# Barbarians at the Gate: Foreign Slaves in Greek City-States

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**ABSTRACT:** This article considers the relationship between interconnectivity and Greek slavery, in particular, the slave trade and the geographical sources of slaves in Greek city-states. Since there exists no extant treatment of the slave-trade from Greek antiquity, most of the evidence is indirect and focuses primarily upon the Classical period. A variety of source material is examined, including Greek drama, art, historiography, and inscriptions. Of specific interest is the often problematic nature of the evidence for the slave trade and the ethnicity of slaves. Although it is clear that the Greeks traded in foreign slaves, how most slaves were acquired and from where are questions that continue to confound modern scholars. This article does not seek to provide a definitive answer to these questions, but aims to further the discussion through a consideration of why the Greeks preferred foreign slaves, how slaves were procured and from where, how we might determine the ethnicity of slaves through indirect evidence (such as names), and the presence of foreign slaves in Attica, where most of the source material originates.

**KEY-WORDS:** slaves, slavery, trade, barbarians, captives, piracy, war

How did the Greeks acquire their slaves and where did the slaves come from? These commonly asked questions are exceedingly challenging to answer, due largely to the indirect and often fragmentary nature of the evidence. Even though references to slaves and slavery pervade much of the source material for ancient Greece, no treatise was ever written on the subject (as far as is known) which might have answered the myriad questions we have about the institution and those who were most affected by it - the slaves themselves. The poverty of direct discussion of slavery, and the slave trade in particular, is reflected by modern scholarship, where there are relatively few

examinations of the slave trade and the geographical sources of slaves.[1] One factor which most scholars agree on is that by the classical period the majority of slaves in Greek city-states were of non-Greek origin, whether they were taken directly from foreign lands or were themselves descendants of foreign slaves. This is in line with the impression presented by much of the evidence. While sources usually agree that slavery is a useful and justifiable institution, they tend to express an aversion to Greeks enslaving Greeks and assume that slavery and barbarianism are inextricably linked. Whether or not most slaves were barbarian, a question which is yet to be satisfactorily resolved, any examination of Greek slavery must therefore also include a consideration of Greek interaction with non-Greek populations.

This article will examine the relationship between interconnectivity and Greek slavery and will consider, specifically, the slave trade and the geographical sources of slaves. It should be noted that, as with most studies of Greek history, the bulk of the source evidence is Athenian, so this examination will necessarily favour an Athenian perspective.

GREEKS ENSLAVING GREEKS

Reference to the importation of foreign slaves to Greek city-states can be dated at least as far back as Homer. The *Iliad* and *Odyssey* provide several examples of Trojans taken as war captives and either sold off soon after their capture or conveyed home as war prizes. While the epics were meant largely for entertainment, they do reflect the harsh realities of ancient warfare, in which the vanquished would often find themselves enslaved to the victors. The regular importation of foreigners for use as slaves and the subsequent ideological association between slavery and barbarianism, however, was likely a later development and might be connected, at least at Athens, with Solon's reforms, which date to the early sixth century (the usual date given is 594/3 BC). Arguably the most important reform attributed to Solon is the *seisachtheia* ("shaking off of burdens"), which made it illegal to secure a loan on one's body (Ar. *Ath. Pol.* 6.1-2). Most scholars agree that subsequent to this, wealthy Athenians had to

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[1] The most useful discussions of the slave trade, to my knowledge, are: Finley (1962) 51-9, reissued in Finley (1981) 167-175; Braund and Tsetskhladze (1989) 114-125. Finley's discussion in particular stresses the surprising lack of evidence for the slave trade: 'The silence of both Greek and Latin sources about the slave trade - at any time or any place - is well known. Usually it was broken only when some special circumstances attracted a writer'. Finley (1962) 51.

look elsewhere for sources of forced labour, and these sources seem usually to have extended beyond their closest neighbors.[2] It is possible, however, that too much emphasis has been placed upon the *seisachtheia* while other reasons for importing foreign slaves have been underestimated or even ignored. The expanding wealth and military success of many Greek city-states at this time must also have contributed to their ability to import slaves from less developed regions, along with other luxury and non-luxury goods. As foreign items became more widely accessible, whether through warfare or trade, so did foreign slaves.

