

THE EXPORT OF SLAVES FROM COLCHIS*

Polybius, in a familiar passage, lists goods moving past Byzantium between the Mediterranean world and the Black Sea region; among these goods, slaves are accorded a prominent place:

... as regards necessities, it is an undisputed fact that the most plentiful supplies and best qualities of cattle and slaves reach us from the countries lying round the Pontus, while among luxuries the same countries furnish us with an abundance of honey, wax and preserved fish; from the surplus of our countries they take olive-oil and every kind of wine. As for grain, there is give-and-take – with them sometimes supplying us when we require it and sometimes importing it from us.

(Polybius 4.38.4–6)

Polybius fails to mention the precise parts of the Black Sea region from which these various goods emanated, for the very good reason that he is concerned in this section to describe the advantageous position of Byzantium, not the economies of the peoples of the Euxine. It is legitimate, nevertheless, to enquire as to the origin of, for example, the slaves of whom Polybius speaks with such approval. The few modern scholars who have given thought to the matter tend to suppose that these slaves came mostly from the northern, southern and western shores of the Black Sea. Scant attention has been paid to the Euxine's eastern shores, regularly called in antiquity either Colchis or, by the second century A.D., Lazica.¹

As will be argued, it is impossible adequately to assess the relative numbers of slaves regularly produced by any particular area of the ancient world.² At best we can, in a few cases, suggest that certain areas produced a lot of slaves, as Thrace seems to have done. Even here much remains unclear: how many Thracian slaves reached the Mediterranean world through the Black Sea and how many simply from the Aegean coast of Thrace?³ It is still more difficult, given the nature of our information, to trace fluctuations in numbers exported from particular areas, except possibly in times of well-documented, large-scale warfare – that is, under abnormal conditions.

The purpose of this article is to establish, despite the limited and problematic nature of our sources, that slaves were exported from Colchis into the Mediterranean and to suggest, tentatively, the manner and consequences of their enslavement and export. The slaves mentioned by Polybius, it is argued, will have included slaves from Colchis.

* The present authors would like to express their thanks to all those who organised or participated in *Vani* '87, at which this collaborative work began. They are also grateful for advice on particular points to David Harvey and Elaine Matthews. All responsibility of course remains with the present authors.

¹ The best discussion remains M. I. Finley, 'The Black Sea and Danubian Regions and the Slave Trade in Antiquity', *Klio* 40 (1962), 51–9, most accessible as re-issued in his *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* (London, 1981), pp. 167–75 and p. 273 for bibliographical note. On the history of slavery in Transcaucasia in antiquity, see G. A. Melikishvili, *K Istarii Drevney Gruzii* (Tbilisi, 1959), esp. pp. 425–38.

² Attempts are collected and usefully discussed in W. V. Harris, 'Towards a study of the Roman slave trade', in J. H. D'Arms and E. C. Kopff (edd.), *The Seaborne Commerce of Ancient Rome* (Memoirs of the American Academy in Rome, 36, 1980), pp. 117–40. See also A. Tchernia, 'Italian wine in Gaul at the end of the Republic', in P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins and C. R. Whittaker (edd.), *Trade in the Ancient Economy* (London, 1983), pp. 87–104.

³ See B. Isaac, *The Greek Settlements in Thrace until the Macedonian Conquest* (Leiden, 1986), p. 145.

I

It is generally acknowledged that slaves were commonly traded together with and in exchange for a wide range of other commodities. Though there may have been some traders who specialised in slaves, as Aulus Capriilius Timotheus seems to have done, the slave-trade was conducted with, not separately from, trade in other goods, very much as part of general exchange.⁴ Therefore, where we can trace substantial trading activity on the margins of the Graeco-Roman world, it is reasonable to suppose, in the absence of evidence to the contrary, that slaves were also traded there and that from there they were brought into that world.

In other words, even without explicit testimony we might expect slaves to have been exported from Colchis, simply from the knowledge that there was substantial trade between the Graeco-Roman world and Colchis. Our literary sources indicate, for example, the particular importance of Colchis as a source of high-quality textiles in the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.⁵ The archaeological record not only confirms this, but also reveals substantial imports – most obviously of wine – from the Aegean into Colchis (presumably as a luxury item, supplementing substantial local Colchian production).⁶

The hypothesis of slave export from Colchis is confirmed by fairly numerous scraps of evidence. The scattered nature of that evidence makes it very difficult to trace changes over time: this shortcoming is tolerable in the case of the slaves traded out of Colchis, for all our evidence tends to suggest an essential continuity in this trade not only within the classical period but even into the nineteenth century A.D. Our most explicit information from antiquity is provided by Procopius, in the sixth century A.D.: in general, he is well-informed, though rather negative, about conditions in Colchis (or Lazica):

... they (*sc.* the Colchian Lazi) were always engaged in commerce by sea with the Romans who live on the Black Sea. For they themselves have neither salt, nor wheat, nor any other good thing, but by furnishing skins and hides and slaves they secured the supplies which they needed.

(Procopius, *Wars* 2.15.5)

Slaves were traded in order to obtain necessities: Procopius seems to envisage a chronic problem which generates a regular, long-standing slave-trade. Some five centuries earlier, Strabo and Pliny the Elder tell how men came down from the mountains which lay immediately behind ancient Dioscurias, a major centre of

⁴ On Timotheus, see M. I. Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity* (London, 1968), ch. 13 with Harris, *art. cit.* pp. 126–7 and 129ff. and H. W. Pleket, 'Urban elites and business in the Greek parts of the Roman empire', in P. Garnsey, K. Hopkins and C. R. Whittaker (edd.), *Trade in the Ancient Economy* (London, 1983), p. 139. On the slave trade as part of broader exchange, see, for example, Cic. *pro Quinct.* 24 with K. R. Bradley, 'On the Roman slave supply and slavebreeding', in M. I. Finley (ed.), *Classical Slavery* (London, 1987), pp. 46–7. Castration seems to have been something of a speciality, see below n. 22.

