published in Vestnik Drevnei Istorii, 1940, I. 8-26; English and French translations, with introductory essays and commentaries, are both announced for 1964. Engels discussed slavery in particular in Anti-Dühring (1877-78) Part 11. ch. 2-4, and in The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State (1884). The best collection of the scattered references to Greco-Roman slavery in the works of Marx and Engels is still that published in Russian by S.I. Kovalev (K. Marx i F. Engels ob antichnosti, Leningrad 1932). There is also a great deal to be found in the very long and occasionally repetitive, but well-indexed, work of E.C. Welskopf, Die Produktionsverhältnisse im alten Orient und in der griechisch-römischen Antike, Berlin 1957. It would be inappropriate at this point to discuss in detail what views Marx and Engels held on the role of slavery in society at various stages in the development of their ideas. But it is important to remember that the whole of their work took place in a period when the fundamental importance of slavery in the ancient world was generally accepted, when plantation slavery in America was or had recently been a burning political issue, and when very little work had been done on the economic and social history of the ancient Near East. In addition, Engels wrote The Origin of the Family under the impact of Lewis Morgan's Ancient Society (1877), a work which was epoch making in its application of the data and concepts of anthropology to a series of historical problems, but which is now generally held to be somewhat one sided in the importance which it attaches to evidence from the Iroquois people, and in the generalisations which it builds upon this evidence.

The impact of Marxist thought upon the general study of slavery in the ancient world remained for half a century very slight. A careful work of compilation like B.J. Nieboer's Slavery as an Industrial System (2nd edition, The Hague 1910) mentions Engels once and Marx never. The prevailing view was still that embodied in Edward Meyer's famous article. The first systematic study of Greco-Roman slavery since Wallon, W.L. Westermann's The Slave Systems of Greek and Roman Antiquity (Philadelphia 1955) - an expanded version of his article "Sklaverei" in Pauly-Wissowa, Real-Enzyklopadie der klassischen Altertumswissenschaft, Supplementband 6. 893-1068 - still treats slavery as a relatively unimportant and accidental feature of ancient society. Westermann's book, however, was out-of-date before it was published. In the thirties historians in many countries began to make a serious study of Marxism, and some of them found in it the key to the central problems of their own field. In England such works as Benjamin Farrington's Science and Politics in the Ancient World. (London 1939), and George Thomson's Aeschylus and Athens (London 1940) were among the first fruits of this new cross-fertilisation. It is unfortunate that it was just at this period that there appeared the altogether too schematic and dogmatic treatment of slavery as a stage in the development of society in the History of the CPSU (B), first published in 1938 - cf. in particular pp. 123-124 of the English edition. In this the distinction between domestic or patriarchal slavery and industrial slavery, which earlier historians, Marxist and non-Marxist alike, had carefully observed, was ignored; and the hypothesis that all societies pass through a stage in which the principal relation of production is that between master and slave was treated as an axiom. For reasons in part clear at the time and in part only now being illuminated, this book acquired an influence much greater than it merited. Indeed its formulations on slavery were still repeated in the Soviet text-book on political economy (1954) and to some extent in the Fundamentals of Marxism-

Leninism (1961) long after they had begun to be tacitly abandoned by Soviet historians of the ancient world. And as late as 1955 A.L. Sidorov - not a historian of the ancient world, incidentally - was trying to have his cake and eat it, by pointing out that in the ancient Near East the peasants were the principal labour force and were subject to almost as high a degree of exploitation as the slaves proper, and going on to infer from this that these societies were passing through a servile stage of production parallel to that of Greece and Rome (Congresso Internazionale di Scienze Storiche, Relazioni, Florence 1955, vol. 6, 408-414).

The years after the end of the Second World War have been marked by an increased interest in slavery as a social formation both among Marxists and among non-Marxists. Historians are anxious to penetrate beyond the generalisations which have so often passed as current to a detailed and concrete understanding of the dynamics of ancient societies. Among non-Marxists the Meyer-Westermann school still has its adherents - notably A. H. M. Jones. "Slavery in the Ancient World", EHR 2nd ser. 9 (1956) 185-199, and C.G. Starr, "An Overdose of Slavery" Journ. Econ. Hist. 18 (1958) 17-32. But more and more the determining character which the institution of slavery possessed in relation to the whole of Greco-Roman society and life is recognised. One cannot but be struck by the contrast between two articles with the same title, "Was Greek Civilisation based on Slave Labour?", published half a century apart, the first by A. Zimmern, Sociological Review 2 (1909) 1-19, 159-176, the second by M.I. Finley, Historia 8 (1959) 145-164.

