

Freedom and Slavery in Herodotus' World

Lecture Outline:

- I. Introduction / Argument
- II. The Meanings of Freedom / *Eleutheria* in Fifth Century Greece
 - Eunomia* -- "good law" / good order
 - Isonomia* -- "equality of law" / equality under the law
 - Isegoria* -- "equal speech" / equal right to speak
- III. Why, According to Herodotus, Some Societies are Free and Others are Not
 - Habitat and Habits
 - Human Agency
 - Herodotus: Cultural Relativist or Ethnocentrist?
 - Dangers Implicit in the Cultural Preference for Monarchy
 - Benefits of *Isonomia* & *Isegoria*
- IV. Was Greek Freedom Based on Slavery?
 - Societies with Slaves vs. Slave Societies
 - Defining Slavery
 - Solon and the Abolition of Debt Bondage for Athenian Citizens
 - Athens: from Society with Slaves to Slave Society
 - Social Death of Slaves & Political Life of Citizens
 - Implications

Key Words:

<i>eleutheria</i>	freedom
<i>eunomia</i>	good law / good order
<i>isonomia</i>	equality of law / equality under the law
<i>isegoria</i>	equal speech / equal right to speak
<i>nomos</i>	custom, law, convention
<i>douleia</i>	slavery
<i>pais</i>	child
<i>andrapodon</i>	man-footed thing
<i>helots</i>	serf-like native peoples of Messenia under Spartan rule
<i>metics</i>	resident aliens of Greek city-states

Key Passages:

1. "...the rule of the people: first, it has the finest of all names to describe it -- equality under law [*isonomia*]; and secondly, the people in power do nothing that monarchs do. Under a government of the people a magistrate is appointed by lot and is held responsible for his conduct in office, and all questions are put up for open debate. For these reasons I propose that we do away with the monarchy, and raise the people to power; for the state and the people are synonymous terms" (Herodotus, *The Histories*, III:80.6).
2. "Everyone without exception believes his own native customs [*nomoi*], and the religion he was brought up in, to be the best; and that being so, it is unlikely that anyone but a madman would mock at such things. There is abundant evidence that this is the universal feeling about the ancient customs [*nomoi*] of one's country. One might recall, in particular, an account told of Darius. When he was king of Persia, he summoned the Greeks who happened to be present at his court, and asked them what they would take to eat the dead bodies of their fathers. They replied that they would not do it for any money in the world. Later, in the presence of the Greeks...[Darius] asked some Indians...who *do* in fact eat their parents' dead bodies, what *they* would take to burn them. They uttered a cry of horror and forbade him to mention such a dreadful thing. One can see by this what custom [*nomos*] can do, and Pindar, in my opinion, was right when he called it 'king of all.'" (*Histories*, III: 38).

3. "How can one fit monarchy into any sound system of ethics, when it allows a man to do whatever he likes without any responsibility or control?...A king...is the most inconsistent of men; show him reasonable respect, and he is angry because you do not abase yourself before his majesty; abase yourself, and he hates you for being a toady. But the worst of all remains to be said – he breaks up the structure of ancient tradition and law [*nomos*], forces women to serve his pleasure, and puts men to death without trial" (*Histories*, III: 80).
4. "When, therefore, Cambyses put this question, they [the royal judges] managed to find an answer that would neither violate the truth nor endanger their own necks: namely, that though they could discover no law which allowed brother to marry sister, there was undoubtedly a law which permitted the king of Persia to do what he pleased" (*Histories*, III: 31).
5. "Thus Athens went from strength to strength, and proved, if proof were needed, how noble a thing equality before the law [*isegoria* -- equal right of speech] is, not in one respect only, but in all; for while they were oppressed under tyrants, they had no better success in war than any of their neighbours, yet, once the yoke was flung off, they proved the finest fighters in the world. This clearly shows that, so long as they were held down by authority, they deliberately shirked their duty in the field, as slaves shirk working for their masters; but when freedom was won, then every man amongst them was interested in his own cause" (*Histories*, V: 78).
6. "They are free - yes - but not entirely free; for they have a master [*despotes*], and that master is Law, which they fear much more than your subjects fear you. Whatever this master commands, they do; and his command never varies: it is never to retreat in battle, however great the odds, but always remain in formation, and to conquer or die" (*Histories*, VII: 104).
7. "...From her [Earth] I once
took up the boundary stones that were fixed in many places,
so that she who was once in servitude is now free.
And to Athens, their god-founded homeland,
I brought back many men who had been sold off, some unjustly,
others justly, still others sent into exile by
the compulsive power of need, none of whom still spoke
the speech of Attika, wandering as they were in many places.
And as for those who here at home endured the shame
of servitude, in terror of their masters' ways,
I made them free. These things through power,
by fitting together force and justice,
I brought to pass, and so came through as I promised.
Laws too, however, alike for the base man and the noble,
fitting straightforward justice to each one's case,
I set down in writing" (Solon, *Greek Lyric*, frag. 36).

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