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It is a sad fact, widely acknowledged by ancient historians, that the deeply lacunar nature of our sources makes it effectively impossible to write the social history of most ancient Greek communities during the Classical period. Written sources rarely extend to anything more than the occasional reference in narrative accounts and a relatively small number of inscriptions, normally silent on most aspects of social history. If Sparta is to some extent an exception to this grim picture, the histories we can recount are still deeply inflected by the fact that all extant sources relating to this city were composed by outsiders. The situation is radically different, however, when it comes to Classical Athens, the focus of most narrative accounts and endowed with an exceptionally rich epigraphic record. The corpus of speeches delivered before Athenian law courts provides a unique vantage point from which to observe everyday interactions among ordinary Greeks, before the papyrological evidence from Hellenistic Egypt enlarges this scope even further. And the same is true of the Athenian social imaginary, that is, the ways in which Athenians conceptualized the nature and the structure of their society, as well as the social relationships between individuals and groups: an extensive literary corpus including both fiction (comedy, tragedy) and nonfiction (rhetoric, philosophy, political treatises) gives modern historians access to this social imaginary as it was formulated and expressed by members of the Athenian community rather than by external observers.

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The unique wealth and diversity of evidence about Classical Athens nevertheless has a flipside, for it has encouraged a tendency among modern historians to take our sources at face value. While specialists of most Classical Greek communities struggle to fit their fragmentary evidence into a fragile but believable collage, it is understandable that historians of Athens rarely ask themselves what is missing from their sources, nor to what extent the image of Athenian society they present can be taken as representative of social reality in the city. This tendency is accompanied by another peculiarity of the scholarly literature on Athenian society. The very richness and variety of evidence on Classical Athens has meant that historians are inclined to focus on particular aspects or points of view, rather than attempt syntheses of Athenian society as a whole.[1] It is remarkable that while there are plenty of synthetic works on Athenian democracy,[2] very few are devoted to Athenian society. This is perhaps due to the fact that the field of Athenian politics, as it is still construed by ancient historians, is relatively limited, while the boundaries of social history are less well defined.[3] Whatever the case, the lack of syntheses on Athenian society means that the overall framework employed by socioeconomic historians of Classical Athens is essentially derived from more generalized research.[4]

1. See, for example, Virginia J. Hunter, *Policing Athens: Social Control in the Attic Lawsuits, 420–320 B.C.* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); James N. Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes: The Consuming Passions of Classical Athens* (London: HarperCollins, 1997); Cheryl Anne Cox, *Household Interests: Property, Marriage Strategies, and Family Dynamics in Ancient Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998); Gabriel Herman, *Morality and Behaviour in Democratic Athens: A Social History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006); Susan Lape, *Race and Citizen Identity in the Classical Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

2. Mogens Herman Hansen, *The Athenian Democracy in the Age of Demosthenes: Structure, Principles, and Ideology*, trans. J. A. Crook (1991; repr. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999); Jochen Bleicken, *Die athenische Demokratie* (1985; repr. Paderborn: Schöningh, 1995); Michael V. Sakellariou, *Η Αθηναϊκή δημοκρατία* (Heraklion: Panepistimiakes Ekdoseis Kritis, 1999).

3. A partial exception, primarily addressed to teachers and school students, is *The World of Athens: An Introduction to Classical Athenian Culture*, 2nd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008). Victor Ehrenberg's classic study, *The People of Aristophanes: A Sociology of Old Attic Comedy* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1943), is restricted to fifth-century comic sources. Claude Mossé, *La fin de la démocratie athénienne. Aspects sociaux et politiques de déclin de la cité grecque au IVe siècle avant J.-C.* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 1962), and Signe Isager and Mogens Herman Hansen, *Aspects of Athenian Society in the Fourth Century B.C.: A Historical Introduction to and Commentary on the Paragraphe-Speeches and the Speech against Dionysodorus in the Corpus Demosthenicum (XXXII–XXXVIII and LVI)*, trans. Judith Hsiang Rosenmeier (Odense: Odense Universitetsforlag, 1975), focus on the fourth century.

4. France is a partial exception to this rule, with two recently published syntheses: Jacques Oulhen, "La société athénienne," in *Le monde grec aux temps classiques*, vol. 2, *Le IVe siècle*, ed. Pierre Brulé and Raymond Descat (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2004), 251–351; and Jean-Manuel Roubineau, *Les cités grecques (VIe–IIe siècle avant J.-C.). Essai d'histoire sociale* (Paris: Presses universitaires de France, 2015).

These works largely date from the emergence of socioeconomic history as a major field of ancient history in the 1960s and 1970s.[5] Their main concern was how to emancipate this history from both the traditionalist political *histoire événementielle* and the clutches of modernism, which presented ancient Greece as largely similar to modern societies.[6] Unsurprisingly, they borrowed their central concepts and analytical framework from the structuralist and functionalist approaches that dominated socioeconomic history during those decades.[7] These approaches seemed all the more fitting since Athenian sources tend to present their own society on the basis of a series of polarities, the three most prominent being those between free and slave, citizen and outsider, and rich and poor. It therefore seemed natural to describe Athenian society as a sort of club for male citizens, based on the exclusion, domination, and exploitation of women, metics, and slaves.[8]

Over the last two decades, a growing number of scholars have started to challenge this dominant image of Athenian society from a variety of perspectives.[9] In line with their work, this article aims to contribute to a renewed understanding of Athenian society by presenting three main arguments. The first is that we need to reexamine the ancient discourses that shaped our sources. Instead of taking such discourses as direct reflections of Athenian reality, we should conceptualize them as discursive focuses highlighting certain aspects of that reality. This first argument has major implications for the second—that Athenian social reality cannot be reduced to the normative discourses presented in the sources. If Classical Athenian texts only focus on certain aspects of reality, it follows that we need to

5. Michel Mervyn Austin and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Economic and Social History of Ancient Greece: An Introduction*, trans. Michel Austin (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1977); Moses I. Finley, *The Ancient Economy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1973); Finley, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1981); Fritz Gschnitzer, *Griechische Sozialgeschichte. Von der mykenischen bis zum Ausgang der klassischen Zeit* (Wiesbaden: F. Steiner, 1981); Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *The Black Hunter: Forms of Thought and Forms of Society in the Greek World*, trans. Andrew Szegedy-Maszak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1986).

6. For a reflection on the challenges faced by socioeconomic historians during that period, see Sally C. Humphreys, *Anthropology and the Greeks* (London/Boston: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1978).