An important project launched since the war has been the series of monographs on aspects of slavery in Greece and Rome prepared under the general editorship of Professor Johannes Vogt of Tübingen, largely by his pupils, and published by the Akademie der Wissenschaft und Literatur in Mainz. These include studies of the enslavement of prisoners of war in Greece by G. Micknat (Part 1 1954); of the slave miners of Laureion in Attica, by S. Lauffer (2 vols. 1955, 1956), of the religion of slaves in the Greek and Roman world by F. Bömer (3 vols, 1957, 1960, 1961); of the slave characters in Roman comedy by P.P. Spranger (1959); of the mass enslavement of the inhabitants of captured cities by H. Volkman (1961); and of the pattern of slave revolts by Vogt himself (1957). Those works are in general marked by thoroughness, objectivity, humanity, and a critical and questioning approach to accepted doctrines. In their way they are a testimony to the extent to which Marxist attitudes and methods of work have been unconsciously adopted by non-Marxist historians (this is admittedly a question-begging formulation, which cannot be discussed here;). The exception is Lauffer's book on the Laureion miners, which still moves in the path marked out by Meyer and Westermann. It is perhaps no accident that Lauffer was one of the principal speakers on ancient history at the 11th International Historical Congress at Stockholm in 1960, where he developed the view that the relation between slave and master in antiquity was not an antagonistic one, i.e. that it did not necessarily lead to a class struggle.

Among Marxist scholars interest in slavery and its problems has been no less intense, and there has been the same eagerness to re-examine critically questions which in the recent past had sometimes been regarded as closed. A selection of studies by Marxist scholars of various countries was published in France in 1957 as Volume 2 of Recherches

internationalss a la lumiere du marxisme under the title Etat et classes dans l'antiquite esclavagiste. When this was published there had been a long and wide-ranging discussion in Soviet journals of the end of slave society and the beginning of feudalism, one of the contributions to which was translated in the French selection. It was gradually realised, however, that the very terms of reference of this discussion were inadequate, and that what was needed was re-examination, taking into account all the new information supplied by papyrology, epigraphy, archaeology etc., as well as the literary sources, of the whole history of slavery in the ancient world. In 1960 the Institute of History of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. included such a study in its long term plans, and made available research workers and resources. The plan envisages a series of monographs on the history of slavery in the Greco-Roman world from the earliest times until the fifth century of our era; a provisional breakdown into themes was made (Vestnik Drevnei Istorii 1960 (4) 2-8). Since then a series of preparatory studies of particular problems has appeared in the Vestnik Drevnei Istorii: these are critical, sometimes polemical, in tone, and often raise fundamental questions, such as what is meant by slavery "dominating" production. They all take as axiomatic and important the distinction between domestic slavery, which is found in many parts of the world at many different times - including our own, where it survives as a legal institution in certain British-protected sheikhdoms of the South Arabian Federation after its abolition in Saudi Arabia and Yemen - and the industrial slavery characteristic of the Greco-Roman world in classical times- The first of the projected monographs, by Ya. A. Lentsman, Rabstvo v mikenskoj i gomerovskaj Gretsii, Moscow 1963, contains a valuable introductory section on the history of the study of early Greek slavery. The second monograph on early Roman slavery by L.A. El'nitskij (Voznikovenie i razvitie rabstva v Rime v VIII - III vy do n.e., Moscow 1964) is not yet accessible to me.

Outside the Soviet Union work in this field has been less intense, and has tended to deal with isolated and disconnected problems. Examples are Iza Biczunska-Malowist, "Quelques problemss de l'histoire de l'esclavage dans la periode hellenistique, Eos, supp. vol. 20. 1949; D. Lotze, Metaxy Eleutheron kai Duulon: Studien Zur Rechtstellung unfreier Landbevolkerungcn in Griechenland bis zum 4. "ahrhundert v. Chr., Berlin 1959 (an important study of such unfree groups as the Spartan Helots, whom Lotze shows to have the determining characteristics of ancient slaves rather than those of medieval serfs): D. Tudor, Istoria sclavajului in Dacia Romana, Bucharest 1957.

Thus far we have been dealing almost exclusively with Greco-Roman slavery, which provided both the facts and the legal and other concepts on the basis of which Marxist and non-Marxist historians alike have in the main regarded slavery as a historical category. In the nineteenth century there was really very little material available from other parts of the world and other periods against which their generalisations could be checked - with the exception of course of the plantation-slavery of the American continent. And the influence of the self-consistent set of definitions and propositions regarding slavery worked out by the Roman lawyers was all-pervasive in a world where Roman law was widely studied and often formed the basis of national legal systems. More recently a great deal of material has accumulated from the ancient Near East. An American Marxist historian, I. Mendelsohn has recently made an interesting survey of this material in Slavery in the Ancient Near East (New York 1949). Mendelsohn, himself would be the first to recognise the provisional nature

