

# Debt slavery as a historical social contingency.

## A sociopolitical analysis

STANISLAV KONEČNÝ

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.54937/kd.2025.16.1.47-64>

**ABSTRACT:** Debt slavery, i.e., the phenomenon in which a free individual, as a result of indebtedness, could become an unfree slave under the conditions of a slave society, meets the criteria of a social contingency phenomenon as defined by contemporary social policy. In textbooks on the history of social policy, however, this social event is usually given only marginal attention, to the extent of a few lines, and even then most often only in the context of ancient Greece and Rome. It was a phenomenon that emerged in the context of the property differentiation of society and was originally considered—like all slavery—to be the natural state of affairs. Within the various causes of slavery, however, the debt slave exhibited certain specificities that made possible the emergence of forms of intervention that enabled the debt slave to return to the ranks of free men. From the Sumerian Empire onwards, these were initially only forms of slave protection, shortening the allowable period of debt slavery, later individual redemption, etc., until finally, in ancient Rome, it resulted in the de facto (albeit only partial) equalisation of slaves and free citizens.

**Keywords:** Slavery, Debt Slavery, Social Contingency, Social Intervention.

### *Introduction*

In history in general, and specifically in the history of social policy, we can note several major turning points, such as the rise of Christianity or Bismarck's social reforms. One of the major turning points, though, has somehow escaped our attention as it concerns a social contingency that we no longer see today—debt slavery. The aim of this study is not to present a history of slavery, but rather to analyse debt slavery as a social contingency, the resolutions of which can still be instructive today.

If we consider the purpose and goal of social policy to be the need to intervene in relation to an individual or other addressee when the satisfaction of their socially recognised needs is threatened and this subject is unable by their own efforts and resources to ensure balance in satisfying their needs, then we can very clearly consider poverty, old age, illness, etc., as such social contingencies today. Thus, we use this term fully in accordance with the content that the term '(covered) contingency' is currently used to refer to: illness, pregnancy, childbirth, unemployment (loss of earnings), old age, incapacity for work, child-

hood, disability, orphanhood, etc.<sup>1</sup> In the earliest, pre-feudal history, it was primarily the family or community that intervened in such situations, but even then there were social contingencies fulfilling all the above criteria, where often neither the family nor the community was able to intervene sufficiently, and we see the first forms of intervention in some social contingencies from the level of wider social structures, such as poverty, in antiquity, whether in Athens (diobelia) or in Rome (frumentatio in particular). These, though, concerned only free citizens and not slaves.

Debt slavery is just one form from among a wide range of forms, including slavery, serfdom, forced labour, etc.; it is considered an integral part of social practice even in the pre-state period,<sup>2</sup> about which, as noted, a number of works have already been written.<sup>3</sup>

It is necessary to recapitulate only the main postulates of these works, such as the fact that while in other forms of slavery the condition was mostly irreversible, even hereditary, in the case of debt slavery it was also possible to end it upon settlement of the debt that had caused the slavery. In general, therefore, there was both an easier transition from the status of a free man to that of a slave and vice versa, as M. A. Dandamaev<sup>4</sup> noted in the context of the Babylonian Empire. Debt slavery was thus not subject to the instruments of termination that, for example, most forms of *manumission* in ancient Rome were. In addition, however, it could be limited by force (generally more than other forms of slavery), especially in terms of its duration and conditions. Because of the scope of the issue, we will touch only marginally on those cases of debt slavery that involved the sale of a wife or children into slavery as a way of settling a debt.

It is also necessary to distinguish between debt slavery in the case of citizens and of foreigners: “measures, found in a number of systems, often limited their benefits exclusively to citizens”<sup>5</sup> An important aspect was also stressed by David H. Lewis, a recognised authority on the subject, when he pointed out

*“a common problem, and that is the conflation of debt bondage with enslavement for debt. The two conditions are qualitatively quite different. The first term describes a form of indentured service in which the bondsman works to pay off an obligation. His or her labour continues only until the debt has been repaid, and the master is not their owner. Enslavement for debt, however, transforms the debtor*

<sup>1</sup> *Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102)*. International Labour Organization., 1952 Available at: <[https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::p12100\\_instrument\\_id:312247](https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEX-PUB:12100:0::NO::p12100_instrument_id:312247)> [01. 03. 2024]; KONEČNÝ, Stanislav. K vymedzeniu predmetu sociálnej politiky. In *Aktuální otázky sociální politiky – teorie a praxe*. Pardubice : Univerzita Pardubice, Fakulta ekonomicko-správní, 2011, pp. 44 – 52.