7. Kostas Vlassopoulos, *Unthinking the Greek Polis: Ancient Greek History beyond Eurocentrism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 44–63.

8. Paul Cartledge, *The Greeks: A Portrait of Self and Others*, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002). For a discussion of an earlier approach, see José Antonio Dabdab Trabulsi, *La "cité grecque" positiviste. Anatomie d'un modèle historiographique* (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2003).

9. Nicholas F. Jones, *The Associations of Classical Athens: The Response to Democracy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999); Edward E. Cohen, *The Athenian Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000); Paulin Ismard, *La cité des réseaux. Athènes et ses associations, VI^e–I^er siècle av. J.-C.* (Paris: Publications de la Sorbonne, 2010); Robin Osborne, *The History Written on the Classical Greek Body* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); Deborah Kamen, *Status in Classical Athens* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Alex Gottesman, *Politics and the Street in Democratic Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Claire Taylor and Kostas Vlassopoulos, eds., *Communities and Networks in the Ancient Greek World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015).

think hard about how to reconstruct what remained in the shadows or outside the vision of these texts. This in turn leads to the third argument: If Athenian discourses are not direct reflections of Athenian reality but discursive focuses on certain aspects of it, then they should be studied as historically changing constellations. We need to understand the reasons for their emergence and explore why they focus on what they do.

Discursive Norms and Fields of Vision

Challenging the assumption that sources relating to Athenian society are direct reflections of social reality does not mean dispensing with them altogether, but rather taking them seriously as objects of historical study. In this respect, it is significant that in other fields of ancient history scholars have already started to rethink traditional accounts based on similar assumptions, seeking ways to overcome the problems created by the nature of ancient discourses and the texts in which they are embedded. The social history of late antiquity was long dominated by an image of profound social crisis, in particular the impoverishment and exploitation of the free lower classes.[10] It is only in the last few decades that historians of this period have begun to challenge this picture through a serious engagement with the generic and discursive features of their sources. If poverty and exploitation are so visible in late antiquity, this is in fact due to a radical change in the nature of the sources. Whereas Classical sources tend to focus on status distinctions between freemen and slaves or citizens and outsiders, some late antique sources are based on a fundamentally novel focus on the poor. As Peter Brown has observed, these sources construct a particular image of poverty, one that is intimately linked to Christianity and its aims. Nevertheless, by making poverty a dominant subject of discursive debates, they shine a light on the conditions of the lower-class lives to which Classical sources were largely indifferent. It is not an increase in impoverishment that makes poverty so visible in late antiquity, but rather the emergence of genres and discourses that make poverty one of their main subjects.[11]

The same applies to another major source for late antique history—the vast collections of laws contained in the Theodosian and Justinian codes. Here again, it would be misleading to interpret these laws as evidence of a deep social crisis: if the sale of free children into slavery, or marriages between free individuals and slaves are so prominent, the reason is not the radical impoverishment of the free or the undermining of status distinctions during this period. Rather, these late antique laws reflect a political drive to clarify the blurred contours of existing social relations left opaque in earlier legislation, where large areas of social

10. Évelyne Patlagean, *Pauvreté économique et pauvreté sociale à Byzance, 4e–7e siècles* (La Haye/Paris: Mouton/EHESS, 1977).
11. Peter Brown, *Poverty and Leadership in the Later Roman Empire* (Hanover: University Press of New England, 2002).

interaction remained ambiguous or subject to tacit agreements.[12] This change in the nature of the sources makes visible for the first time on a large scale phenomena that were probably just as common in earlier periods, but which were obscured in the sources.

A similar point can be made in regard to the texts of the Hebrew Bible. Classical Greek sources often focus on a variety of reciprocal relations, including friendship, patronage, and exchange.[13] To the contrary, the Hebrew Bible is generally silent on—or indifferent to—these reciprocal relations, preoccupied instead by relations of solidarity between members of a community and the obligations that result from them. The different focuses of Greek and Hebrew texts were long understood to be direct reflections of radically divergent social realities. Nobody would dispute the existence of major differences between Greek and Hebrew societies. However, once we take into account, as scholars are beginning to do, the fact that the different preoccupations of the texts themselves can produce a distorted vision,[14] we start to find far more similarities and resemblances than we might have thought.[15]

We can generalize from the above examples. The social imaginary does not include the totality of relations and dimensions that exist within a particular society: it privileges and focuses on certain issues, while others remain outside its purview. This observation is especially important because the Athenian social imaginary exemplifies a significant peculiarity which has largely escaped the attention of ancient historians.[16] As mentioned above, this imaginary was based on three major distinctions.[17] The first was that between free and slave. The second focused on a clear dividing line between adult male citizens, who were full members of the Athenian political community and its institutions, and various excluded "others" (slaves, metics, women). Finally, within the citizen community itself there was a marked division between *plousioi*, the wealthy who did not need to work, and *penētes*, who had to work for their living, irrespective of whether they were well-off or destitute. These three distinctions all express polar opposites rather than

12. Kyle Harper, *Slavery in the Late Roman World, AD 275–425* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011), 351–66.
13. Christopher Gill, Norman Postlethwaite, and Richard Seaford, eds., *Reciprocity in Ancient Greece* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1998).
14. The reader could usefully compare Seth Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society? Reciprocity and Solidarity in Ancient Judaism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010), with Matthew Christ, *The Limits of Altruism in Democratic Athens* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012).
15. David Lewis, *Greek Slave Systems and Their Eastern Neighbours: A Comparative Study* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, forthcoming); Lewis "Making Law Grip: Inequality, Injustice and Legal Remedy in Solonian Attica and Ancient Israel," in *Violence and Community: Law, Space and Identity in the Ancient Eastern Mediterranean World*, ed. Ioannis J. Xydopoulos, Kostas Vlassopoulos, and Eleni Tounta (London: Routledge, 2017).
16. See, however, the stimulating comments of Mohammad Nafissi, "Class, Embeddedness and the Modernity of Ancient Athens," *Comparative Studies in Society and History* 46, no. 2 (2004): 378–410.
17. Cartledge, *The Greeks*.

relationships: they are manifestly not the same as those between masters and slaves, rulers and subjects, landlords and peasants, or capitalists and workers. This peculiarity emphasizes the fact that the Athenian social imaginary stemmed from a deliberate choice about what to focus on.