of his work, if only because there are ten times as many texts from the ancient Mesopotamian Kingdoms lying unread in the cellars of the British Museum and the museums of Baghdad as the total of those published. Nevertheless his book is particularly valuable in showing that the presence of considerable numbers of slaves in a society does not necessarily give rise to the peculiar features of the Greco-Roman slave-owning society, the peculiar and isolated nature of which is sharply emphasised. Many Marxist historians, particularly in the period dominated by the schematism of the History of the C.P.S.U. (B), have supposed that the history of every society must contain a stage corresponding closely to Greco-Roman slavery. Grandiose constructions have been built upon inadequate evidence - and sometimes upon inadequate acquaintance with what Marx and Engels actually said - in the attempt to find such a stage. An example is S.A. Dange's India from Primitive Communism to Slavery, Bombay 1949. In so far as India is concerned, Marxist scholars have given up this dogmatic and infertile approach. Dev Raj Chanana in Slavery in Ancient India, New Delhi 1960 makes a study of the evidence of "the Sanskrit and Pali texts on slaves and their economic and social position in India which makes no assumptions regarding the existence of a stage of production corresponding to the slave economy of Greece and Rome. The present writer is regrettably unfamiliar with recent Chinese work in this field. In 1950 Kuo Me Jo observed: "It is impossible for a single people to reach feudalism without passing through slavery; and passage through a stage of semi-slavery (domestic slavery) is not enough". (La société esclavagiste chinoise in Etat et classes dans l'antiquité esclavagiste, Paris 1957, 32, translated from the Quarterly Bulletin of Chinese Studies of Peking University 7 (1951) 2. pp. 153-164). But there were great differences among Chinese scholars as to when this stage of slavery occurred, estimates varying from the 3rd millennium B.C. to the 10th century A.D.; Kuo Mo Jo himself placed it in the Yin and Chou periods (15th to 3rd centuries B.C.). The arguments cited by him seem to turn upon the existence in these societies, of some slaves, which is undisputed. A recent study by a Czechoslovak sinologist argues, with full references to the copious literature, that Chinese slavery was never the dominant mode of production in the Marxist sense (T. Pakora, "Existierte in China eine Sklavenhaltergesellschaft?" Archiv Orientalni 31 (1963) 353-363).

PARTICULAR PROBLEMS

It will be seen from the foregoing survey that this is not the moment for a categorical statement of the Marxist doctrine; and it may well be that such a moment will never come, although we can be confident that many problems - sometimes not recognised to be problems in the past - are being or will soon be illuminated. It seems best therefore to deal briefly with a number of particular questions which have recently been discussed, and then to state what appears to be the present position regarding slavery as a universal stage of production.

1. Sources of Slaves.

The keeping of slaves depends in theory upon a man's - or a woman's - labour producing a sufficient surplus over what is needed to keep him or her alive and active. Considerations of amortisation, training etc., complicate the economics. But it has been generally held by Marxists and non-Marxists alike that a slave class cannot - for economic

and other reasons - be self-reproducing, and that its maintenance depends upon a supply of adult slaves from outside, the fruits of war, piracy and other measures of force. As this is now being questioned, e.g. by H.Volkman (op.cit.), S.L.Utchenko and E.M.Shtaerman (VD1 1960. 4.9-21), E.M.Shtaerman (Problemy sotsial'no-ekonomicheskoi istorii drevnego mira. Sbornik pamyati Akademika A.L.Tyumeneva, Moscow-Leningrad 1963, 339-354), the whole question of the origin of slaves is ripe for rediscussion. Whether in the remote beginnings of class society a few prisoners taken in war - perhaps women and children - were spared and put to work in the household rather than being killed is a matter of speculation. But in the early Near Eastern societies we regularly find two types of slave, those captured in war and those enslaved for debt. Captured slaves are often not so much adult males seized on the field of battle - these would need too much surveillance - as whole populations removed from their village after a military defeat. Such wholesale enslavement of conquered peoples seems also to have been practised by the Aryans as they gradually occupied India. Such a conquered population might on the other hand be left to till its own lands on condition of paying a rent in kind, and possibly rendering various services, to its conquerors, either individually or collectively. This leads to a serf-like status, which is at first entirely dependent on the whim of the conqueror, but in which various constitutional rights may develop. In certain conditions, as the differentiation of wealth and the strengthening of the state apparatus proceeds among the conquerors, there may in the end be little difference between the status of originally conquered peoples and the peasant cultivators of the original conquerors, who themselves fall into a state of dependence.