⁵ Hdt. 2.104–5; Xen. *Cyneg.* 2.4; Strabo 11, p. 498.

⁶ See, most accessibly, O. D. Lordkipanidze, 'The Greco-Roman world and ancient Georgia (Colchis and Iberia)', in *Modes de Contacts et Processus de Transformation dans les Sociétés Anciennes: Actes du Colloque de Cortone (1981)* (Pisa–Rome, 1983), pp. 123–44. Note also his *Das alte Kolchis und seine Beziehungen zur griechischen Welt vom 6. zum 4. Jh. v. Chr.* (Xenia 14, Konstanz, 1985). Extremely valuable on the economy of Colchis is G. Lordkipanidze, *K Istarii Drevnyey Kolkhidy* (Tbilisi, 1970), esp. pp. 84–9 (on textiles) and pp. 52–4 (on wine-production). The fullest discussion of viticulture and wine-production in Colchis remains A. V. Bokhochadze, *Mevenakheoba–Megvineoba Dzel Sakartveloshi Arkeologiuri Masalebis Mikhedvit* (Tbilisi, 1963) (in Georgian with brief Russian summary).

exchange, in order to trade there.⁷ In another passage, Strabo mentions that these men came especially to obtain salt. It may well be that they brought with them slaves and no doubt other goods to exchange. The exchange of slaves for salt is attested elsewhere: Pollux states that inhabitants of the Thracian hinterland sold their children for salt. A slave might be called *halonetos*, 'salt-bought'⁸.

Since trade in slaves was one of only a few available means of obtaining necessities, as Procopius' evidence seems to suggest, the obtaining of slaves must itself have been a high priority. Another passage of Strabo is so enlightening that it must be quoted in full:

These peoples [sc. the Achaei, Zygi, and Heniochi, usually situated in the north west of Colchis, in the region of Dioscurias] live by robberies at sea. Their boats are slender, narrow and light, holding only about 25 people, though in rare cases they can hold 30 in all; the Greeks call these craft *camarae*. ... At any rate, by equipping fleets of these craft and sailing sometimes against merchant-vessels and sometimes against a country or even a city, they hold the mastery of the sea. And they are sometimes assisted even by those who hold the Bosphorus, who supply them with moorings and markets and a means of disposing of their booty. And since, when they return to their own land, they have no anchorage, they put the *camarae* on their shoulders and carry them to the forests where they live and where they till a poor soil. They bring the *camarae* down to the shore again when the time for navigation comes. And they do the same thing in the countries of others, for they are well acquainted with wooded places; and in these they first hide their *camarae* and then roam on foot night and day in order to kidnap people. But they readily offer to release their captives for ransom, informing their relatives after they have put out to sea.

(Strabo 11, pp. 495–6)

Strabo, who himself came from the south-eastern shores of the Black Sea, describes piracy as an essential part of Colchian life, especially perhaps in the north-western part of Colchis, where the tribes he mentions are usually located. Piracy was a supplement to agriculture, a seasonal source of income and probably – as later – a social institution.⁹ Strabo also makes quite plain the close association of piracy and trade, of which trade in slaves was a part. And it is worthy of note that the victims of this piracy were not only or even mostly Colchians, but all who sailed or lived near the sea within the wide range of the Colchian pirates, who seem to have operated as far west as Tomi.¹⁰ Those enslaved and sold by Colchians – in and around Colchis or elsewhere – need not be Colchians.

Piracy was endemic in the Black Sea,¹¹ as even Pericles is said to have discovered. Praise was heaped upon those who, like Pericles, were credited with suppression of

⁷ Strabo 11, p. 498; Pliny, *N.H.* 6.15. The practice had changed little by the nineteenth century: see, for example, E. Spencer, *Travels in Circassia, Krim-Tartary etc.* (3rd edn., London, 1839), i.306. On Dioscurias, see now Yu. N. Voronov, *Dioskuriada-Sebastopolis-Tskhum* (Moscow, 1980).

⁸ Strabo 11, p. 506; cf. Procopius, *Wars* 2.15.5 (quoted below) and, much later, Evliya, *Narrative of Travels* (Oriental Translation Fund, London, 1850), ii.56, who himself took advantage of the highly profitable exchange of salt and the like for slaves. On unequal exchange as a characteristic of slave trading, see E. A. Alpers, *Ivory and Slaves in East Central Africa* (London, 1975). *Halonetos*: Pollux 7.14 with I. T. Nikulitse, *Severnnye Frakiysy v VI–I vv. do n.e.* (Kishinev, 1987), p. 188.

⁹ On slave-raiding as a social institution, see Evliya, op. cit. p. 55: '[they]... steal each other's children and a man who does not steal and plunder is thought to be bad company, so that they give him not their children in marriage.'

¹⁰ Ovid, *Ex Ponto* 4.10.25–30 with A. Podossinov, *Ovids Dichtung als Quelle für die Geschichte des Schwarzmeergebiets* (Xenia 19, Konstanz, 1987).