From at least the fifth century Greek enslavement of Greeks was generally viewed as contemptible and this view probably also contributed to the increased use of foreign slaves. Herodotos provides an early source for this when he comments that the Methymnians on Lesbos enslaved their fellow islanders, the Arisbians, even though they were 'related by blood' (*homaimoi*) (1.151). This statement presages Herodotos' famous definition of Greekness, which includes 'being *homaimos*', that is, sharing a common blood (8.144). Thucydides provides further evidence that Greeks enslaving Greeks was the exception rather than the rule. In his description of the "Mytilenean Affair", the Athenians, regretting their decision to kill the men and enslave the women and children of Mytilene, dramatically revoke the order moments before they are due to be carried out (3.36-50). At around the same time, Isokrates in his *Panegyric* suggests that some Greeks thought it distasteful to enslave other Greeks when he comments upon Athens' enslavement of the women and children of Melos in 416 BC: 'Some of us claim that when we achieved the rule of the sea, we brought many evils upon the Hellenes, and in these speeches of theirs, they condemn us for enslaving the Melians' (100, cf. 110). Thucydides' lengthy description of this same conflict illustrates that the Athenians did not arrive at this decision easily (5.84-116).

Aside from the idea of kinship, there were other reasons why the Greeks might have preferred foreign over domestic slaves. Most importantly, enslaving a large population of individuals who share in the same culture and language can be dangerous. This is notably exemplified by the Messenian and Laconian helots, who posed a persistent threat to their Spartan masters. This was due in no small part to the helots' sizeable population and their Greek origin, which gave them strong ancestral

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[2] Harris (2002) 415-430 has disputed the idea that debt-bondage was actually abolished as a result of Solon's reforms, citing a number of later Athenian examples in which people appear to be working off debts to creditors. While his argument is compelling, debt-bondage, if indeed it did continue to exist at Athens, does not appear to have been very common.

ties to the land and to each other. The Peace of Nikias, ratified in 421 BC between Athens and Sparta and their respective allies (Thuc. 5.18-19), was likely motivated, at least in part, by the threat of a helot uprising in Messenia during the Peloponnesian War (Thuc. 4.41). When the helots saw their chance (e.g. when an earthquake weakened Sparta in the mid-460s BC), they could muster support for revolt, not only amongst each other but sometimes also amongst free Greeks in other city-states (e.g. Thuc. 1.102, 4.41).

On the other hand, importing foreign slaves with very little, if any, knowledge, of Greek culture and language made it much more challenging to organize such large-scale slave revolts. Patterson has argued that for a person to be successfully enslaved, relatively speaking, he or she must suffer a "social death", an important aspect being the severing of family and ethnic ties.[3] This idea is reflected by the Athenian in Plato's *Laws* when he advises that one way to avoid slave revolts is not to enslave fellow countrymen but rather those who are *asumphônoi* ("linguistically distinct") (777d). What was important, therefore, was not so much where a slave came from but more simply that the slave was non-Greek.

## "THE DAY OF SLAVERY": HOW ONE BECOMES A SLAVE

Due primarily to recognized kinship between Greeks, it is often held that by the classical period the Greeks did not usually keep other Greeks as slaves, which means that most slaves must have been imported. It is worthwhile, however, to examine the question further. While some slaves in Greek city-states were doubtless foreign (see below), it does not appear that the Greeks developed a specialized slave trade along the lines seen in more recent history. There is no evidence, for instance, of "slavers" (ships used exclusively to convey slaves), which were in wide use between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries by European imperialists and colonists to convey slaves from Africa. In the early years of Solon's reforms and perhaps long after, a significant number of slaves were probably imported as part of the war booty captured from defeated enemies. Aristotle writes that the Greeks and their foreign enemies had amongst themselves a custom (*nomos*) which consisted of 'a kind of agreement according to which they say that the things conquered in war belong to the

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[3] This is discussed in depth by Orlando Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death.*

conquerors' (*Pol.* 1255a6-8).[4] One of the more derogatory words for "slave", *andrapodon* ("man-footed thing"), is directly related to this method of procurement, which saw captives conveyed from their homelands along with the *tetrapoda* ("four-footed things", namely "cattle"). While the Greeks had several words for "slave", *andrapodon* occurs most frequently in the military context, particularly in the works of Xenophon (*Anabasis* and *Hellenica*) and Herodotos.