<sup>2</sup> TESTART, Alain. The Extent and Significance of Debt Slavery. In *Revue française de sociologie*. Vol. 43, Supplement: An Annual English Selection, 2002, pp. 196 – 201. <http://doi.org/10.2307/3322762>

<sup>3</sup> PARGAS, Damian Alan. Introduction: Historicizing and Spatializing Global Slavery. In PARGAS – SCHIEL (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan 2023, p. 4. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_1)

<sup>4</sup> DANDAMAEV, Muhammad Abdulkadyrovich. *Slavery in Babylonia. From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626 – 331 B. C.)*. Northern Illinois University Press, 1984, p. 80.

<sup>5</sup> WESTBROOK, Raymond. The Character of Ancient Near Eastern Law. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.) *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill 2003, p. 38. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_002)

*into a slave, who can be bought, sold, inherited, and so on; and the creditor who enslaves him upon default becomes his owner”.*<sup>6</sup>

In this, it is necessary to be aware of the difference between owning a slave and owning other property, although in some periods this difference was not very marked, as analysed in greater detail by J. W. Watts.<sup>7</sup>

Slavery itself was initially not socially recognised as needing any kind of intervention. To be a slave was simply seen as part of the natural state of affairs (just as in the early days of social thought, old age, childhood, etc., were also seen as natural states where no intervention was needed), nor was it seen as a form of social stigmatisation or social exclusion.<sup>8</sup> We find this also, for example, in the case of Aristotle,<sup>9</sup> although his understanding was based on the consideration that being a slave was a consequence of *physis*, i.e., natural law (as a result of the slave's mental deficiency). Thus, if we speak of slavery as a social contingency, we need to distinguish historically the causes of its emergence as such. We know that slaves in the period of so-called archaic or patriarchal slavery were most often prisoners of war (a role seen for the longest time as a natural part of military conflict) or entire subjugated ethnic groups (helots of the Messenian plain in Sparta, etc.). The subject of our interest, however, is a different group, namely persons who were originally free yet fell into slavery as a result of their indebtedness. Although we are familiar with the concept of “debt slavery” (*nexum*) mainly from ancient, especially Greek, history, this phenomenon was known much earlier. We already consider debt slavery to be a form of classic slavery, which was especially widespread in antiquity.

In this study, we will look at changes in attitudes toward debt slavery from the pre-antique period (in the Sumerian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Hittite, and Assyrian periods), through the Old Testament period to Sparta, Athens, and ancient Rome. We will observe the different forms that attitudes toward debt slavery took: from forms in which it was perceived as a natural and largely unmitigable condition, to the gradual creation of room for intervention, whether by relatives or by public institutions, from the privileging of the status of debt slaves, to the limiting of the duration of debt slavery, and finally to the disappearance of its classical form. At the same time, we will try to draw conclusions from the analysis of these developments that would be useful in contemporary social policy theory and practice.

### *Debt slavery in pre-antiquity*

Naturally, debt slavery could not have arisen before debt itself arose, and debt could not have arisen before the emergence of property differentiation in society. Already in the Sumerian period, we can find evidence of increasing property

<sup>6</sup> LEWIS, David M. *Greek Slave Systems in their Eastern Mediterranean Context c. 800-146 BC*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018, p. 10.

<https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198769941.001.0001>.

<sup>7</sup> WATTS, James W. The Historical Role of Leviticus 25 in Naturalizing Anti-Black Racism. In *Religions*, 2021, Vol. 12, Iss. 8/570, p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080570>.

<sup>8</sup> ROBERTS, John Madox. *The New Penguin History of the World*. 5th ed. London : Penguin Books, 2007, p. 65.