¹¹ The classic study of piracy as a source of slavery in the Black Sea remains V. D. Blavatskiy, 'Rabstvo i evo istochniki v antichnykh gosudarstvakh Severnovo Prichernomor'ya', *SA* 20 (1954), 31–56.

it.¹² Yet, as we have seen, piracy was here all but essential to life itself; it was not to be suppressed easily. At best it might be controlled. Rome no doubt expected her 'client kings' in the area, here as elsewhere, to do just that.¹³ Moreover, the control of piracy is usually considered to have been a prime function of the Roman garrisons established along the eastern coast of the Black Sea under the Principate.¹⁴

However, Strabo also observes the countervailing effect of the practice of ransom, which seems to have been popular with kidnappers and slave-raiders everywhere: it could be more profitable to sell captives back to their families than to sell them into slavery. Slave-raiding and ransom are seen together in a fragmentary passage of Aelian, writing in the second century A.D.:

His name was Dionysius, a trader by profession, who had spent his life in frequent voyaging, spurred on by gain. Weighing anchor beyond [i.e. east of] the Maeotis [i.e. Azov], he bought a Colchian girl whom the Machlyes, a local tribe, had carried off.

(Aelian, fr. 71 (Hercher))

The surviving fragments of Aelian's text seem to show that Dionysius took the girl, via Byzantium, to Chios where he put her on sale; he did so, it seems, in breach of a ransom-agreement which he had made with her family.

Victims of shipwreck might be enslaved, killed or ransomed. A fragment of an Aristotelian 'Constitution of the Phasians' deserves more attention than it has been accorded:

Φᾶσιν τὸ ἐξ ἀρχῆς Ἡνίοχοι κατώκου, φύλον ἀνθρωποφάγον καὶ ἐκδεῖρον τοὺς ἀνθρώπους, ἔπειτα Μιλήσιοι. φιλόξενοι δ' εἰσὶν, ὥστε τοὺς ναυαγοὺς ἐφοδιάζειν, καὶ τρεῖς μᾶς διδόντας ἀπολύειν.

(FGrHist ii, p. 218)

The claim seems to be that Milesian colonists civilised the local Heniochi to the extent that they began to ransom the shipwrecked, where once they had flayed them. Nothing is said of enslavement, which can be given a place between murder and ransom in such conceptions of 'progress'.¹⁵ The fragment is problematic in many ways,¹⁶ but it does show that shipwreck (and its consequences) was at least imagined on the eastern coast of the Black Sea. If we take the fragment at its word, we may also infer that the shipwrecked were sometimes enslaved at Phasis, for not all will have been able to find someone to ransom them.

Economic problems of a short-term nature must also be considered, for they could lead to slaving.¹⁷ A response to bad harvests in many contexts has been, after the sale

¹² Plut. *Per.* 50; Diod. 20.25.

¹³ Strabo 11, p. 496 with D. Braund, 'Client kings', in D. Braund (ed.), *The Administration of the Roman Empire (241 BC-AD 193)* (Exeter Studies in History 18, Exeter, 1988), ch. 4.

¹⁴ See M. P. Speidel, 'The Caucasus Frontier. Second-century garrisons at Apsarus, Petra and Phasis', *Studien zu den Militärgrenzen Roms III; 13. Internationaler Limeskongress, Aalen 1983* (Stuttgart, 1986), pp. 657-60 with important new evidence from Pityus in N. Sh. Kiguradze, G. A. Lordkipanidze, T. T. Todua, 'Kleyma XV legionia iz pitsundskovo gorodishcha', *VDI* (1987), 2.88-92.

¹⁵ See Y. Garlan, 'War, piracy and slavery in the Greek world', in M. I. Finley (ed.), *Classical Slavery* (London, 1987), pp. 7-21.

¹⁶ See *RE*. viii (1913), cols. 490-1 with O. D. Lordkipanidze, 'K problemye grecheskoy kolonizatsii vostochnovo Prichernomor'ya (Kolkhidy)', *Problemy Grecheskoy Kolonizatsii Severnovo i Vostochnovo Prichernomor'ya; Materialy I. Vsesoyuznogo Simpoziuma... Tskhaltubo, 1977* (Tbilisi, 1979), pp. 188-9. See also N. Lomouri, 'O "Politii Phasistsev" Geraklida', *VDI* (1988) 3. 123-34, with H. B. Gottschalk, *Heraclides of Pontus* (Oxford, 1980), p. 157.

¹⁷ Xenophon, *Symposium* 4.36, where it is stressed that the well-off might also indulge in it.

of other assets, the sale of children, wife and, ultimately, oneself.¹⁸ The logic of such a dire situation is captured by al Umari, a mediaeval Islamic scholar, reporting on the sale of children by the Kipchak, to the north of the Caucasus:

In some years when they find themselves reduced to a state of severe famine, they sell their children in order to use the price to buy sustenance. 'In this situation', they say, 'it is better to ensure our survival and that of our child than to watch him perish beside us.'¹⁹

We have already seen how some inhabitants of Colchis found it difficult to scrape a living from the land. Here the danger of famine may have been significant, though most of the Colchian plain offers rich land, where the greatest danger is not famine but flood. However, even in this relatively rich region, harvests can fail as a result of adverse climatic conditions:

During summer in Kutaisi [*sc.* a principal town of Colchis], they [*sc.* foehns] appear as very hot and desiccating winds which after several hours may cause vegetation to drop leaves. They usually last 2–10 hours, but occasionally they may last up to a week and after such duration much vegetation withers and dies.²⁰

Probably more important as a cause of enslavement was exploitation of the poor by the local elite. Allen has collected ample evidence from later centuries in Colchis.²¹ Procopius again provides our clearest evidence from antiquity, for he describes the activities of kings of the Colchian Abasgi who seized handsome boys from among their subjects, castrated them to increase their value and sold them as eunuchs into the Byzantine empire.²² The market for slaves constituted an incentive for the powerful to act in this way even towards their own subjects, whether from necessity or in order to obtain luxury goods, such as foreign wine. It seems likely enough that such men had acted similarly in earlier centuries: Herodotus states that down to his own day the Colchians send 100 boys and 100 girls every five years as tribute to the Persians,²³ though it is not clear whether these were Colchians or persons obtained from other peoples by war or purchase.