To understand this imaginary, we need to take into account two major features of all texts: discursive norms and their fields of vision.[18] Societies consist of an immense network of interactions and relationships between people of divergent capacities and powers, whose motives include a variety of interests and emotions. While much of this social complexity usually remains untheorized and unregulated, discursive norms provide individuals, groups, and institutions with the means of conceptualizing, evaluating, and regulating the intricacies of social reality by focusing on a certain range of issues from particular perspectives.[19] It follows that the discourses that embed, debate, and enforce these norms have their peculiar fields of vision. It seems evident that these are established by the generic requirements of texts: it is no accident that comedy gives us a much more extensive view of everyday Athenian life than tragedy or historiography. But the norms embedded in texts also shape their fields of vision in specific directions.[20] Emphasis is thus placed on particular themes and issues, while others tend to be invisible or mentioned only incidentally. The wider the range of sources we have from a given society, the more likely it is that there will be sufficient incidental references to relativize accounts based on discursive norms and their fields of vision. One of the reasons we can understand the complexity of Classical Athenian society much better than that of ancient Israel is that we possess significantly more, and more diverse, sources for the former.[21]

Classical Athenian discourses are dominated by three discursive norms, which could partially overlap and reinforce one another, but could also face in different and sometimes contradictory directions. The first is that of the gentleman, the householder who judiciously controls the various members of his household, successfully runs its affairs, and has sufficient wealth to afford a leisured lifestyle devoted to activities that have value in themselves (politics, warfare, culture, philosophy). The second norm is that of a free person, and implies the absence of subservience to other people, as well as an entitlement to the honor, protection from maltreatment,

18. For a similar perspective, see Simona Cerutti, *Étrangers. Étude d'une condition d'incertitude dans une société d'Ancien Régime* (Montrouge: Bayard, 2012).

19. For a similar argument regarding the link between the discourse of law and social reality, see Sally Falk Moore, *Law as Process: An Anthropological Approach* (London/Boston: Routledge/Kegan Paul, 1978).

20. Recent works of medieval history pay particular attention to the changing nature of the sources and the discourses they employ in order to understand historical reality: Nicolas Carrier, *Les usages de la servitude. Seigneurs et paysans dans le royaume de Bourgogne (VI^e–XV^e siècle)* (Paris: Presses de l'université Paris-Sorbonne, 2012); Charles West, *Reframing the Feudal Revolution: Political and Social Transformation between Marne and Moselle, c. 800–c. 1100* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

21. Schwartz, *Were the Jews a Mediterranean Society*, 1–20.

respect, and power that derive from the mere fact of not being a slave. The third is that of the citizen: an individual who has major obligations toward his community, but who, as a member of that community, can also claim a significant share of power and communal resources.[22]

The cumulative impact of these norms shaped the field of vision of Classical Athenian discourses and thus the texts in which they are embedded. These texts generally tend to focus on two social arenas: the household and the various hierarchical relationships established between its male head and its female, child, and slave members; and the political community conceived as a circumscribed field, defined by the distribution of power within its institutions. Conversely, two other arenas remain largely outside the discursive focus of Athenian texts. The first is the vast arena of interactions between the household and the political community, along with the networks and communities that emerge from those interactions. The second is the wider world and its interconnections with households, the political community, and other networks and communities.

The differing visibility of these arenas in the Athenian social imaginary can be demonstrated through various examples. It is significant that while Classical sources tell us a lot about struggles between the rich and the poor as groups (due to the distribution of power within the political community), they reveal very little about actual social and economic relations between rich and poor individuals. In general, the norm of the gentleman meant that Athenian discourses tended to focus on hierarchical social and economic relationships within the household, rather than on relations between individuals outside the domestic unit. Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* thus discusses extensively how to run a household and its estate through relations with wives and slaves, but is largely silent on its interactions with the exterior (the hiring of wage-laborers, buying and selling, lending and borrowing).[23] The norm of the freeman as an independent agent and the norm of the citizen as an individual sharing equal entitlements had their own impact: Athenian sources largely avoid discussion of those relationships between household and political community that jeopardized independence and political equality (wage labor, indebtedness, clientship).

This argument has major implications for the study of Athenian society. Not only are we unable to assess the significance of a phenomenon solely on the basis of how often it is mentioned in the sources, but phenomena which are mentioned more rarely could be the tip of an iceberg rather than genuinely exceptional or unimportant. The cancellation of debts might have been a common slogan in Greek revolutions, for instance, but the process through which poor Greeks became indebted

22. Josiah Ober, *Mass and Elite in Democratic Athens: Rhetoric, Ideology, and the Power of the People* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989); Kurt Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom in Ancient Greece* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004); Peter Liddel, *Civic Obligation and Individual Liberty in Ancient Athens* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).
23. Xenophon, *Oeconomicus* 5.16–17, 7.1–8 and 23, 9.5, 9.11–13, 12.1–20.

is effectively invisible in the sources. It would be hard to find a better example of how discursive norms and fields of vision contribute to obscuring issues that are otherwise known to have had an important and very concrete impact.[24]

A rare glimpse of this reality is afforded by a comic dialogue in which one Daos explains to his fellow slave Getas that he is in love with a girl:

> *Getas: A slave?*
> *Daos: Yes—nearly … in a way. You see, there was a shepherd living here in Ptelea, he'd been a slave when young, Tibeios, who'd got these twin children—that's what he himself said—Plangon, she's the girl I worship …*
> *G: Now I see!*
> *D: … and Gorgias, the boy.*
> *G: The one you've now got here, in charge of the sheep?*
> *D: That's the man. When he grew old, their father—this Tibeios—borrowed from my master for their keep one mina, then another. Life was hard. It killed him … and Gorgias borrowed some more cash for the funeral, the normal ceremonies. After that he came to us here with his sister, and he's stayed, while working off the debt.*
> *G: And Plangon?*
> *D: She spins and weaves wool with my mistress, and works as a servant.*[25]

The fact that this unique reference to debt bondage in Classical Athens does not fit the established model of Athenian social reality has led most scholars to try to explain it away on various grounds. But as Edward Harris has shown, Solon's reforms only abolished enslavement for debt, rather than debt bondage to repay a debt.[26] If the phenomenon is almost invisible in Classical sources, the reason might not be its rarity in social reality, but rather the norms and fields of vision mobilized in the sources available to us.