This leads us to consider the second source of slavery universally found in the Near East - debt slavery. The existence of the debt slave or pawn presupposes considerable differentiation in wealth within a society. Hence the debt slave is probably of later origin than the war-slave. But in the earliest Near-Eastern Societies of which we have any record both are found. The debt slave is sharply differentiated legally from the war slave in that he can secure his freedom at any time by paying his debt, or having it repaid for him) the creditor cannot refuse. This distinction may often not have amounted to much in practice, but it was in principle very important. It follows from it that there were limits to the ill-treatment permissible to a debt slave: for instance, he could in general not be killed, and he could often not be sold, or not sold away from his native land in such a way as to make repayment impossible. There were also extra legal distinctions between the two types of slave. The debt-slave might have an influential kindred to protect him and limit the degree of his exploitation; the war slave had usually none. The debt-slave would usually be of the same race, language, and religion as his master; the war-slave was often a foreigner, whose habits and beliefs were regarded with misunderstanding or contempt. In the Rigveda, for instance, the dasus (slaves) are regularly spoken of as "black", "noseless", "of hostile speech", and "phallus-worshippers". The debt-slave might, if he got away, lose himself among his kinsmen - though he would be unable to get back any property he may have had - the war-slave would have to travel some distance through hostile country to reach the safety of his native village, if it still existed. Hence we more often find the debt-slave kept in fetters or other form of confinement, which must have greatly reduced his efficiency in production. On the other hand war-slaves were more readily available for tasks demanding a large labour force than was the rather isolated debt-slave.

Other sources of slaves in these early societies are sale of children - sporadic everywhere; as the humane parent will prefer slavery to starvation for his children - self sale (a kind of permanent debt-slavery but often an improvement for the poor, landless men from the marginal areas); gambling (often mentioned in legal and literary sources, but hardly an important source of man power), birth from a slave mother, and purchase.

Any slave, other than a protected debt-slave could be bought and sold. But the slave trade is something much more than the exchange of labour-power between different owners within a community. Slaves whose homes are not far away and who can easily run away, or slaves who have kindreds to protect them, are less exploitable and need more surveillance than those without kin and without home of return home. Hence merely by moving slaves a sufficient distance one can increase their value. Furthermore a slave's value will be increased by moving him from a region of low technical development to one of higher technical development. These two factors provide the economic basis for the slave trade: the trader both buys and sells his wares at a price approximating to their value, and yet he makes a profit on the deal. Trade in slaves, once established, has a profound effect upon the economy and social structure of the supplying regions, as has been observed in more recent times in connection with the European and Arab slave trade in Africa. Peoples who previously did not trouble to enslave defeated enemies because there was no place for them in their economic system now do so in order to sell them to the slave trader. Slaves, from being a by-product of inter-tribal war, became its goal. The pressure to break with custom and the rules of kinship and sell debt-slaves increases. The market-price of children rises. If the poorer members of the tribe are already in some degree of dependence upon the richer, they are likely to find themselves sold as slaves and transported abroad. All these factors are amply attested in the sources. From the great Bronze Age civilisations of the Near East, and still more from the Greco-Roman Mediterranean, the influence of the slave trade spread far and wide into the surrounding barbarian world. Within the slave-using regions too, organised piracy and kidnapping were regular consequences of the existence of a developed slave trade. This is the explanation of the frequent outbreaks of large scale piracy in the Mediterranean and of the role which piracy played in the imagination of the common man, as witnessed by the Greek novelists and the themes of school declamations. And it is one of the motives which induced the upper classes of the Hellenistic world to accept so readily Roman rule.

It has often been held that the long series of successful military campaigns waged by Rome in the last two centuries B.C. provided an endless flow of cheap slaves and rendered possible the jump from domestic slavery to industrial slavery in Italy; that with the stabilisation of the frontier of the empire by Augustus this flow dwindled to a trickle, and that as a consequence the number of slaves gradually fell; and that this shortage of slaves is one of the factors leading to the replacement of slaves by peasants tied to the land and by free wage labourers. Some have added the suggestion that the fresh series of foreign wars of the late fourth and fifth centuries A.D. once again renewed the current for a time and produced a fresh influx of slaves. All this is now being critically re-examined and the following points have been made by Marxist and non-Marxist historians alike:

i) Wholesale enslavement of defeated armies and populations was by no means the rule in the Greco-Roman world. As often as not they were ransomed, or simply disarmed and allowed to go home. An ancient army found the logistic problem of dealing with large numbers of prisoners very difficult.

ii) While in certain conditions e.g. chain-gangs and mine-slaves, who are in any case all male, a slave population is not self-reproducing, natural increase normally played a large part, perhaps the largest, in maintaining the numbers of slaves. The evidence for this seems clear enough in regard to the Roman empire. The added cost of bringing up a slave from infancy was more than made up by the greater docility of a home born slave and the possibility of teaching him some craft. And in any case the ancients were not cost-accountants and may not always have been aware of their own true long term economic interests. The American figures are eloquent proof of the vigour with which a slave population can reproduce itself, even in the daunting conditions of plantation slavery. Total slave imports to the southern states down to 1860 were a little over 600,000, yet the slave population was about 4,500,000.