Our sources indicate that relations between the peoples of the eastern coast of the Black Sea and the Greeks, Romans and Byzantines could and did degenerate into warfare: Arrian, for example, in the second century A.D., was most concerned to guard against attacks from the hinterland upon Roman establishments on the coast.²⁴ Skirmishes must have produced captives who could be sold into slavery: the traders encamped beside Arrian's troops at Phasis will have bought them up.²⁵ When conflicts erupted on a larger scale still more locals were presumably sold into slavery.

¹⁸ For a useful survey of responses to famine, see R. Dirks, 'Social Responses during Severe Food Shortages and Famine', *Current Anthropology* 21 (1980), 21–44; cf. P. Garnsey, *Famine and Food-Supply in the Graeco-Roman World* (Cambridge, 1988).

¹⁹ Ibn Fadl Allah al Umari, *Masalik al absar* (translated and edited by P. Quatremère), *Notices et Extraits* 13 (1838), 267.

²⁰ P. E. Lydolph, *Climates of the Soviet Union* (World Survey of Climatology 7, Amsterdam, 1977), p. 196, which finds some ancient support in *Airs, Waters, Places* 15: 'There are [*sc.* in Colchis] only slight changes of temperature from season to season. The winds are mostly moist, except one breeze peculiar to the country called *kenkhron*, which sometimes blows strong, violent and hot.'

²¹ W. E. D. Allen, *A History of the Georgian People* (London, 1932), pp. 282–3.

²² Procopius, *Wars* 8.3.15ff. Castration increased a slave's value (Claudian *In Eutrop.* 1.48–9; cf. Amm. Marc. 16.7.5 and Hdt. 8.105 for a rationale); it seems to have been a fairly specialised business: see, with the passages cited, C. Verlinden, *L'Esclavage dans l'Europe Médiévale* (Ghent, 1977), ii.130.

²³ Hdt. 3.97.4.

²⁴ Arrian, *Periplus of the Black Sea* 9; cf. A. B. Bosworth, 'Arrian and the Alani', *HSCPh* 81 (1977), 217–55.

²⁵ Arrian, *Periplus* 9.5.

In the mid-sixties B.C. Pompey's army fought its way through Transcaucasian Albania and Iberia into Colchis, where it linked up with Servilius' fleet which had doubtless been engaged in actions against local pirates: we can only guess at the number of slaves generated.²⁶ Much earlier, Colchians had fought with the Persian forces which invaded Greece under Xerxes: some of them were presumably captured and enslaved.²⁷ Much later, as Procopius and Agathias describe, the Byzantines were engaged in major warfare with the Persians in the Caucasus: substantial numbers of slaves must have been taken. What is less clear is the extent to which the foundation of Greek and later settlements on the coast of Colchis encouraged slaving among local peoples, as such settlements have often done in various parts of the world in more recent centuries.²⁸

We can see, therefore, that social, economic, political and military conditions in Colchis were such as to produce slaves on a regular basis and that this production could be accelerated from time to time by special conditions of climate or warfare. It remains to find slaves from Colchis resident in the Mediterranean world.

II

Ulpian's account of the edict of the curule aediles, as preserved in the *Digest*, states explicitly that the vendor of a slave should state the people (*natio*) from which that slave comes. This is important, it is explained, because ethnic origin is commonly an incentive or disincentive to purchase: the ethnic origin of a slave leads buyers to suppose that slave to be either a good slave or a bad slave, depending on the reputation of the people from which he comes. Indeed, where national origin has not been stated, the purchaser and other interested parties can take legal action to compel the vendor to take back the slave.²⁹ Much earlier, Varro confirms that ethnic origin was a significant factor in determining the market-price of a slave.³⁰

We may wonder how often a vendor was in practice tempted to give his slave an origin which would prove more attractive in the market-place, especially where the physical characteristics of a slave would not reveal the deception and where slaves were not themselves in a position to know better and perhaps give the game away. Attempts at falsification of slaves' origins are likely to have occurred in the case of those who came from a people reckoned to make bad slaves. Slave vendors could evidently claim that their slaves had skills which they did not in fact possess: the slave-trade had something of a reputation for sharp practice.³¹ And the reputation of Colchians, as warlike, cannibalistic or simply idle, seems not to have been such as to encourage declarations of an ethnic origin in Colchis.³²

There is also evidence of simple ignorance of ethnic origin, as a case from the south-

²⁶ Plut. *Pomp.* 34.5.

²⁷ Hdt. 7.70.

²⁸ Garlan, op. cit. p. 20; cf. in other colonial contexts, Alpers, op. cit.; A. Marchant, *From Barter to Slavery* (Gloucester, MA, 1942); J. E. Inikori (ed.), *Forced Migration: the Impact of the Export Slave Trade on African Societies* (London, 1982).

²⁹ *Digest* 21.1.31.21 (Ulpian); cf. 50.15.4.5 (Ulpian) with W. W. Buckland, *The Roman Law of Slavery* (Cambridge, 1908), pp. 58ff.; M. I. Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity* (2nd edn., London, 1977), p. 156 supposes similar practice and legislation in classical Greece; cf. his *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* (London, 1981), p. 171.