<sup>9</sup> BARKER, Ernest. *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*. New York : G. E. Putnam's Sons, 1909, pp. 359 – 370.

differentiation,<sup>10</sup> the unfortunate consequences of which were counteracted, for example, by the reforms of the ruler Urukagin (also called Uruinimgina, 2318-2312 BC), who

*“proclaimed in Lagash liberties from debts, returned the mother to the child, returned the child to the mother, proclaimed liberation from interest.... For the inhabitants of Uruk, the inhabitants of Larsa, and the inhabitants of Bad-tibira, he proclaimed exemption from debts”.*<sup>11</sup>

The authorship of these reforms being sometimes attributed to Entemena, the ruler of Lagash (who lived around 2400 BC).<sup>12</sup> Slavery in general was not yet very common in Sumer, and even the above-mentioned reforms did not speak directly of debt slavery, but the rulers did address the conditions under which debt slavery may arise.

In early Mesopotamia, the peculiarity of debt slavery is seen in the ways that children and other dependents were used as collateral for access to credit and seized because of defaulted loans, failure of family members to meet requirements placed upon them as part of their responsibilities, crimes committed by family members, or outright sold.<sup>13</sup>

In the Akkadian Laws of Eshnunna, we already find direct mention of slaves who were not allowed to leave the city without their master's consent, but offences of which any slave was a victim were already punishable.<sup>14</sup> The circumstances under which debt slavery was practiced varied significantly. In the Lipit-Ishtar Laws of Isin (1931 – 1924 BC), the alienation of inhabitants threatened with debt slavery is already addressed: *“At that time, I liberated the sons and daughters of the city of Nippur, the sons and daughters of the city of Ur, the sons and daughters of the city of Isin, the sons and daughters of the lands of Sumer and Akkad, who had been subjugated, and I restored order.”*<sup>15</sup> So, this is not yet about redemption from debt slavery, but rather its prevention. While in the Akkadian city of Nuzzi *“debt slavery was widespread, and the time required to work off a debt sometimes lasted up to fifty years,”*<sup>16</sup> we did not find such concessions in other Akkadian cities.

After the collapse of the Akkadian Empire, when its northern part was occupied by the nomadic Gutei tribes, the various city-states regained their independence, with the city of Ur somewhat dominating for about a century (2111–2003

<sup>10</sup> UHLIG, Helmut. *Die Sumerer : Volk am Anfang der Geschichte*. München : Bertelsman, 1976.

<sup>11</sup> MASSE, Martin. Gudea, Urukagina and the Mesopotamian Origin of the Concept of Liberty. In *Le Québécois Libre*, 15. 1. 2010; KLÍMA, Josef. *Lidé Mezopotámie: cestami dávne civilizace a kultury při Eufratu a Tigridu*. Praha : Orbis, 1976, p. 108.

<sup>12</sup> DENNY, Rose – ROWAN, Allen. *Ancient Civilizations of the World*. Waltham Abbey: ED-Tech Press, 2021, p. 159; MORALES, Abel Maria Cano – PINEIDA Carlos Maria Restrepo – MONSALVE Omar Osvaldo Villa. La primera reforma tributaria en la historia de la humanidad. In *Entramado*, 2019, Vol. 15, Iss. 1, p. 159. <https://doi.org/10.18041/1900-3803/entramado.1.5419>.

<sup>13</sup> REID, John, Nicholas. The children of slaves in early Mesopotamian laws and edicts. In *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*, 2017. Vol. 111, Iss. 1, p. 12. <https://doi.org/10.3917/assy.111.0009>.

<sup>14</sup> YARON, Reuven. *The Laws of Eshnunna*, 2nd ed. Jerusalem – Leiden : The Magnes Press – E. J. Brill, 1988, pp. 161 – 165. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004665361>

<sup>15</sup> ROTH, Martha T. *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. Atlanta : Scholars Press, 1995, p. 25.

<sup>16</sup> DANDAMAEV, *Slavery in Babylonia*, p. 178.

BC). Ur is associated with the Code of Ur-Nammu, which, among other matters, deals with how a slave can be returned to his master;<sup>17</sup> however, specific provisions regarding debt slavery are not contained in this Code. The literature does, however, state that in the pre-Babylonian period, debt slavery was one of the main sources of recruiting the slave class.<sup>18</sup>