Women and children appear to have been the most common victims of slavery. The men, on the other hand, were typically killed or ransomed.[5] Athenian tragedy furnishes several examples of the enslavement of women and children. The subject of slavery by convention (i.e. via warfare) seems to have been of particular interest to Euripides, who wrote several plays in which pitiable Trojan war captives and their suffering are central, such as *Hekuba*, *Andromache* and *Trojan Women*. Slavery appears to have been viewed as especially tragic for members of the upper class - the further the fall, the harder the landing, so to speak. In *Hekuba*, for instance, the Trojan princess Polyxena makes it clear that her suffering is intolerable precisely because of her inexperience of such an ignoble condition (375-8).

In his Trojan War plays, Euripides explores the question of slavery by convention within the relatively innocuous context of foreign war captives. Slavery, however, was certainly not something which was restricted to barbarians. Greeks were sometimes also on the losing side in warfare and were subsequently enslaved by their foes, Greek or non-Greek. It is noteworthy that in matters of war, particularly the lengthy and especially violent Peloponnesian War, the Greeks seem to have acted just as harshly towards each other as towards barbarians. There is evidence that, despite their apparent distaste for enslaving their own countrymen, it was certainly not unheard of, as the above examples illustrate. There are several other examples. Thucydides, for instance, states that the Spartans enslaved the women of Plataea (3.68.2) and in the next book writes that one faction of Coryraeans sold off as slaves the women of their Corcyraean opponents (4.48.4). The most noteworthy example of Greeks enslaving Greeks, however, is provided by the Spartans, who held in slavery their Messenian and Laconian neighbours for many generations. Even if this irritated other Greeks, however, they had little choice but to tolerate it. The plight of the helots

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[4] For similar statements about this "law" of war, see Xen. *Cyr.* 3.3.45, 4.2.26, 7.5.3; Poly. 2.58.9-10. For a discussion, see Garlan (1987) 8-10.
[5] Raaflaub (2004) 47.

is mentioned several times by writers such as Herodotos and Thucydides, although neither goes so far as to suggest that the Spartans should discontinue their use of them. The Athenian in Plato's *Laws* calls the Spartans' Helot-system 'the most puzzling problem of all Hellas' and claims that there were differing opinions amongst the Greeks about whether the system was a good one or not (776c). Isokrates, moreover, questions the Spartans' seemingly hypocritical enslavement of their Greek neighbors while they allow the barbarians to remain free (*Pan.* 4.131).

   If Greeks enslaving each other was the exception rather than the rule, most Greeks who were captured in warfare with other Greek city-states were probably sold to slave-traders and taken abroad or else they were ransomed or exchanged.[6] Thucydides writes at the end of Book 2 that the Athenians after returning home exchanged 'man for man' those of the war captives who were free men (103). Another example is provided by Demosthenes in his speech *Against Nikostratos*, where it is claimed that Nikostratos had been captured by an enemy trireme and sold as a slave in Aegina while pursuing his own slave who had run away. Nikostratos' brother Deinon borrowed money from Apollodoros and used this to pay the ransom (53.7). It is unlikely, however, that most Greek captives were so fortunate.  At any rate, allowing a slave to be ransomed need not be mistaken for empathy with the slave. Ransom could be more profitable than slave-trading, since people would probably be much more willing to pay a premium to rescue one of their own family members or friends.[7]

   Considering the infamous pugnacity of the Greeks, warfare was therefore a common method of obtaining slaves. Another was through piracy. Pirates were an ever-present threat both to the inhabitants of settlements as well as to travelers - the story of Nikostratos' capture by pirates, cited above, provides one such example. Piracy, however, was also a problem in earlier periods and involved both Greeks and non-Greeks. In Homer's *Odyssey*, Odysseus and his companions raid the city of the Thracian Cicones, plundering women along with other desirables (9.39-47). While Odysseus is not called a pirate, not surprisingly since the designation would be insultingly at odds with his noble status, the *Hymn to Apollo* mentions 'pirates (*lêïstêres*) randomly wandering the seas bringing trouble to people in other lands'

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[6] For a discussion of the ransoming of slaves, see Garlan (1987) 8-9; Braund and Tsetskhladze (1989) 117.
[7] See Braund and Tsetskhladze (1989) 117.