³⁰ Varro, *LL* 9.93 with Harris, art. cit. p. 136 n. 55.

³¹ Cic. *pro Plancio* 62 with Harris, art. cit. 129. Cf. Aristoph. *Knights* 1030; *Plutus* 522; Plato, *Rep.* 344b.

³² On the reputation of Colchians, see *Airs, Waters, Places* 15; Aristotle, *FHG* 2, p. 180; D. Braund, 'Herodotus, Slavery and the Physiognomy of the Colchians', *Symposium, Vani* 1987 (Tbilisi, forthcoming).

east coast of the Black Sea serves to illustrate. Xenophon tells us that among those who marched with him through that region, heading home from Cunaxa at the very end of the fifth century B.C., was a man who had been a slave at Athens. When they reached the land of the Macrones, not far from Trapezus, this man recognised the language of the local people and presumed himself to have originated among them.³³ The story is not beyond suspicion, but its logic demands that the man, who was previously a slave, did not know from which people he came. We can only guess at the commonness of such fundamental ignorance. In the processes of kidnapping and sale from hand to hand, origin might easily have been forgotten or concealed, where it was inconvenient, especially in the case of slaves who were sold as slaves when very young. Invention within the bounds of plausibility was an obvious substitute for knowledge and was, in effect, demanded by any legal or market requirement that an origin be stated. At the same time, the very existence of such a measure in Roman law tends to suggest that some vendors at least did not state slave-origins, whether because they did not wish to deter buyers or because they simply did not know.³⁴ To Herodotus, at least, Colchians and Egyptians looked alike: a slave from Colchis might therefore be sold as originating from Egypt or vice versa.³⁵

It may well be that point of sale played a part in the bestowal of ethnics, just as it undoubtedly did in the bestowal of names which resemble ethnics.³⁶ Certainly, the athlete Nicostratus, who was a Phrygian by origin but was sold on the coast of Cilicia, could be regarded as a Cilician.³⁷ The implications are considerable. For example, we know that the sea of Azov (Maeotis), the mouth of the Don and the neighbouring Crimean Bosphorus were together a centre of trade in slaves: were the four slaves of Protarchus on Delos who are listed as Maeotians in fact not Maeotians at all, but men from other areas – from Colchis even, for Colchian pirates traded their captives there (see Strabo 11, pp. 495–6, quoted above)?³⁸ At the same time, some slaves were disposed to elaborate mythical genealogies for themselves; one wonders if they ever had a hand in choosing an ethnic origin for themselves, for, as Finley observes, ‘the psychology of the slave in the ancient world was obviously more complicated than mere sullen resentment, at least under “normal” conditions’.³⁹

In short, there was considerable scope for confusion and imprecision about slave-origins – a scope which was explored to humorous effect in New Comedy and for philosophical purposes by the likes of Dio Chrysostom.⁴⁰ Origin could become

³³ Xen. *Anab.* 4.8.4–7. For a possible Macronian in Athens, see below n. 46.

³⁴ S. Treggiari, *Roman Freedmen during the Late Republic* (Oxford, 1969), p. 4, observes this ignorance and uncertainty: the origin of freedmen... ‘was often disputed even during their lifetime’.

³⁵ Hdt. 2.104–5 with n. 65 below.

³⁶ Varro, *LL* 8.21. Strabo 7, p. 304 states that the Athenians tended to give their slaves names which recalled their ethnic origin or names popular among the peoples from which their slaves came. His discussion is more problematic than has often been allowed. He seems to imply that the Athenians were somehow unusual in this. Their stated practice seems to involve a notable concern for slave origin, but it does not fit the evidence as neatly as Strabo might suggest: see O. Masson, ‘Les noms des esclaves dans la Grèce antique’, *Actes du Colloque 1971 sur l’esclavage* (Besançon, 1973), 9–23. Moreover, Strabo alludes to some uncertainty as to the derivation even of the name ‘Davus’.

³⁷ Pausanias 5.21.10.

³⁸ Strabo 11, p. 493; Migne *PG* 159, col. 140 (wherein the Latin version is misleading). Protarchus: *SEG* xxiii, no. 381.

³⁹ M. I. Finley, *Aspects of Antiquity* (2nd edn., London, 1977), p. 165; cf. Atotas, *IG* ii/iii².10051; Pallas, *Tac. Ann.* 12.53.

⁴⁰ G. E. Duckworth, *The Nature of Roman Comedy* (1952), pp. 253ff.; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 15.

confused, as well as forgotten or falsified, through kidnapping or repeated sale. We can only guess at the confusion which could arise from the linguistic limitations of even adult slaves with some firm idea of their homeland, let alone small children. At the same time, geographical precision can hardly be expected even of scholar-geographers of antiquity, let alone traders – particularly where their financial interests might be at stake.⁴¹

We have reason, therefore, to be wary in identifying the ethnic origin of a slave even in the relatively few cases where we are given explicit evidence of a slave's origin. Where, as usually, there is no explicit evidence, we must be a good deal more cautious in making inferences about origin. Robert and Masson, amongst others, have drawn attention to the great danger of inferring origin from the names of slaves, even where those names look like ethnics. Undoubtedly, ethnics were commonly used as names for slaves, but they were also used for free persons.⁴² Status cannot be determined purely from a personal name, though it is certainly true that some names – Thratta, for example – are regularly the names of slaves. Any complete certainty is made still more difficult by the presence of visiting or resident foreigners and the use of nicknames. Apart, perhaps, from the commonest names of slaves, such as Thratta,⁴³ it is only possible to infer ethnic origin from a name in cases where slave-status can be demonstrated by other means; even here, all the same qualifications apply as in cases where ethnic origin is explicitly stated.