The Free/Slave Distinction and Athenian Society

Based on the above arguments, can we accept that the traditional model of Athenian society, as constructed through the social imaginary, is a direct reflection of Athenian social reality? For the rest of this article I want to focus on one of the three distinctions that were fundamental to the Athenian social imaginary: that between slaves and free individuals. This distinction is perfectly illustrated in the standard Greek expression "everybody, slave or free," used as an all-encompassing formula

24. Alexander Fuks, *Social Conflict in Ancient Greece* (Jerusalem/Leiden: Magness Press/Brill, 1984). Contrast the prevalent position of debt in Hebrew discourses and texts, a result of their focus on solidarity and its subversion: Gregory C. Chirichigno, *Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1993).
25. Menander, *Hero* 18–38.
26. See the arguments and literature cited in Edward M. Harris, "Did Solon Abolish Debt-Bondage?" *Classical Quarterly* 52, no. 2 (2002): 415–30.

for humankind.[27] This usage is based on the premise that it makes sense to divide all human beings into just two groups, with all those who are not slaves sharing a common feature: freedom.

As Moses Finley emphasized in the 1960s, this is a remarkable peculiarity of ancient Greece, as most societies did not have a generic, all-encompassing term for non-slaves. One option was to divide the population into a spectrum of distinct status groups, arranged into a hierarchy that ran from the monarch to the lowest slave (as in, for instance, the *sakdina* system in Thailand).[28] Another was to describe non-slaves using precise terms specific to the group to which they belonged, identifying them as insiders, kindred, or members of the community.[29] In contrast, the Greek term "free" could apply to males and females, adults and children, citizens and outsiders. What is more, it implied that all non-slaves possessed certain entitlements to respect, honor, and protection due to the simple fact of not being slaves. This concept of freedom is highly unusual: in most non-Western, precolonial slaveholding societies, the opposite of slavery was not freedom but mastery, the power to dominate other people, or kinship.[30]

According to Finley's influential explanation of this Greek (and Roman) peculiarity, the emergence of such a singular conceptual model was due to the radical change in social reality introduced by the Solonian reforms. For Finley, these reforms represented a fundamental break in Athenian history. While in earlier periods of Greek history the elite had derived its revenue from exploiting the labor of the free lower classes through institutions such as debt bondage and enslavement, the Solonian reforms marked a major social victory for these classes. By cancelling debts and prohibiting the enslavement of indebted Athenian citizens, Solon liberated the city's lower classes from the obligation to work for the elite: from this point on, poor Athenians worked only for themselves. This meant that the Athenian elite had to find an alternative source of labor, and the mass importation of slaves filled the gap. Athens was transformed from a society with slaves, in which slavery existed but was not dominant, into a slave society, where it was the structural exploitation of slave labor that sustained the elite. It was this social transformation that obliterated the old spectrum of statuses and replaced it with a single and clear-cut distinction between slave and free. In Finley's words, "one aspect of Greek history … is the advance, hand in hand, of freedom *and* slavery."[31]

Finley argued that slave societies have been rare in world history, citing Athens, Rome, Brazil, the Southern United States, and the Caribbean. These societies were all Western and based on a radical distinction between slave and free; for Finley they generated the conceptual distinction between the two statuses and

27. See, for example, Antiphon, *On the Choreutes* (6) 22; Isocrates, *Against Euthynus* (21) 4; Plato, *Gorgias* 515a7.
28. Andrew Turton, "Thai Institutions of Slavery," in *Asian and African Systems of Slavery*, ed. James L. Watson (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 251–92.
29. For example, Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, eds., *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1979), 3–66.
30. Finley, *Economy and Society*, 116–32.
31. Ibid., 115.

thereby created the conceptual language of freedom. This interpretation appeared convincing as long as the study of slavery was largely restricted to Greco-Roman antiquity and the colonial New World. Subsequent studies have documented the existence of large-scale slave societies in various parts of Africa, among Native Americans in the Northwest, and in Southeast Asia.[32] But the conceptual language of freedom was largely absent from these non-Western slave societies, where, as noted above, the opposite of slavery was considered in terms of mastery or community membership. If Finley was right that the concept of freedom is largely absent outside the West, his assumption that the emergence of slave societies sufficed to create the conceptual language of freedom is clearly wrong.[33] A consideration of earlier periods of Greek history supports the same conclusion. As Harris has shown in a recent exploration of the Homeric epics and Hesiod, a fundamental part of the Homeric elite's income was derived from slavery. This implies that we should characterize the society depicted in the Homeric epics as a slave society.[34] Yet the language of freedom and the division of human society into the two sole categories of slave and free is effectively absent from these texts.[35]

It is probable that without the presence of large numbers of slaves the Athenians would never have seen their world in terms of a single dividing line between free and slave. Nevertheless, the assumption that the distinction between slave and free and the conceptual language of freedom were the direct result of the emergence of slave societies in the Greek world is simply untenable. There have been many slave societies in global history, but most of them did not develop this categorical distinction, nor the language of freedom. The Athenians *chose* to see their social reality as if all men could be classified as either free or slave, and to attribute to a negative condition (that of not being a slave) the positive sense of an entitlement to respect and power. If we want to understand why the Athenians set so much store by this distinction, we need to frame it as an object of historical inquiry rather than a direct consequence or reflection of reality.

32. Pioneering studies include Orlando Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1982); Anthony Reid, ed., *Slavery, Bondage, and Dependency in Southeast Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1983); Claude Meillassoux, *The Anthropology of Slavery: The Womb of Iron and Gold*, trans. Alide Dasnois (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991); Leland Donald, *Aboriginal Slavery on the Northwest Coast of North America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Paul Lovejoy, *Transformations in Slavery: A History of Slavery in Africa*, 3rd ed. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); Sean Stilwell, *Slavery and Slaving in African History* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

33. The arguments concerning the origins of Western freedom set out in Orlando Patterson, *Freedom*, vol. 1, *Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1991) are highly speculative and without foundation in the actual sources.

34. Edward M. Harris, "Homer, Hesiod and the 'Origins' of Greek Slavery," *Revue des études anciennes* 114, no. 2 (2012): 345–66. For another perspective on Archaic Greek societies, see Julien Zurbach, "The Formation of Greek City-States: Status, Class, and Land Tenure Systems," *Annales HSS (English Edition)* 68, no. 4 (2013): 617–57.