(453-4).[8] This mischief doubtless included plundering people, which is one of the primary reasons why pirates were so feared. As time went on, piracy became more organized and was conceivably responsible for supplying an increasingly significant number of slaves to the slave markets located throughout the region.[9] In the fifth century BC, two Cretan cities, Cnossus and Tylissos, even signed a treaty arranging how they should divide up the booty secured through raids on the Acharnaeans.[10] In Aristophanes' *Wealth*, moreover, Chremylos claims that most slave merchants and kidnappers came from Thessaly (520-2). Over two centuries later, slave trading continued to be a problem. Plutarch indicates that Pericles had personal experience of the rampant piracy in the Black Sea during the early fifth century and, in fact, played an important role in suppressing it (*Per*. 18). Much later, Strabo claims that Cilician pirates provided the Delian market with 'ten thousand slaves' daily (14.5.2). While this number is surely an exaggeration, it does express the perceived importance of pirates to the slave trade, at least in the Hellenistic period.

While warfare and piracy probably supplied most of Greece's slaves, Herodotos provides evidence that some parents might even have sold their children into slavery. The Thracians, he writes, 'sell their children for export abroad' (5.6). Considering the often derogatory view of Thracians presented in other sources, one wonders whether this should be attributed more to gossip than to fact, or at least how common it was to sell one's children.[11] As we shall see below, however, during times of severe poverty or famine, some parents might have felt it preferable to sell their children into slavery than to see them die of hunger or disease, a problem which continues to be seen in some parts of the world today.


GEOGRAPHICAL SOURCES OF SLAVES


It has so far  been established that both Greeks and barbarians sometimes found themselves enslaved through warfare and piracy. This section will address the

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[8] Thucydides comments upon this early form of unorganized piracy (1.5). Organized piracy, on the other hand, was thought to have emerged with the *polis*.

[9] Finley (1962) 53 contends that most slaves did not come onto the market via piracy, which was 'mere chance', along with being captured in warfare. There is evidence, however, that piracy was a way of life for some people, just as it is today.

[10] Fornara no. 89(b).

[11] For an examination of Greek views of Thracians, with a particular focus upon iconography, see Tsiafakis (2000) 364-89.

question of the geographical sources of foreign slaves through an examination of literary, artistic, and epigraphic evidence.

The regions surrounding the Black Sea are commonly thought to have provided the bulk of Greece's slaves. This is partly because there were large populations in this area, traders were active, and piracy was a problem for everyone, all ingredients which could contribute to a robust slave-trade. The Pontus as a major source of slaves is attested by Strabo, who claims that they came into the possession of European and Asiatic nomads (11.2.3), and Polybius, who claims that higher numbers and better quality slaves (and cattle) came from this region than any other (4.38). Strabo further indicates that Tanaïs, a city on the northeastern coast of the Black Sea, housed a market for slaves, but there is no evidence of one here prior to the Hellenistic period. The Black Sea was also connected with piracy in earlier periods. Aristotle, for instance, claims that the tribes around the Black Sea are particularly lawless and piratical (*Pol*. 1338b), although he does not refer to slave-trading *per se*.

The Black Sea region is a large and diverse area and so the question remains, where exactly did some of Greece's slaves come from and what sorts of evidence do we have? In the absence of evidence for ships used exclusively to convey slaves, it can be assumed that slaves were transported as part of a ship's cargo and, like the rest of the commodities one may find on an ancient merchant ship, they did not necessarily originate in the same place as the ship. Traders would follow armies in the hope of purchasing war captives whom they could then sell more dearly elsewhere, for instance, to slave traders, slave markets, or to general merchants. One can imagine that armies, particularly if they were not going straight home afterwards, would have preferred to dispose of their captives quickly rather than take them along on campaign. Even if the armies were heading home, however, the practicality of transporting large numbers of slaves must have been questionable.