2. Employment of slaves.

The great distinction between the ancient Near East on the one hand and fifth or fourth century Athens or the Roman Empire on the other was in the use to which slaves were put. In the former they were mainly domestic servants, not engaged in production, in the latter they were employed in industrial production - and to some extent in agriculture - for the market. This is one important distinction and one which was sometimes neglected in the recent past. But the terms in which it is here stated all call for some discussion.

i) It is true that the great bulk of slaves in the Near Eastern world, and very many - one cannot really estimate the proportion - in the Greco-Roman world were employed within the household; and indeed temple and state slaves in the Near East were mainly employed on domestic and maintenance duties, like the hewers of wood and drawers of water in the temple at Jerusalem. And the possession of large numbers of unproductive domestic slaves was very much a status symbol. However it is hard to make a sharp distinction between productive and non-productive employment. In the ancient world a good deal of commodity production as well as production for immediate consumption took place within the household, and domestic slaves would no doubt participate in this. For instance we gather from Aristophanes that most Athenian farmers in the late fifth century B.C. had at least one domestic slave. Are we to suppose that he - or more often she - did not lend a hand with the farmwork?

ii) The industrial slave may in some cases work in gangs under close supervision: mine slaves are a case in point. But this is most untypical. More typical cases are the small workshop in which the master, a free man, works side by side with one or more slave assistants: the slave craftsman who pays a fixed sum to his master, but carries on business on his own account (thinks to some convenient legal fictions), perhaps with a few slaves of his own: the small contractor who hires a few slaves belonging to someone else in order to carry on his business; and so on. The general difficulties of expensive transport, absence of a concentrated market, low level of technology, and under-capitalisation, which prevented

the development of large scale industrial units in the ancient world, were supplemented by other special difficulties when it came to slaves.

These industrial slaves did not compete with free wage labourers, for there virtually never were any. Wage-labourers as a class only come into being when there exists a class of capitalist entrepreneurs to employ them. They did compete with free artisans working on their own account, insofar as the small man, who could not buy a slave assistant, might find himself bankrupt; but in the main they belonged to free artisans, who got some of the surplus product of their labour.

iii) Agriculture was throughout antiquity the principal form of production, and the occupation of most of the population. The general view has been that, with the exception of Italy (and Carthage?) during short periods, slaves played little role in agriculture. The exceptional cases of the latifundia of Rome and Carthage were explained by the extreme cheapness of slaves at the time, which permitted an uneconomic use of them. There is some truth in this. Latifundia, worked by slaves in gangs, were exceptional; but they seem to have been economically viable for a considerable time in North Africa and elsewhere. However, there are other ways of employing slaves in agriculture than large scale plantation slavery. The small or medium farms - the actual acreage would vary with soil conditions, main crops, and so on - on which a dozen or twenty slaves worked under a slave overseer proved remarkably viable throughout the Greco-Roman world, and rapidly spread, along with other elements of Romanisation, into the still tribal western provinces of the Roman empire. This type of agricultural economy forms the main subject of a discerning study by a Soviet historian, Mme. E-M. Shtaorman (Krizis rabcvladel'cheskogo stroya v zapadnykh provintsiyakh Rimskoj Imperii, Moscow 1957, German translation announced for 1964). And as has been seen, many domestic slaves might be at least partly engaged in agriculture. In general the tendency today is to give mere weight to the role of slaves in agriculture in the ancient world. A particular way of employing a slave in agriculture was to put him on a small holding belonging to his master and exact from him either a fixed rent or a proportion of his harvest or some other toll. Such a slave may become almost indistinguishable from a free peasant working another's land, and bound by legal restrictions or by the terms of his lease; and the law may come to treat the two as for certain purposes equivalent. Yet this mode of employment is merely a special case of the general practice of letting a skilled slave work on his own account and pay a fixed rake-off to his owner. It does not in itself represent a break-away from a slave economy, still less is it a revolutionary step.

3. Numbers of slaves.

The plain fact is that we have not, nor will we ever have, reliable figures for the total numbers of slaves or the proportion of slaves to free citizens in any ancient community; still less do we have a breakdown into slaves of different categories. No one ever thought it worth while to keep such records at the time, though census-taking procedures were familiar enough. Estimates have to be based upon elaborate constructions made from data of uncertain reliability preserved in our sources. As was indicated above, the tendency of the Meyer-Westermann school was to work with minimum estimates. Most Marxist historians and a great many non-Marxists find somewhat higher estimates more plausible. But what has been emphasised in recent Marxist studies is the unimportance of head-counting. Whether or not slavery is the dominant mode of production - in the Marxist sense of

the term - does not turn on whether there are more slaves than free men, or more than a certain proportion of the free population. What is important is what forms of production and of property relations tend to dominate and to colour all others; what forms prevail in those branches of production in which there is a high rate of return and which consequently tend to expand. It is clear, for instance, that at the end of the Roman Republic and in the early centuries of the Empire other forms of dependence regularly gave way to slavery as tribal and communal survivals died out in the Roman provinces, that prisoners-of-war, if they were not released, became slaves rather than being settled as tax-paying peasants on the land, and so on. It is clear too that while slaves might play a limited role in agriculture, the growing industrial production which spread through the empire depended largely on the labour of slave workers. This is not to say that the attempt to obtain approximate figures is pointless. It is of great importance, and we are better placed today to make and criticise estimates than were historians of a century ago. But it is not the crucial question that it has sometimes seemed to be.