35. Raaflaub, *The Discovery of Freedom*, 29–45.

Outside the Social Imaginary: Athenian Labor Strategies

Athenian discursive norms and their fields of vision created a stereotypical image of the structure of Athenian society and economy, based on the autonomy of the Athenian household. While medieval landlords cultivated their lands with peasant labor, and modern capitalist enterprises employ wage-laborers, Athens is seen as a uniquely segmented labor market, in which the poor did not work for the rich. Athenians worked for themselves, whether as farmers, artisans, or traders: the poor and the middling classes met their labor needs with family members and the occasional slave, while the rich operated their farms and workshops with tens or even hundreds of slaves. Free Athenians despised working for somebody else: the mass employment of slaves provided an alternative labor strategy that made possible the citizen independence that was essential for an egalitarian democracy to function.[36]

This stereotypical model is commonly presented in ancient sources and endlessly parroted by modern scholars.[37] There is no doubt that it accounts for a significant part of Athenian reality. But once we become aware of Athenian discursive norms and their fields of vision, there is a wide range of anecdotes, mentioned incidentally in the sources, whose implicit assumptions present a very different picture. There are two ways in which we can challenge the traditional model. The first recognizes the disjuncture between the norms of the social imaginary and the hard choices imposed by reality: the ideal that a freeman should work for himself and not for others was continuously undermined by situations in which a freeman had no choice. A typical example is presented in Xenophon's *Memorabilia*, which recounts how Eutherus, once a comfortable, propertied citizen, lost his assets in the aftermath of the Peloponnesian War and was forced to work as a hired laborer to make ends meet. Other examples include a speech by Isaeus, in which the prosecutor describes how the unscrupulous behavior of the defendant forced his relatives to become wage-laborers to afford basic necessities; or when Isocrates imagines his Plataean speakers describing the effects of their financial misery, which deprived the elders of appropriate care and forced their children to work for hire.[38] In Demosthenes's speech *Against Euboulides*, Euxitheus tries to defend himself against the charge that he had illegally assumed the identity of a citizen, an accusation based on the fact that his mother had worked as a wet-nurse, a stereotypically servile profession:

> *Some time after this, when by now two children had been born to her, she was compelled at a time when my father was absent on military service with Thrasybulus and she herself was*

36. Robin Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 85–103.
37. Finley, *The Ancient Economy*, 73–74. Geoffrey E. M. De Ste. Croix, *The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World: From the Archaic Age to the Arab Conquests* (London: Duckworth, 1981), 179–204; Davidson, *Courtesans and Fishcakes*, 235.
38. Xenophon, *Memorabilia* 2.8.1; Isaeus, *On the Estate of Dicaeogenes* (5) 39; Isocrates, *Plataicus* (14) 48.

> *in hard straits, to take Cleinias, the son of Cleidicus, to nurse. … Many are the servile acts which free men are compelled by poverty to perform, and for these they should be pitied, men of Athens, rather than be brought also to utter ruin. For, as I am informed, many women have become nurses and laborers at the loom or in the vineyards owing to the misfortunes of the city in those days.*[39]

We should note the apologetic character of these examples: it is the exceptional circumstances of war and misfortune that explain why people like Eutherus and Euxitheus's mother were forced into working for others; in the normal state of affairs, we are meant to assume, none would have resorted to such activities. This might suggest that the free only worked for a wage in particular, desperate situations, and that wage labor was by no means a structural feature of Athenian economy and society. But this would be deeply misleading. There is no doubt that Athenians had a social ideal in which women were supposed to stay at home and avoid the dangers inherent in interactions with males outside the family. And yet we know that a substantial number of citizen women in Classical Athens were obliged to work in order to make a living and support their families.[40] This was a structural feature of large urban centers, as Aristotle recognized when he argued that overseers of women were uncommon in democracies, because it was impossible to stop the women of poor families leaving the house to make a living.[41] The structural permanence of poverty and misfortune created an ample labor supply, and, crucially, this was matched by a structural labor demand.

This demand can be illustrated through texts that treat the employment of wage labor as one possible strategy among many:

> *This property of his is worth*
> *About two talents; and he farms it still*
> *All by himself, without a man to help—*
> *No family slave, no hired hand from the area,*
> *No neighbour—it's all done by him,*
> *And him alone.*[42]

The passage describes eloquently the variety of options available to somebody who had more land than he could cultivate on his own. He could employ his own slaves, he could hire laborers from the vicinity, or he could work together with a neighbor, presumably through either a mutual-help agreement or through sharecropping. Wage labor here is not the result of an exceptional situation; it is merely one possibility among others. In the Athenian countryside, where landholding was highly fragmented and small plots were often far away from each other, a landowner could cultivate parts of his land with a permanent labor force of

39. Demosthenes, *Against Euboulides* (57), 42 and 45.
40. Roger Brock, "The Labour of Women in Classical Athens," *Classical Quarterly* 44, no. 2 (1994): 336–46.
41. Aristotle, *Politics* 1300a4–7.
42. Menander, *Dyskolos* 327–32.

slaves and other more distant plots through renting, sharecropping, or wage labor.[43] Theophrastus describes how the "bumpkin" (*agroikos*) "distrusts friends and family, preferring to discuss important business with his slaves, and … reports the proceedings of the Assembly to the hired laborers working on his farm,"[44] while another Menandrian comedy describes how Cleaenetus, an elderly Athenian citizen, worked on his farm alongside his own slaves, but also employed a young Athenian citizen as a hired hand.[45]

Passages describing the employment of wage labor on a large scale have even more significant implications. Take, for example, the story about how the Athenian general Iphicrates managed to find sustenance for his military force by having his sailors work as agricultural laborers for the Corcyraeans.[46] The traditional model posits that elite landowners met their labor needs by buying slaves, while smallholders used family labor and a few slaves. It thus assumes a system in which labor needs were fully covered, with no structural demand for labor that could be fulfilled in a variety of ways. But how did Iphicrates manage to find employment for his sailors, unless there was a chronic need for labor in the Corcyraean countryside?

What these examples take for granted, but do not explicitly discuss, is a more complex situation than that reflected in the traditional model. There was undoubtedly a labor market that resulted from a chronic need for labor among all landowners and other employers whose family members could not meet their needs. For those who had the capital and required a constant amount of labor year-round, buying slaves provided the most reliable means of covering their labor requirements. But many people simply did not have the capital, or had alternative uses for it; and many activities required varying amounts of labor at different times in the year, creating a structural niche for the employment of seasonal wage labor.[47] We should not assume any kind of fixed equilibrium between supply and demand in the labor market. Rather, this was the meeting point between the chronic supply of wage labor by impoverished people unable to follow the ideal of not working for others, and the chronic demand from those who did not have the capital to buy slaves, who had other uses for their capital, or who had irregular labor needs.