Braund and Tsetskhladze have identified Colchis, on the eastern side of the Black Sea, as a notable source of slaves. Since there was a thriving trade between Greece and Colchis, it can be presumed that slaves were part of the cargo.[12] There is good evidence that the Colchians were active in the slave-trade and piracy. The best source for this is again Strabo, who gives a detailed account of how some Colchians 'live by

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[12] Textiles from Colchis seem to have been particularly sought after by Greeks, while Colchis imported many things, such as wine, from Aegean trade channels. See Hdt. 2.105; Xen. *Cyneg*. 2.4. See Braund and Tsetshladze (1989) 115.

robberies at sea' and roam the forest looking for people to kidnap (11.13).[13] None of this, however, indicates that the slaves sold by Colchian traders were themselves Colchian. There is some indication that some people were enslaved after being kidnapped by raiders when their ships were wrecked near Colchian shores.[14]

It has also been suggested that some of the local population might have fallen victim to slavery after being sold by their families during periods of economic strife and famine, which was perhaps also the situation in Thrace (above).[15] The region of Colchis, while having rich soil, was from ancient times subject to flooding and violent hot winds, both of which can ruin crops. Hippokrates writes that the area of Phasis (in Colchis) is hot and marshy, that the land does not produce much viable fruit, and that there is a peculiarly violent, hot wind (*kenchron*) which sometimes blows there (*Airs* 15). Herodotos writes, moreover, that every four years the Colchians send 100 boys and 100 girls as "gifts" to the Persians, although there is no way to tell whether these children were Colchian or of some other origin (3.97). The Ethiopians are similarly said to have sent ten boys to the Persians every other year (3.97), no doubt to be used as slaves or eunuchs, which presumably was also the fate of the boys sent by the Colchians.

While there is therefore some indication of where at least some of Greece's slaves originated, there is very little evidence upon which to draw conclusions. Since, as mentioned at the outset, there are no contemporaneous discussions of the slave trade, we must infer slave origins from indirect comments in the literature. Slave names, however, provide another source of evidence for slave origins. The following section will examine slave names with a particular emphasis upon how useful they are in determining the origins of slaves.

NAMES AS EVIDENCE FOR ETHNICITY

As mentioned above, in order for people to be enslaved successfully, it is necessary to take measures to break their spirits. One of the ways this can be done is by giving

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[13] Braund and Tsetshladze (1989) 116-7.

[14] A fragment from the Aristotelian *Constitution of the Phasians* (*FGrHist* ii, p. 218) suggests that people who were shipwrecked on the Black Sea's eastern coast might be ransomed. It is likely, however, that those who were not ransomed were sold as slaves. For a discussion of this fragment, see Braund and Tsetshladze (1989) 117.

[15] Braund and Tsetshladze (1989) 117-8.

slaves new names, thereby erasing their former ones and, by extension, their previous identities. A name, as Orlando Patterson writes, is 'the verbal sign of [a person's] whole identity, his being-in-the-world as a distinct person.'[16] Renaming slaves is a feature of all slave-holding societies, including those of ancient Greece.[17] Once a slave's name is changed, his or her identity is, theoretically, removed and the slave becomes the property of the name-giver, the master. In Plato's *Kratylos*, Hermogenes states that 'we change the names of our slaves', suggesting that this was a standard practice for Greek slave-owners (384d).

Although literary and epigraphic sources indicate that slaves were sometimes given common Greek names found also for free persons, many slaves, both real and fictional, had names suggesting foreign origin, and these were not typical for free persons. There are, for instance, numerous examples of slaves with barbarian names in Attic comedy, which in turn expresses the idea that the stereotypical slave was a barbarian. One of the more notable of these is Aristophanes' Skythian Archer, who is called simply *Skythes* ("the Skythian"). This slave is characterized as bumbling and intellectually blunt, characteristics which are expressed, in part, by his humorous accent and poor understanding of the Greek language.