4. Domestic or patriarchal and industrial slavery.

It is easier to perceive than to describe the immense difference between domestic slavery, found so widely throughout the world, and the developed classical slavery of Greece and Rome. Some of the distinguishing features of the latter are:-

i) Virtual disappearance of debt-slavery and of various other partially dependent statuses, and their supersession by slavery. Hence the great social distinction - for some purposes even more important than that between rich and poor - becomes that between free man and slave. The slave is often equated with the foreigner.

ii) Extensive use of slave labour in commodity production; and not merely in services.

iii) Domestic slavery of a primitive kind can probably precede the formation of the state and certainly does not presuppose a highly developed state apparatus. Classical industrial slavery is only possible where there is not only a well developed machinery of coercion but also a stable structure of beliefs and ideas about human society and a developed body of law.

Is the Greco-Roman slave system a unique specimen of its kind? This is a question for those with a wider knowledge of world history than the present writer to answer. But no very convincing instances seem to have been advanced so far; with the exception, of course, of the "overflow" in the early centuries of our era into regions of the Near East adjacent to the Roman Empire. For instance the legal codes of Sassanian Persia paint a picture not very much different from that of the eastern provinces of Rome (cf. N. Pigulevskaya, Goreda Iripjna v rannem sredncvekov's, Moscow, 1956, 187-202; French translation, Paris 1964)¹

What were the special conditions which enabled this higher stage of slavery to be reached? Here we can only put forward hypotheses, though further study of the matter should narrow the range of possible hypotheses. One requirement is a plentiful supply of slaves of external origin. This depends partly on geographical considerations, but also in view of what has been said, on the steepness of the "technological gradient": i.e. if by moving slaves a fairly short distance - but far enough to make running away

home impossible - they can be brought into an area of much higher technology, then the slave trade will find it very profitable to supply them. Greece was obviously well situated in this connection. Great reservoirs of man power in the form, of tribal communities at a lower cultural level lay near at hand, in the southern Balkans and the interior of Asia Minor; communications were good, through established ports; and the journey was made by sea, which not only reduced costs, but made return almost impossible.

There are evidently other economic conditions which must be fulfilled, in terms of level of productive technique, and existence of markets, but they are hard to lay down with precision. Even harder are the social and political conditions within the slave-owning community. A certain differentiation of wealth is evidently necessary; buying several slaves and setting them to work costs money; training a skilled slave costs money; and so on. And wealth must be in part liquid, in the form of merchant capital. Probably a certain stage of decay of tribal institutions and tribal solidarity is necessary; at any rate no Greek state seems to have made the "jump" until it got rid of its old aristocracy. Again, it must not be too easy for slaves to slip away and live comfortably out of the reach of the state machine. Chanana (op. cit.) points out that until very recently there was abundant unoccupied land in India, and that the discontented could easily live in the forest. The political aspect of this condition is that neighbouring states, even if at war, must not normally welcome one another's runaway slaves and grant them freedom and the means of subsistence.

There are no doubt other conditions to be discerned. This question is one which might well be studied by economists as well as by historians. One of the most interesting contributions to its study in recent years was made by a Soviet economist, but it has remained so far quite isolated. (D.V.Kuzovkov, "Ob usloviyakh, porodivshikh razlichiya v razvitii rabstva, i ego naivysshce razvitie v antichnom mire", V.D.I. 1954 (1) 108-119).

5. Class struggle of slaves.

There has often been a tendency among Marxists to equate ancient slaves with the modern industrial proletariat in a manner depending more upon emotion than upon reason. This led many scholars to see in the great slave revolts in the Mediterranean world in the second half of the second and the first half of the first century B.C. revolutionary movements of the slaves, aimed at the establishment of new productive relations; it also led these scholars to suppose that by this time a general crisis of servile relations of production had set in, parallel to and similar to the general crisis of capitalism through which we are now living. This view of things is expressed by the Soviet scholar A.V.Mishulin, in his popular book on Spartacus (Moscow/ 1947, 2nd ed. 1950, German translation Berlin 1952) as well as in his more detailed studies of the same subject published between 1934 and 1948; it was also the view then of S.L.Utchenko, who wrote in his introduction to the second edition of Mishulin's book, "Here we see one of the first class struggles, the great and noble attempt of an oppressed class to rise against its oppressors, to struggle against a system which subjugated free men and turned them into entities without rights, into things, belonging to their masters, into "vocal tools". He goes on to quote Lenin's remarks about Spartacus in his lecture on the State. However, had he continued his quotation from Lenin he would soon have reached these words, "The slaves as we know revolted, rioted, started civil wars, but they could never create a class-conscious majority and parties to lead the struggle,

they could not clearly realise what they were aiming for, and even in the most revolutionary moments of history they were always pawns in the hands of the ruling classes". The view here expressed by Lenin is that maintained e.g. by N.A. Mashkin in his Istoriya drevnego Rima (Moscow 1947 and later editions), and by most Soviet scholars today, including S.L. Utchenko.