Beyond agriculture, a society with relatively primitive technology like Classical Athens required a significant amount of manual labor for all kinds of tasks. This resulted in an extended service sector, in which wage labor played a very prominent

43. On forms of labor in the Athenian Countryside, see Michael H. Jameson, "Agriculture and Slavery in Classical Athens," *Classical Journal* 73, no. 2 (1977): 122–45; Ellen Meiksins Wood, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy* (London: Verso, 1988), 42–80; Walter Ameling, "Landwirtschaft und Sklaverei im klassischen Attika," *Historische Zeitschrift* 266, no. 2 (1998): 281–315.
44. Theophrastus, *Characters* 4.2 (trans. Cambridge Classical Texts and Commentaries, vol. 43).
45. Menander, *Georgos* 42–62.
46. Xenophon, *Hellenica* 6.2.36.
47. For a stimulating comparative example, see Seth Rockman, *Scraping By: Wage Labor, Slavery, and Survival in Early Baltimore* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009).

role alongside, of course, familial and slave labor. We have already seen examples of Athenian citizen women working as wet-nurses or servants, and Aristophanes's *Frogs* presents a scene in which Dionysus haggles over wages with a dead man hired as a porter.[48] But some of our best evidence in this regard comes from stories about philosophers and cooks. This is another good example of the limits of the field of vision of our sources, which are inherently uninterested in discussing free wage-laborers. The only reason we are told these stories about philosophers is the contrast between their original condition of hard physical labor and their future focused on intellectual pursuits; and the only reason we hear so much about hired cooks is the crucial role they play in the plots of Athenian comedies.[49] Aulus Gellius reports that Protagoras used to work as a hired porter in his home city of Abdera before being discovered by Democritus, who was impressed by the skill with which he arranged and tied the blocks of timber he was carrying.[50] Diogenes Laertius recounts how the Stoic philosopher Cleanthes started his life as an immigrant in Athens by working as a wage-laborer, drawing water from a well for a gardener and grinding flour for a female flour-seller.[51]

The mixed labor market in the service sector, involving both slaves and wage-laborers, is presented in a dialogue between Socrates and the young aristocrat Lysis:

> *Socrates: But answer me this: suppose you desire to ride in one of your father's chariots and hold the reins in some race; they will not allow you, but will prevent you?*
> *Lysis: That is so, to be sure, he said; they will not allow me.*
> *S: But whom would they allow?*
> *L: There is a driver, in my father's pay.*
> *S: What do you say? A hireling, whom they trust rather than you, so that he can do whatever he pleases with the horses; and they pay him besides a salary for doing that!*
> *L: Why, of course, he said.*
> *S: Well, but they trust you with the control of the mule-cart, and if you wanted to take the whip and lash the team, they would let you?*
> *L: Nothing of the sort, he said.*
> *S: Why, I asked, is nobody allowed to lash them?*
> *L: Oh yes, he said, the muleteer.*
> *S: Is he a slave, or free?*
> *L: A slave, he replied.*[52]

Lysis's father thus employed both a hired horse-driver and a slave muleteer.

Finally, we must take into account the large number of people who tried to eke out a living as hucksters and peddlers. These were people with little or no capital, who had to borrow money to buy the products they were trying to sell,

48. Aristophanes, *Frogs* 164–78.
49. John Wilkins, *The Boastful Chef: The Discourse of Food in Ancient Greek Comedy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 371–82.
50. Aulus Gellius, *Attic Nights* 5.3.
51. Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers* 7.168–69.
52. Plato, *Lysis* 208a–b.

or who sold goods that could be produced at negligible cost: Euxitheus's mother selling ribbons is a good example. Harris's list of professions in Classical Athens includes a significant number of women and men described as petty sellers of garlic, salt, nuts, onions, cumin, gruel, honey, pulses, sesame, salt-fish, and cheese.[53] Theophrastus's portrait of "the man who has lost all sense" describes the dire circumstances under which these hucksters obtained the capital needed to operate their stalls:

> *He does not think it beneath him, either, to manage a mass of market-traders and lend them money on the spot and charge a daily interest of one and a half obols to the drachma, and do the rounds of the butchers, the fishmongers, and the kipper-sellers, and pop the interest from their takings straight into his mouth.*[54]

While the majority of Athenian citizens probably lived and worked as the independent householders envisaged by the Athenian social imaginary, a significant part of the population consisted of an urban and rural proletariat who had hardly any working capital or property, and who lived hand-to-mouth by selling labor, services, or modest products. These people did not enter into the purview of the Athenian social imaginary, and as a result historians who have based their reconstructions of Athenian reality on this imaginary have also left them unaccounted for. Fortunately, the variety of sources relating to Classical Athens means that we have enough incidental details to show the limits of the traditional model. Any modern account of Athenian social reality needs to reserve a prominent position for the people left outside the discursive model, and must think seriously about the fact that a significant part of the population lived as a propertyless proletariat.[55]

Relativizing the Athenian Social Model

We have already seen that the Athenian social imaginary cannot be taken as a direct reflection of social reality; we have also explored how outside this model there existed a more complex reality which remains unconceptualized in Athenian discourses. But it is also necessary to relativize the model even for that part of social reality that it was supposed to cover. Once again, the distinction between free and slave proves revealing, and was manifested in a number of ways. Access to communal institutions such as the Assembly and the council was restricted to free

53. Edward M. Harris, "Workshop, Marketplace and Household: The Nature of Technical Specialization in Classical Athens and its Influence on Economy and Society," in *Money, Labour, and Land: Approaches to the Economies of Ancient Greece*, ed. Paul Cartledge, Edward E. Cohen, and Lin Foxhall (London: Routledge, 2002), 67–99.
54. Theophrastus, *Characters* 6.9; Paul Millett, "Encounters in the Agora," in *Kosmos: Essays in Order, Conflict, and Community in Classical Athens*, ed. Paul Cartledge, Paul Millett, and Sitta von Reden (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 203–28.
55. Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Free Spaces: Identity, Experience and Democracy in Classical Athens," *Classical Quarterly* 57 (2007): 33–52, here pp. 47–51.

citizens. Moreover, the functioning of certain institutions like the courts depended on establishing the legal status of each individual. Penalties for lawbreaking were clearly differentiated according to status, for while freemen were punished with fines, slaves were subjected to physical punishment for the same offences. A slave's testimony was admissible in court only if extracted through torture, but the judicial torture of free individuals was not permitted except in very special circumstances. Finally, there were actions and possibilities from which slaves were rigorously excluded. Only freemen could legally own property, while a number of activities essential to the Athenian sense of identity, such as those linked to the gymnasium, were strictly forbidden to slaves. Establishing an individual's status was thus considered necessary for the proper functioning of the legal system and political institutions, as well as for many major social activities.[56] Because so much depended on these distinctions, scholars have often assumed that they were easy to make and enforce. As we shall see, however, this is in many respects an unwarranted assumption that needs to be challenged if we want to understand Athenian social reality and its discourses.