The barbarian origin of the Skythian Archer is made clear not only by his name, but also by other textual references, not least, by his deficient grasp of Greek. For most other slave characters, however, barbarian origin is suggested only by names such as Thraix/Thratta, Skythes, Karion, Syros, Manes/Mania and Midas. The frequency of such names for comic slaves has given the impression that most of Athens' slaves were barbarian and that they came from places such as Skythia, Thrace, Syria, Caria, and Phrygia. Images on pots depicting comic scenes, moreover, sometimes show slavish characters with non-Greek ethnic characteristics, notably light-coloured hair, which was associated with Skythians and Thracians.[18] Pollux reflects this in his list of theatral masks, which includes the red-haired comic slave mask (4.143).[19]

It is, of course, risky to draw conclusions about slave origins based upon comic and iconographic evidence, which cannot be expected to provide the most accurate reflection of reality. By utilizing barbarian slave characters, Aristophanes could play upon popular stereotypes of barbarians as not only slavish but also uncivilized, feeble-

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[16] Patterson (1982) 54.
[17] See Patterson (1982) 55; Finley (1962) 55-6.
[18] See, for instance, Xenophanes who claims that Thracians have red hair and blue eyes (Frg. 16).
[19] For a discussion of foreign slaves in comedy and theatral art, see Wrenhaven (2010?) 000.

minded, and lacking in self-control. The epigraphic evidence, however, does indicate that slaves had these types of ethnic names, which strongly suggests that Aristophanes was, in fact, reflecting the actual situation. For instance, the names Thraix and Thratta appear several times for slaves in the Athenian Naval Catalogue, Karion appears on the Attic Stelai and the Naval Catalogue, Syros on both the Attic Stelai and Naval Catalogue, and Mania and Midas both appear in the Attic Manumissions. The Attic Manumissions also include names such as Lyde, Thraitta and Thraissa.[20] It is further noteworthy that, with the exception of names suggesting Carian origin, there are more epigraphic occurrences of those suggesting Thracian origin than any other location, and this is reflected by Aristophanes, who includes Thracian slaves in four different plays (*Ach., Wasps, Peace, Thesm.*).  Menander, similarly, includes several slave characters named Getas, which suggests the Getai, a Thracian tribe (*Per., Dysk., Her., Mis.*).[21] Demosthenes indicates that certain ethnic names were so commonly used for slaves that they became indicative of slavishness: 'Do not consider that [the slaves] are Syros or Manes or whatever while this man is Phormio. The matter is the same, they are slaves and this man was a slave' (45.86).

The question remains, how useful are names in determining where a person comes from? Certainly, some Greeks had non-Greek names, probably because they were fashionable at the time. Braund and Tsetskhladze point out that Colchos was popular for Greek citizens, particularly those in settlements around the Black Sea.[22] Names like Gerys, Iasos, Karion, and Kroisos, moreover, identify Greek citizens in the Erechtheum Accounts.[23] While it is therefore true that some Greeks had non-Greek names, these types of names are relatively common. For instance, the name Thraix/Thraitta was rare for free foreign residents (there are only two recorded instances), whereas the name is found in various forms twelve times for slaves.[24] It is further possible that the two free residents with this name were the descendants of slaves or were themselves former slaves. On the other hand, there is some indication that Greeks gave their slaves names which were meant to indicate the slave's suspected origin. This is made explicit by Strabo, who writes that the Attic people

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[20] Lyde: IG II$^2$ 1554.53; Thraitta IG II$^2$ 1557.51.

[21] For a discussion of the Getai, see Hdt. 4.93-5

[22] Braund and Tsetskhladze (1989) 122.

[23] While slaves are identified by their first names alone, citizens are identified by their first names and patronymics or demes in the genitive; metics are identified by their first names and are said to be 'living in' their demes (rather than belonging to them).

[24] *The Foreign Residents of Athens* nos. 3541 (*IG* II$^2$ 9287) and 3542 (*IG* II$^2$ 9288).