These last considerations have a particular relevance to our earliest evidence for a person who might be a Colchian slave in the Mediterranean world. A potter named Kholkhos is attested on an oenochoe from Vulci, which was made in Athens in the latter part of the sixth century B.C. at the latest.⁴⁴ Since the pot was evidently made and decorated in an Athenian manner, the potter had presumably spent time in learning his craft at Athens. Kholkhos must therefore have been in Athens at least from the middle of the sixth century and very probably earlier; he may have come as a child. His name (like the names of other potters and painters at Athens) looks like an ethnic and might be taken to suggest servile status. If this man was indeed a slave,

⁴¹ Polybius 4.39.11. Cf. D. Braund, 'The Caucasian Frontier: myth, exploration and the dynamics of imperialism', in P. Freeman and D. Kennedy (edd.), *The Defence of the Roman and Byzantine East* (British Archaeological Reports, Oxford, 1986), pp. 31–49.

⁴² Masson, op. cit. (n. 36), p. 13; L. Robert, *REG* 52 (1939), 13, with his *Noms indigènes dans l'Asie mineure gréco-romaine* (Paris, 1963), pp. 535–40. Note also P. R. C. Weaver, 'Cognomina ingenua: a note', *CQ* 14 (1964), 311–15 with Treggiari, op. cit. (n. 34), pp. 6ff. Older works, such as the otherwise useful M. Lambertz, *Die griechischen Sklavennamen* (Wien, 1907), are less cautious. A salutary warning is Scythes, who was not a Scythian slave, but the tyrant first of Cos and then of Zancle at the beginning of the fifth century B.C.: Hdt. 6.23ff.; Aelian, *VH* 8.17; he had a Spartan namesake, Xen. *Hell.* 3.4.20; Plut. *Ages.* 16. Note also V. I. Kadeyev, 'Ob etnicheskoy prinadlezhnosti nositelyey imeni skif v Khersonesye Tavricheskoy', *SA* (1974), 3. 56–63. Cf. the slave Karos, of Pontic birth: *BGU* iii. 937.9, with J. A. Straus, 'Le pays d'origine des esclaves de l'Égypte romaine', *Chronique d'Égypte* 46 (1971), 363–6.

Of course, it was not uncommon for members of the elite in particular to give their offspring names which reflected their own affiliation with other states and which therefore resemble ethnics, e.g. Thuc. 1.20 (Pisistratus' son, Thessalus), Plut. *Cimon* 16 (Cimon's son, Lacedaemonius), etc.

⁴³ M. I. Finley, *Economy and Society in Ancient Greece* (London, 1981), p. 169; cf. V. Velkov, 'Raby-Frakiytsy v antichnykh polisakh Gretsii VI–II vv.do n.e.', *VDI* (1967), 4.70–80.

⁴⁴ *ABV* p. 110, no. 37; cf. M. B. Moore, M. Z. P. Philippides, D. von Bothmer, *The Athenian Agora: XXIII* (Princeton, 1986), p. 83 n. 92. It has been suggested that he was also a painter, but the suggestion is founded upon a misunderstanding of the name Oltos: B. N. Grakov, 'Materialy po istorii Skifii v grecheskikh nadpisyakh Balkanskovo poluoostrova i Maloy Azii', *VDI* (1939), 3.305 after *CIG* iv.8200; see *ARV* p. 60 no. 64.

as could well be the case, we must suppose the arrival of a slave from Colchis to Athens in the early or middle sixth century B.C. The date is early, but it is entirely credible, for there was by that time active trade between Greeks and non-Greeks on the eastern shores of the Black Sea.⁴⁵ However, the possibility cannot be excluded that this man was a metic (a supposition which itself has considerable implications for Colchian involvement with the Mediterranean world) or, just possibly, a free Athenian.⁴⁶

The name 'Kolkhos' is, in fact, attested in a number of instances where its bearer's freedom seems more or less probable.⁴⁷ An inscription of the third century B.C. shows a Byzantine trierarch who was the son of one Kolkhos.⁴⁸ Earlier but inconclusive is a graffito, Kolkhos, scratched on a fragment of a lamp found at Panticapaeum in 1961; it is dated on palaeological grounds no later than the fifth century B.C.⁴⁹ Grave stelae of the fourth century B.C. from the same area separately record Philocomus, son of Kolkhos, and Mazis, son of Kholkos [*sic*]:⁵⁰ the status of these fathers is not clear, nor is their origin, though one gave his son a Greek name, while the other chose a Persian name for his son. Similarly problematic is an inscription of the second century A.D., found by the River Kuban: it is thought to have come from Gorgippia and includes the name Khol[kos] in a list of names. This inscription seems to list the names of members of a *thiasos*; they have usually been taken to be the names of citizens, though they need not be.⁵¹ Olbia provides clearer evidence: an inscription of the second century A.D. mentions an archon of Olbia named Rhaodmeos, whose father is named as Kolkhos. It seems most likely that this Kolkhos was a Greek citizen of Olbia.⁵²

It is noteworthy that the name Kolkhos appears predominantly in the Black Sea region. In that context, of course, Colchis was of particular significance, not least as a source of raw materials and other products.⁵³ At the same time, the myth of the Argonauts also had a special interest at many points in the Black Sea, including Panticapaeum, which was said to have been founded by Aeetes' son.⁵⁴ By contrast,

⁴⁵ See above, n. 6.