In practice, there existed various categories of status that did not fully correspond to the theoretical clarity of the distinction between citizen, metic, and slave.[57] Although many status groups (bastards, disfranchised citizens, privileged foreigners) possessed both rights and disadvantages that were clearly enshrined in law, they were nevertheless largely absent from the Athenian imaginary. The actual status of illegitimate children in Athens is hard to establish; they were probably not full Athenian citizens, but neither were they metics or slaves. *Atimoi* were citizens who had lost all or some of their rights for serious offences, debts to the state, or failing to fulfil their obligations as citizens. There were also many people like Euxitheus: people who had exercised or claimed citizenship at some point, but were rightly or wrongly disfranchised. Given that Athenians who lost a case often tried to reopen it even decades later, it is likely that these people and their descendants existed in a state of limbo, which could either be maintained for a long period or resolved through their reintegration into the citizen body, their acceptance of metic status, or their eventual migration. The need to fit such status groups into the tripartite scheme of the Athenian social imaginary (citizen/metic/slave) for various practical purposes was inevitably the cause of constant challenges and problems.

A second factor was linked to the singularity of Athenian society, economy, and politics. Athens was an atypical *polis* due to its size: while most Greek city-states were relatively small in scale, the Athenian *polis* encompassed the whole region of Attica. The city was also the epicenter of a vast network of goods, people, and ideas involving the Aegean, the Black Sea, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Sicily. It depended on traders and sailors to import the huge amounts of cereals necessary to

56. Stephen C. Todd, *The Shape of Athenian Law* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1993), 167–200; Virginia J. Hunter, introduction to *Law and Social Status in Classical Athens*, ed. Virginia J. Hunter and Jonathan Edmondson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), 1–30.
57. Kamen, *Status in Classical Athens*.

its economic survival; on foreign, metic, and slave oarsmen for its navy; and on thousands of laborers, artisans, builders, and intellectuals for a variety of functions. All this meant that Athens was not a face-to-face society but an imagined community, a polity in which most members did not know one another.[58]

The lack of familiarity created by the large scale of Athens was enhanced by the peculiar organization of the Athenian local communities, the *demes*. Athenians of the Classical period inherited membership of the deme to which their ancestors belonged at the time of Cleisthenes's reforms in 508 BCE. Changes in residence (in particular internal migration to Athens and Piraeus from the rural demes) and the pattern of scattered landholdings meant that the deme in which one resided and the deme of which one was a member could diverge widely. Demesmen of Halimus (on the south coast of Attica) could have lived for generations in Athens, while Halimus itself could be inhabited by citizens registered in different demes, metics, and slaves living apart from their masters. Not only was Attica extremely populous, but place of residence and community membership were often unrelated. These factors meant that status could not be easily established on the basis of the face-to-face processes available to small-scale communities.[59]

Finally, a third factor resulted from the entanglement of Athenian politics and Athenian economy and society. Athenian democracy extended citizenship to all male adults of citizen stock, irrespective of wealth or profession. Alongside the rich and the middling class of independent peasants and craftsmen, the citizen body thus included a significant number of proletarians who made a living as hired laborers or petty traders. The complex economic processes of Classical Athens meant that the dividing lines of wealth, profession, and status did not always coincide. Rich citizens and rich metics lived alongside poor citizens and poor metics, but there also existed a substantial number of slaves who lived and worked on their own and were effectively indistinguishable from freemen, apart from the fact that they made a regular payment from their profits to their masters. The fact that citizens, slaves, and metics did the same kind of jobs made it impossible to make assumptions about an individual's status on the basis of their profession or appearance. As the Old Oligarch recognized, a system that put slaves in positions of trust and authority as shopkeepers, artisans, and bankers could only function if slaves behaved toward third parties as if they were freemen. The combination of this complex socioeconomic situation with the fact that poor citizens had substantial political power meant that establishing status in such an intricate and large-scale community was difficult:

> *Now among the slaves and metics at Athens there is the greatest uncontrolled wantonness; you can't hit them there, and a slave will not stand aside for you. I shall point out why this is their native practice: if it were customary for a slave (or metic or freedman) to be struck*

58. Robin Osborne, *Demos: The Discovery of Classical Attika* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 64–65.
59. Jones, *Associations of Classical Athens*, 123–50; Cohen, *The Athenian Nation*, 113–20; Osborne, *Athens and Athenian Democracy*, 139–67.

> *by one who is free, you would often hit an Athenian citizen by mistake on the assumption that he was a slave. For the people there are no better dressed than the slaves and metics, nor are they any more handsome.*[60]

The consequence of all these factors was that a theoretically clear-cut distinction between free and slave, or citizen/metic/slave, was often unworkable in practice. For many aspects of everyday life and in many arenas of interaction legal status was inconsequential. Inscriptions reveal communities of work and cult that crossed status lines: a group sculpting columns for the Erechtheion included two citizens, two metics, and two slaves working apart from their masters; a group of washers making a communal dedication to the Nymphs included four freemen, citizens, or metics, two women of unclear status, and six slaves or freedmen.[61] The concept of "free spaces" can be used to define arenas of interaction (the agora, the workshop, the tavern, the ship, the neighborhood, the cemetery) that brought together citizens, metics, slaves, and women, created common experiences, and shaped new forms of identity.[62]

It was precisely when the stakes were high that claims to a particular status were challenged. Modern scholars have tended to ignore the substantial number of cases in which the status of an individual was contested from a variety of standpoints. Some citizens tried to avoid their slaves being subjected to judicial torture by claiming they were free, or to have people tortured by claiming they were slaves; others challenged the status of their fellow citizens in an attempt to disfranchise them. Legatees were accused of being slaves and thus illegitimate; slaves and citizens used their acquaintances and supporters to reclaim freedom or citizenship; slaves tried to pass as freemen, while slaves and metics tried to claim citizen identity. Even well-known Athenian politicians were routinely accused of being foreigners, slaves, or the children of slaves.[63]

The case of Pancleon narrated in a legal speech by Lysias is revealing.[64] Pancleon's opponent believed that he was a metic, and accordingly prosecuted him in the polemarch's court, which tried cases involving individuals of that status. Pancleon countered that he was a Plataean, and therefore an enfranchised Athenian citizen who could not be brought before that court. When his accuser tried to find out the truth by consulting the community of Plataeans, he was told that there was no Plataean with such a name, but rather a Plataean's slave. He subsequently witnessed two different individuals attempt to claim Pancleon as their slave,