'tended to call their slaves by the same names as those of the nations from which they were brought' (7.3.12). The intention, however, does not *de facto* mean that these identifications were correct. Even if such names were intended to reflect the origin of the slave, the average Greek probably had little detailed knowledge of exact geographical locations. If he thought a slave came from the North or if the slave looked like a northerner, he might simply have presumed that the slave was Thracian, whereas if the slave came from the East or looked eastern, the owner might simply have concluded that his slave was Syrian or Lydian. It should also be kept in mind that traders themselves might not have known exactly where a slave came from and so might have misidentified the origin to potential buyers.

Based upon stereotypes about people from certain regions, sellers might even have purposely misidentified a slave's origin in order to make their "wares" more attractive to potential buyers. The Greeks connected a person's geographical origins with their personality and so believed that people reflected in their characters and bodies the places in which they were born. This, in turn, could be exploited by a shrewd merchant. For instance, if a buyer was looking for a man he could put to hard labour, he might have wanted a Thracian slave, while another potential buyer might have wanted an Asiatic slave as a tutor for his son. The waiter's comment in Menander's *Aspis*, for instance, suggests that while Thracian slaves were considered physically rugged and therefore useful for hard labour, people from places such as Phrygia were considered meek and effeminate (242-244). Aristophanes' intellectually blunt and bossy Skythian Archer fits the stereotype of a rugged northerner, and Aristotle likewise expresses a stereotype when he suggests that Asiatics, because of their warm climate, have skill and intelligence but lack spirit and so have a 'predisposition to live slavishly' (*Pol.* 1327b24-28).

While names may therefore provide evidence of the origins of slaves, a study based upon such evidence can never yield the types of definitive results we might like. Due to the frequency of ethnic names for slaves in comedy and epigraphy, however, it seems safe to assume that there was a number of foreign slaves in Athens and that this number was significant enough to make the stereotypical slave character on Athens' stages barbarian. Judging by the frequency of certain type of names, moreover, a significant number of these slaves must have come from the region of the Black Sea, especially Thrace and Skythia, and Asia Minor. Indeed, all of the areas suggested by slave names are those which the Greeks had long been in contact with through trade

networks. Although not as comon, images of black slaves Athenian art further suggest that some slaves came from Africa, likely Egypt and Ethiopia, areas that the Greeks were also long familiar with.[25] Further evidence for African slaves may be provided by names such as Melainis ("Blackie"), who was a manumitted Athenian slave.[26]

## FOREIGN SLAVES IN ATTICA

There is no doubt that there were many foreigners resident at Athens during the classical period who came both from other Greek city-states and further afield for employment opportunities. Xenophon claims, for instance, that there is a large number of 'barbarians of all sorts' residing at Athens, including Lydians, Syrians, and Phrygians (*Poroi* 2.3). The people Xenophon is referring to, however, are metics (resident aliens), not slaves. A certain number of these metics were presumably freed slaves who stayed on at Athens, but again, it is impossible to determine exact numbers based upon the available evidence. Is there any other evidence for foreign slaves in Attica?

In the period following the Persian Wars, Athens purchased three hundred Skythian slaves to act as a "police" force (Aesch. 2.173; Andoc. 3.5). These public slaves, or *dêmosioi*, would stand guard at public events and meetings. Their main function appears to have been crowd-control, although they also assisted magistrates by helping with arrests and 'manhandling prisoners' (Ar. *Ach*. 54, *Equ*. 665).[27] They were clearly distinguished from Athenians by their Skythian attire and bows, hence the name given to them, the *toxotai* ("archers") (Ar. *Thesm*. 933, 1125, 1127, 1135). Aristophanes offers several parodies of these barbarians, who were familiar to all Athenians, by representing them as overly zealous in their duties and/or completely inept. In *Lysistrata,* for instance, four Skythian Archers unsuccessfully try to tie up a group of women, who refuse to let the barbarian *dêmosioi* come anywhere near them, let alone lay a hand on them (387-475).[28] There is little evidence, however, of the use of Skythian Archers in the fourth century. The last mention of them is in Plato's *Protagoras* (319C), which dates to about 390 BC. There has been some suggestion