⁴⁶ For judicious discussion, see J. Boardman, *Athenian Black-Figure Vases* (London, 1974), p. 12. At least as problematic is Macron, who worked as a painter at Athens early in the fifth century B.C. (*ARV* pp. 458ff.). He may have been a Macronian, as Xenophon's companion seems to have been (*Anab.* 4.8.4-7), but his name is common enough among Greeks: see F. Bechtel, *Die historische Personennamen des Griechischen bis zur Kaiserzeit* (Halle, 1917), s.v. Makron with W. Pape and G. Benseler, *Wörterbuch der griechischen Eigennamen* (Braunschweig, 1884), p. 847.

⁴⁷ Note also J. Chadwick, *Documents in Mycenaean Greek* (2nd edn., Cambridge, 1973), nos. 265 and 282 for a Kolkhidas.

⁴⁸ *Syll.*³ 580. Perhaps his family had some affiliation with Colchis: see above, n. 42, and below, n. 52.

⁴⁹ See G. R. Tsetskhladze, 'K voprosu ob etnicheskoy prinadlezhnosti nositelyey imeni kolkh v antichnom mirye', *Vestnik Kharkovskogo Universiteta* 21 (1988), p. 82.

⁵⁰ *CIRB* (= *KBN*) nos. 230 and 200 respectively: 'kh' and 'k' are there taken (as usual, and throughout the present article) to be largely interchangeable; so also by L. Zgusta, *Die Personennamen der griechischen Städte der nördlichen Schwarzmeerküsten* (Prague, 1955), p. 392.

⁵¹ *CIRB* 1231 B.5 with S. M. Sherwin-White, *Ancient Cos* (Leiden, 1978), p. 360 on the difficulties of identifying the status of members of *thiasoi*. No less problematic is the name Kolkha, attested, quite possibly of a Greek woman, in a list of names from the island of Calymnus compiled early in the second century B.C.: M. Segre, 'Tituli Calymnii', *ASAA* n.s. 6-7 (1944-5), no. 88 lines 57, 77, 92 and 95. Cf. *MDAI(I)* 13-14 (1963-4) p. 57, nos. 64-5.

⁵² *IOSPE* i².132; cf. Zgusta, loc. cit.; again, some family link with Colchis is not unlikely: see above, nn. 42 and 48.

⁵³ See G. Lordkipanidze, op. cit. (n. 6), pp. 17ff.

⁵⁴ Steph. Byz. s.v. Pantikapaion; cf. Braund, art. cit. (n. 41).

there is no clear evidence for the use of the name Kolkhos among Greeks outside the Black Sea region: instances from the Black Sea serve to indicate that the Kholkhos who worked at Athens could possibly have been a free man. However, the fact remains that he is at least as likely to have been a slave.

Nor is Kholkhos the only attested person in Attica who may have been a Colchian slave. A funerary inscription records the death of Euphrosyne, who is described as a Colchian. She was the wife, daughter, freedwoman or, possibly, slave of one Chaeremon.⁵⁵ Less problematic is the list of the property of Cephisodorus, confiscated as the result of the affair of the Mysteries in 415–14 B.C., which mentions, among other slaves of various origins, a male slave who is described as a Colchian and is valued at 153 drachmas – that is, neither very high nor very low by comparison with the other slaves listed.⁵⁶

Among the many slaves manumitted at Delphi, for whom an ethnic origin is given in a significant number of cases, one female slave is described as a Colchian: her personal name is given as Kallo.⁵⁷ The name Kallo has a certain assonance with Kolkhis, but there is nothing particularly Colchian about it. That only one Colchian slave is explicitly attested at Delphi, amid so many slaves, might suggest that Colchian slaves were not common. But caution is required: Delphi may be quite atypical, while those involved in manumission there may very well be atypical even within Delphi.⁵⁸ The point may be illustrated in the case of Maeotian slaves: we have seen that one man on Delos had at least four slaves described as Maeotians, but among all the slaves recorded at Delphi only two Maeotians are mentioned – again with indistinctive names, Agathon and Eutaxia.⁵⁹ Moreover, as Lauffer acknowledges, the ethnic origins of the slaves of Laurium are recorded in only a very few cases; they represent a tiny fraction of the slaves who worked there. None of these few is given an origin in Colchis, though the name Kolianos could suggest as much for one slave.⁶⁰

At Rome there is no clear evidence of slaves from Colchis. Slaves are attested in Rome with names which recall the Caucasus and the Argonautic myth, but their ethnic origin is quite uncertain.⁶¹ Yet it is likely enough that some Colchian slaves reached Rome, for they continued to be brought into the Mediterranean world. In a literary skit of the second century A.D. Alciphron could still imagine the sale of a Colchian or Scythian slave girl in classical Athens. At about the same time, Aelian was describing the activities of Dionysius the merchant and his Colchian slave girl.⁶²

There is no reason seriously to doubt the presence of some slaves from Colchis in the Mediterranean world from at least the fifth century B.C. onwards, though it must also be acknowledged that complete certainty as to the precision of stated ethnic

⁵⁵ *IG* ii/iii².9049 with Grakov, art. cit. (n. 44), p. 308 no. 110.

⁵⁶ R. Meiggs and D. M. Lewis, *A Selection of Greek Historical Inscriptions* (Oxford, 1969), no. 79 with the literature there cited; cf. N. B. Klyachko, 'Stely Germokopidov kak istochnik svedeniy o rabakh V v.do n.e.', *VDI* (1966), 3.114–27. See now *IG* i³.421, line 44.

⁵⁷ *SGDI* 2218.