60. Pseudo-Xenophon, *Constitution of the Athenians* 1.11–12, citation at 1.10. See Silvio Cataldi, "Ακολασία e ισηγορία di meteci e schiavi nell'Atene dello Pseudo-Senofonte: una riflessione socio-economica," in *L'opposizione nel mondo antico*, ed. Marta Sordi (Milan: Vita e pensiero, 2000), 75–101.
61. *Inscriptiones Graecae* (hereafter "*IG*") I^3.476.243–48; II^2.2934. See Gottesman, *Politics and the Street*, 44–63.
62. Vlassopoulos, "Free Spaces."
63. Kostas Vlassopoulos, "Slavery, Freedom and Citizenship in Classical Athens: Beyond a Legalistic Approach," *European Review of History* 16, no. 3 (2009): 347–63.
64. Lysias, *Against Pancleon* (23).

countered by a group of his friends who asserted his freedom. If we believe the accuser's account, Pancleon was an individual who, whether metic or slave, tried to take advantage of the mass enfranchisement of Plataeans to enhance his own condition and lay claim to citizenship. But whatever the truth, this case shows how difficult it could be to establish an individual's status in Athens.

Athens lacked the administrative system and bureaucracy that could effectively police status distinctions. Instead, the Athenians relied on networks of kinship, support, and solidarity to arbitrate claims to status and challenges to it.[65] In other words, they used a system suited to a small face-to-face society in the context of a large state with a cosmopolitan urban center and ports. It is important to realize that the Athenian system was a double-edged sword. It is certainly true that different penalties and procedures existed for slaves, citizens, and metics, but these could also serve as post facto determinants of status. If a non-citizen were tortured, this would be "proof" that he was a slave; inversely, if a metic was to pass an official interrogation (*dokimasia*), speak in the Assembly, or bring a case to court, this would "prove" that he was a citizen.[66]

Given this uncertainty, it was ultimately the extent to which an individual could mobilize a network of kin, friends, and supporters that would bolster a claim to a particular status. Conversely, claims to status would be challenged when an individual's actions caused the mobilization of a network of people who were offended or threatened. Citizens without such a network, or with enemies with much stronger networks, could find themselves disfranchised; metics or slaves with sufficient support networks could even end up as Athenian citizens.

The case of Euxitheus invoked above illustrates this process. Despite being a prominent member of his deme and having served as demarch, Euxitheus was disfranchised by his fellow demesmen. Those who claimed he had illegally usurped the status of citizen cited the fact that his father had a foreign accent and his mother had worked as a wet-nurse and ribbon-seller, two servile professions incompatible with being a respectable Athenian woman. For Euxitheus's opponents, this meant that one or even both of his parents was not an Athenian citizen, and he had thus illegally entered the local deme roll. Euxitheus tried to counter these arguments by stating that his father's foreign accent was due to his long enslavement abroad, while the lowly occupations of his mother were the result of a difficult financial situation rather than a sign of servile status. But his main argument was that he could mobilize an extended network of friends and relatives ready to testify in support of his statements. If we accept the truth of Euxitheus's words, it is evident that the harsh realities of Athenian socioeconomic life, which blurred any clear distinction between citizen/outsider and free/slave, could be used by a citizen's enemies to disfranchise him: acts and behaviors that clashed with the ideal of the freeman

65. Adele C. Scafuro, "Witnessing and False Witnessing: Proving Citizenship and Kin Identity in Fourth-Century Athens," in *Athenian Identity and Civic Ideology*, ed. Alan L. Boegehold and Adele C. Scafuro (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1994), 156–98.
66. Gottesman, *Politics and the Street*, 163.

and the citizen could be used as evidence that one did not legitimately hold this status. Such a danger could not be warded off with documents or registers of status, but only through the mobilization of a network of kin, friends, and supporters. On the other hand, if Euxitheus was in fact lying, it is remarkable that the son of two slaves was able not only to assume citizen status, but also become a demarch. Once again, it was a matter of cultivating the network of people that would support his claims to status on a variety of occasions.

Athenian social reality included a range of arenas and activities in which legal status was unimportant or invisible, and a range of arenas and activities in which it mattered significantly, but where it was often difficult to establish and open to challenges and conflicts. Nevertheless, we should not conclude that the significance of legal status in Athenian society is an illusion created by Athenian discourses. From a comparative point of view, the Athenians instituted a remarkable range of practices that aimed to make legal status decisive and required clear status attributions in order to function. Many slave-holding societies leave complete freedom to a master to marry his (manumitted) female slave, and most allow him to recognize his slave children as heirs if he so wishes. While societies with "elementary" structures of kinship include explicit prescriptions about marriageable partners, societies with "complex" kinship structures (that is, most ancient, medieval, and modern European societies) have no such prescriptions and allow their members to marry whomever they can afford to. In Classical Athens, however, a master could not legally marry his manumitted slave or recognize his slave children, and following Pericles's law of 451 BCE citizens were obliged to marry the daughters of other citizens if they wanted their children to hold citizen status. These decisions are even more remarkable when we realize how difficult it was to establish status in the complex communities of Attica. They cannot be attributed to the inherent nature of slave societies, nor be considered the direct consequence of the significance of status in Athenian social reality. Rather, they represent choices about how to understand and arrange the Athenian social world, choices that must be explained historically rather than taken for granted.

This is not to deny that slavery played an important role in the emergence of the radical distinction between slave and free and the conceptual language of freedom; nor is it to doubt that the majority of Athenians exemplified the social model of independent householders. It is entirely plausible that many people never faced or even feared a challenge to their identity as citizen, metic, or slave. What I have tried to show is that discursive models are not direct reflections of social reality, but rather conceptual choices about what to focus on and how to arrange human affairs: discursive models like that of the independent householder leave aside a significant proportion of the population, while status distinctions that were foundational and clear-cut in theory were inconsequential for many issues and commonly challenged when it came to others. This article calls for a debate on a renewed framework for interpreting Athenian society, a framework that would not take discursive models as reflections of reality, but would try to supplement them

with a painstaking reconstruction of what remains outside these discursive norms and their fields of vision. This is not a question of dismissing discursive models as "false ideology." To the contrary, instead of taking these models for granted, we need to ask hard questions and fundamentally reorient our inquiry if we want to understand why Athenians chose to describe their world on the basis of polar opposites rather than social relationships.

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