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[25] See Bérard (2001) 390-412 for an examination of black people depicted on Greek pots.
[26] Melainis was the name of a slave manumitted by Kleon, Athens, 330-320 BC (*IG* II² 1568, 24).
[27] Hunter (1994) 3.
[28] For a detailed discussion of the Skythian Archers, see Hunter (1994) 145-149.

that their duties were taken over by citizens.[29] It is more likely, however, that such work, which the Athenians considered servile, was taken over by regular public slaves, who had for long been employed in a variety of public service roles at Athens.[30]

Another large group of foreign slaves appear to have been involved in working Attica's Laureion mines. Judging by their names, which as we have seen can be problematic, a high percentage of the slaves might have come from regions such as Thrace, Asia Minor, the Levant, and even further East.[31] Due to the Thracians' knowledge of mining, Thompson has suggested that some slaves might even have been poached from the Thracian mines to work in Attica.[32] Xenophon recounts that Sosias the Thracian leased one thousand mining slaves from Nikias (*Por*. 4.14) and it is possible that at least some of these were his own countrymen. A cult statue of the Thracian goddess Bendis has been found in the Laureion region which further points to a high local population of Thracians.[33]

Whether they were free or slave, there is no doubt that there was a significant number of Thracians living and working in Athens by the mid-fifth century BC. By 429/8 BC, the Athenians had even officially adopted the Thracian cult of Bendis and took part, alongside Thracians, in worshipping the goddess at the Bendideia (Pl. *Rep*. 327A).[34] As outlined above, moreover, there is a relatively large number of slaves with the Thracian names in Aristophanic comedy and this is reflected in Athenian epigraphy. Athenian pottery provides further evidence for the presence of Thracian slaves. Thracians are usually identified by their tattoos and sometimes also by light-coloured hair.[35] One notable image shows Herakles followed by his aged nurse Geropso.[36] Tattoos are clearly visible on her arms, face, neck, and feet. Another pot shows a scene of mourning, with the deceased surrounded by female figures. One of the female figures, who cradles the deceased in her arms, has close-cropped hair, like

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[29] Sargent (1924) 119.
[30] See Hunter (1994) 148-149 for examples of the kinds of work done by public slaves.
[31] Lauffer (1955-6) 123-4; Finley (1962) 53; Thompson (2003) 146.
[32] Thompson (2003) 146.
[33] Simms (1988) 68.
[34] See Simms (1988) 59-78 for a detailed discussion of the worship of Bendis at Athens.
[35] The Greeks associated tattooing with foreigners, notably the Thracians, and Thracian women in particular. In Thracian culture, tattoos were decorative and might signify religious as well as other cultural practices (Hdt. 5.6.2). See Jones (1987) 139-155.
[36] Attic, red-figure skyphos, attributed to the Pistoxenos Painter, c. 460 BC. Schwerin, Kunstsammlungen, Staatliches Museum 708. For a photo, see Tsiafakis (2000) 374, Fig. 14.4.

a slave's, her hair is lighter than that of the other women, and there are tattoos on her face and arms, all elements which suggest that she is a Thracian slave.[37]

CONCLUSION

Because we possess no contemporaneous and detailed discussion of the slave trade and the geographical sources of slaves, we must rely upon what evidence we do have, which, as I have tried to express in this article, is fragmentary and problematic for a variety of reasons. Certainly, sources such as Attic comedy strongly suggest a link between barbarianism and slavery, yet it is also clear that the Greeks did sometimes enslave each other. There is no doubt, however, that the Greeks utilized foreign slaves and that these slaves were obtained in a variety of ways, through warfare, trade, piracy, or a combination of these. Due to the evidence we do have, including references to slave origins and the slave names themselves, it can be assumed that many, if not the majority, of foreign slaves came from areas with which the Greeks were long familiar through trade and warfare, notably, the Black Sea region and Asia Minor. A study of this sort, then, while it cannot definitively resolve the issue of how most slaves were obtained and from where, does at the very least point to the importance of interconnectivity to Greek slavery.

K. W.

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[37] For further discussion of Thracians in art, see Tsiafakis (2000) 364-389.

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