The difficulty about the revolutionary view of Spartacus and his contemporaries is that it leaves the next four centuries of history, in which servile relations of production flourished with no large scale revolts, unexplained and inexplicable. Most Marxist historians now see in these great slave revolts neither a revolutionary attempt to set aside servile society as such, nor a sign that servile society had reached a crisis, but rather the consequence of the extremely rapid enslavement of vast numbers of able-bodied free men, and the gross and cruel exploitation to which they were subjected. In other words these revolts are consequences of the beginning of industrial slavery over great areas of the Mediterranean world, not harbingers of its end; and what the rebellious slaves wanted to do was to change places with their erstwhile masters rather than to institute new relations of production. There is room for further study of these revolts, their links with the struggle of the poor against the rich in free society, with the Utopian ideologies current at the time, and so on.

Concentration on Spartacus and his contemporaries, valuable though it was, distracted historians' attention from the study of the actual operation of slavery under the Roman empire. Marxist scholars are now devoting more attention to this. They note that while there are no great revolts, there is a continuous undercurrent of opposition, varying from "working to rule" to assassination of masters. Brigandage is endemic, as runaway slaves - often joined by landless peasants and the like - seek to make a life for themselves outside the law. This unending antagonism of slave and master is reflected in the details of the legal system, in popular ideology, etc. And it is mitigated, but not removed, by a series of measures which, whatever the individual motives of their sponsors, resulted in some alleviation of the harshest features of slavery; it seems likely that these too reflect the continuous pressure under which the slave-owning class found itself, rather than unmotivated humanitarianism.

But the slaves had no ideology of revolution, no rudiments of common organisation - though the minute care with which the state authorities scrutinised and restricted the activities of funeral clubs and the like to which slaves and poor freemen belonged bears witness to the anxiety of the rulers lest such an organisation be formed, even on a local scale - and no hope of changing society; their hopes were restricted to self-betterment. The situation remained firmly in the control of the ruling classes. And the modifications which we find in the relations of production in the third century A.D. and later - growing replacement of the slave-run "villa" by small holdings let out to free, but dependent, tenants, settlement of slaves on small-holdings at fixed rents, and so on - are to be regarded as measures taken by the slave-owning class, or sections of it, to increase their own returns rather than as victories won by the struggle of the slaves. None the less they are signs that servile relations of production were no longer very efficient. When we find defeated enemies being settled as tax-paying or rent-paying peasants on the land rather than being sold as slaves, we have a far surer indication of the onset of a crisis of servile society than the great revolts of 400 years earlier.

6. The end of servile society.

Slavery as an institution did not end with the break-up of the Roman empire. There were plenty of slaves in Europe, from Constantinople to Ireland, in the early middle ages. But with few exceptions they belonged to two categories, agricultural slaves settled on small holdings, and more and more becoming indistinguishable from feudal serfs; and domestic slaves. What has vanished is the developed industrial slavery of the Greco-Roman world, producing commodities for the market, and the whole super structure of ideology and law built up on it. From what has been said above it will be clear that to suppose that its disappearance was the result of a combined operation between invading barbarians and revolting slaves, who joined hands over the corpse of the Roman empire, is an error rather than an over simplification. Much of what had been most characteristic of servile society in its heyday was already dwindling away before the barbarian invasions began. Their attacks were prompted in part by the growing economic and military weakness of the Roman world - i.e. the failure of servile society - and in part by the rapid social changes which the various communities on the fringe of the Roman world were themselves undergoing. The barbarian invasions destroyed the Roman state - in the west at any rate - but it had already developed internal weaknesses which made it a ready victim.

Recent Soviet studies of the Late empire and the barbarian invasions emphasise:-

- i) That the backbone of the many rebellions and resistance movements within the empire at this time was provided by free peasants, dissatisfied by the growing exploitation to which they were subjected, as rich landowners reorganised their estates on the new basis. Many escaped slaves joined these, particularly slaves settled on small-holdings. But they did not provide either the leadership or the ideology.
- ii) The Goths, the Vandals, the Alans, the Burgundians, the Lombards and the Franks were not armies of national liberation, welcomed by the oppressed classes as they came. They might support the rebellious peasantry and slaves against their landowners and masters, but they were often called in by the latter to suppress their rebel subjects. And there were sometimes sharp class struggles within the barbarian communities themselves. By and large what they wanted was land to settle on - and booty if they could get it. In the long run they generally proved less oppressive to the poor than the Romans, if only because their state apparatus was much less developed, and their techniques of exploitation rudimentary. Thus we find strong support from the peasantry of Italy and Africa for their Ostrogoth and Vandal rulers against Roman reconquest - or at any rate a marked absence of support for the returning Romans, and a series of large scale revolts in the territories which they had just reconquered. But it would be quite wrong to suppose that the peasantry or the slaves welcomed the Goths and Vandals when they first came.
- iii) Insofar as there were in some parts of the Roman world large numbers of slaves of Gothic, Vandal, etc., origin, often very recently enslaved, we do find cases of large bodies of slaves making common cause with the invaders and then joining their army. But this is a special case; and these men behaved as they did because they were Gothic or Vandal Tribesmen, not because they were slaves.