⁵⁸ K. Hopkins, *Conquerors and Slaves* (Cambridge, 1978), pp. 138–9 stresses the inadequacy of statistical inferences from the inscriptions from Delphi, such as those made by V. A. Goldenberg, *VDI* (1953), 1.200–9.

⁵⁹ *SGDI* 1992 and 2163 respectively; contrast *SEG* xxiii, no. 381 (the slaves of Protarchus).

⁶⁰ S. Lauffer, *Die Bergwerkssklaven von Laureion* (2nd edn., Wiesbaden, 1979), pp. 121–40, 279–81. Lauffer, op. cit. p. 129 thinks Kolianos (*IG* ii/iii².2938) probably a non-Greek name. On Colchian Koli, see, for example, Hecataeus, *FGrHist* i, fr. 209, but the name may be explained otherwise; cf. *RE* xi (1922), cols. 1073–8 for some other possibilities.

⁶¹ For example, Colchus, imperial slave and bath-attendant (*CIL* vi.8742); Sallustia Colchis (*CIL* vi.8206).

⁶² Alciphron, *Epp.* 3.61. See above on Aelian and Arrian.

origins remains impossible. Their presence in the sixth century B.C. and even earlier is not unlikely, given our evidence for exchange between Colchians, Greeks and others, even if Kholkhos the potter was not a slave.

The general impression one might gain from the meagreness of our evidence is that Colchian slaves were rare in the Mediterranean world. This may be so: it may well be that Colchian slaves, like the name Kolkhos, were more common in the Black Sea region. But it must be stressed that explicit evidence for the presence of slaves of most ethnic origins is notably rare. There were many slaves in the Mediterranean world, of which only a fraction are attested in any way; of those attested only a fraction have origins which are stated or even guessable. The uncomfortable fact remains that our evidence is insufficient to allow anything but the most vague and impressionistic quantification.

Nevertheless, a story preserved by Athenaeus could imply that Colchian slaves were no great rarity on Chios at least:

Nicolaus the Peripatetic and Posidonius the Stoic both say in their *Histories* that the Chians were enslaved by Mithridates the Cappadocian and handed over in chains to their own slaves to be transported to Colchis.

(Athen. 6.266e-f = Edelstein-Kidd, fr. 51)

Appian confirms that Chians were transported to the Black Sea; he makes it clear that Mithridates Eupator is the king in question and gives a date of 86 B.C. Memnon mentions their passing by sea off Heracleia Pontica, whence a force put out to effect a rescue, on account of the friendship between the peoples of Heracleia and Chios.⁶³

The context and the point of the story in Athenaeus are that the Chians were punished for being the first Greeks to import slaves by the reversal of the positions of master and slave: the Chians became the slaves and were shipped out to Colchis. How closely are we to press this reversal of roles? Are we to understand that many (even most) slaves on Chios came from Colchis? We have already observed Aelian's account of a Colchian slave girl brought for sale at Chios, which was also, it seems, a stopping-point for those sailing from the Black Sea towards Egypt. Moreover, Chian goods certainly found their way to Colchis. And can it be simple coincidence that Chios is the only island in the Aegean where the names Kaukasos and Kaukasion are attested (the latter six times, probably from the fifth century B.C. onwards)? It seems reasonable to suggest some on-going connection between Chios and the eastern coast of the Black Sea wherein exchange bulked large, though shortage of evidence makes that suggestion inevitably provisional.⁶⁴

In conclusion, not only can there be no serious doubt that Colchian slaves existed in the Mediterranean world, but there is also no good reason to suppose them to have been particularly rare there. One consequence of that finding deserves particular attention. It has recently been argued that Herodotus did not know what Colchians looked like and in his ignorance described them as negroes. However, A. B. Lloyd and one of the present authors have independently argued that there is nothing in the text of Herodotus to indicate that Herodotus thought Colchians to be negroes and

⁶³ Appian, *Mithr.* 7; Memnon (= *FGrHist* 434) 231a-b, cf. J. Malitz, *Die Historien des Poseidonios* (Munich, 1983), pp. 357-9.

⁶⁴ Th. Ch. Sarikakis, 'Commercial relations between Chios and other Greek cities in antiquity', in J. Boardman and C. Vaphopoulou-Richardson (edd.), *Chios: a Conference at the Homereion in Chios, 1984* (Oxford, 1986), 121-31, esp. p. 121; Chian pottery is quite commonplace in Colchis. On Chios and slavery, see I. A. Shishova, 'Rabstvo na Khiosye', in D. P. Kallistov *et al.*, *Rabstvo na periferii antichnovo mira* (Leningrad, 1968), pp. 149-92. On Kaukasion and Kaukasos, see P. M. Fraser and E. Matthews, *A Lexicon of Greek Personal Names i* (Oxford, 1987), pp. 253-4.

much to suggest that he did not.⁶⁵ If, as may well have been the case, Colchian slaves were to be found with no great difficulty on mainland Greece and the islands of the Aegean, it seems still more difficult to imagine that Herodotus could be so profoundly mistaken – unless, perhaps, we are to suppose that black slaves were passed off as Colchians.

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⁶⁵ A. B. Lloyd, *Herodotus Book II*, iii (Leiden, 1988), p. 20 and, at length, Braund, art. cit. (n. 32) *contra* O. K. Armayor, 'Did Herodotus Ever Go to the Black Sea?', *HSCPh* 82 (1978), 45–62, an article which owes much to D. Fehling, *Die Quellenangaben bei Herodot: Studien zur Erzählkunst Herodots* (Berlin–New York, 1971), pp. 15–17.