The interest therefore shifts from the moment when this or that area of the empire passes permanently into barbarian control to the preceding period when the weakness developed which made this possible. In particular the great economic and political crisis of the third century calls for detailed study by Marxists. Events moved at different speeds, and perhaps at different directions in different provinces of the empire. There is much to be learned of general import by careful study of particular regions. And the development of class society among the Germanic peoples, and its interaction with the class contradictions of Roman provincial society is another theme of investigation. Much work has recently been done along one or other of these lines; examples are Mme. Shtaerman's book (of. p.20.), the study of Pannonia in the second and third centuries A.D. by the Czech Historian P. Oliva (Pannonia and the Onset of Crisis in the Roman Empire, Prague 1962), the studies of Germanic society on the fringes of the Roman empire by E.A.Thompson. As this work advances we shall have a better understanding of the complex interplay of class forces which led to the breakup of the Roman empire, certainly the most cataclysmic event in the history of Europe.

General Conclusions

The foregoing remarks have perhaps emphasised our ignorance rather than our knowledge. There is a great deal of work for Marxist historians to do in this field, and it is moving forward more rapidly and purposefully now than in recent years. The big question of course is whether slavery is a stage of relations of production through which all societies must pass. There is a commendable reluctance to make dogmatic pronouncements when much of the preliminary research has still to be done. But most Marxist historians today would give a negative answer, if by slavery we mean developed industrial slavery of the Greco-Roman type. And many would go on to say that if we mean patriarchal, domestic slavery, then it is not a stage of relations of production in the sense that feudalism and capitalism are stages. It is a form of economic dependence found in almost all early class societies.

The question which then arises is what we are to call those societies in which domestic slavery exists, but which are not developed slave societies of the Greco-Roman type. For a time, as various societies were shown, by detailed study of their individual features, not to fit into the pattern of Greco-Roman slavery, the tendency was to call them "feudal". This feudalism tended to become a kind of residuary legate, in the words of E.J. Hobsbawm, and to lose most of its specific content. At the same time a preceding stage of slavery was postulated in the remote past of these societies.

For a variety of reasons this approach has proved less and less satisfactory. And in recent years Marxist historians in many countries have turned to the concept of an "Asiatic mode of production", which both Marx and Engels used from time to time, but which Engels tacitly rejected "The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State." In the early years of the Soviet Union some Soviet historians tried to use this concept as a working hypothesis, but it was decisively repudiated in the thirties. For the best part of a generation the Asiatic mode of production was left to cranks and "Marxist heretics" such as Wittfogel. It is interesting to see it revived once again. The most accessible modern statement of

the hypothesis is to be found in the French Marxist journal Le Pensee No. 14 (April 1964), which contains articles by F. Tokei and J. Chesneaux, together with a critical bibliography. This is a line of approach which will certainly be pursued further.

Marx himself in his "Formen, die der kapitalistischen Produktion vorhergehen", speaks of the break-up of primitive communal institutions following more than one path, in dependence upon various conditions which he suggests rather than enumerates. Monolinear development is not the only kind of regularity possible. And we know now, as Marx and Engels and their contemporaries did not, that both Greek and Indian society did not develop straight out of primitive communal society, but arose upon the ruins of highly civilised bronze age societies, with developed class distinctions. In the case of India the destruction of the old order seems to have been pretty complete; but in Greece some of the Mycenaean cities at any rate remained in being, with all that this implies. Is there some continuity between the extensive palace (and temple?) - slavery evidenced by the Linear B tablets and the slavery of archaic Greece? And is there no continuity at all between the social patterns of Mohenjo-Daro and Harappa on the one hand, and those of Vedic India or the Mauryan empire on the other? One cannot easily answer these questions now. But assumptions about monolinear development will not help us answer them. We should seek for regularity within the complexity of history rather than imposing it upon history from without. And the history of the ancient world, which within living memory seemed a cut and dried series of cautionary examples, is now seen to be an area in which exciting and epoch-making discoveries can be made. And they are not academic, in the pejorative sense of the word. For there are still great regions of the world where social relations resemble those of Greece and Rome and the ancient east more than they resemble those of nineteenth century Manchester or twentieth century Moscow.