The cultural heritage of the Sumerian and Akkadian era was taken over by the Babylonian era for three centuries between 1900 and 1600 BC. Its development is primarily associated with the ruler Hammurabi (reigning c. 1792 – 1750 BC), who built up the empire and also issued his famous legal code. In it, we find a classification of the social stratification, which consisted of *awilums* (who were the richest, free, fully entitled, privileged landowners), *mushkenums* (personally free but unprivileged, farming on rented land, employees of the royal palace or temple, artisans, soldiers, etc.), and *wardums* (slaves, unfree, could be bought and inherited).<sup>19</sup> Though the Babylonian Empire suffered from labour shortages, its poorest social classes were not slaves. This was compensated for by the arrival of foreigners.<sup>20</sup> The problem of debt slaves was thus not crucial in the Babylonian Empire:

*“...regular slave-markets existed and there was price stability, indicating fairly regular trade... Even though the master’s hold on the slave was practically absolute, some Babylonian slaves did nonetheless enjoy remarkable independence, engaging in business, and even owning slaves on their own account; they had legal rights, albeit narrow ones.”<sup>21</sup>*

The Babylonian concept of debt slavery had a fundamentally conditional character:

*“...persons held in this way were understood to be pledges for debts to be repaid—parked in the household of a creditor until (someday) redeemed—rather than property whose ownership was unconditionally and permanently transferred. All such “enslavements,” though indefinite, were not considered a permanent change of status. That the verb of transaction in contracts was unambiguously “to sell” may be misleading to the extent that slaves could later be “redeemed”. To put this in culturally salient terms, “slavery” was often a matter of a low-ranking member of a poor household being deputed to go and live and work (but also to be pro-*

---

<sup>17</sup> KRAMER, Samuel N. *The Sumerians. Their History, Culture and Character*. Chicago – London : The University of Chicago Press, 1963, p. 78.

<sup>18</sup> DANDAMAEV, *Slavery in Babylonia*, p. 103.

<sup>19</sup> *The Code of Hammurabi, King of Babylon*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1904, §§ 196– 223.

<sup>20</sup> PAULUS, Susanne. Babylonien in der 2. Hälfte des 2. Jts. v. Chr. – (K)ein Imperium? Ein Überblick über Geschichte und Struktur des mittelbabylonischen Reiches (ca. 1500 – 1000 B.C.)» In GEHLAR, Michael - ROLLINGER, Robert (eds.). *Imperien und Reiche in der Weltgeschichte. Epochenübergreifende und globalhistorische Vergleiche. Teil 1: Imperien des Altertums, Mittelalterliche und frühneuzeitliche Imperien*. Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014.

<sup>21</sup> ROBERTS, John Madox. *The New Penguin History of the World*. 5th ed. London : Penguin Books, 2007, p. 66.

*vided for, i.e., fed and clothed) in another household until such time as a family debt was repaid.*"<sup>22</sup>

In general, debt slavery continued to exist in the Neo-Babylonian period, although it was losing importance.<sup>23</sup>

The Code of Hammurabi distinguishes between public and private slaves—"slaves of the palace" and "slaves of the *mushkenums*".<sup>24</sup> Public slaves were mainly prisoners of war and persons convicted of a crime; private slaves were more likely to be *mushkenums* who had fallen into debt, including children of parents who were already private slaves. Indebted parents also sometimes sold their children into slavery to be rid of their debts. A *mushkenum* could also sell himself into slavery. A wife could also be taken into slavery for violating her marital duties, and likewise children for unacceptable behaviour towards other family members. A slave was fundamentally just a chattel owned by his master; he could be given away, sold, let, or inherited. A slave was allowed to dispose of certain property, though it remained their master's property. A slave could gain his freedom by being set free, could redeem himself from slavery by property he had accumulated, or could be redeemed by relatives. The Code of Hammurabi, meanwhile, is considered to be the first norm that significantly restricted debt slavery.<sup>25</sup>

Throughout history, from the Old Babylonian to the Neo-Assyrian period (ca. 2004 – 612 BC), rulers had the right to forgive debts (called *misharum*, *anduratum*).<sup>26</sup> Hammurabi limited the length of debt slavery for family members to three years.<sup>27</sup> In the Old Babylonian period, children could also form an integral part of debt negotiations, since the creditor benefited from the work performed by the distraint or guaranty while waiting for repayment.<sup>28</sup> Elderly free citizens sometimes adopted their slave to look after them, with the slave gaining freedom upon their owners' death. In general, therefore, positive social mobility of *mushkenums* was slight but possible in principle, especially by entering palace or temple service, though negative mobility was more common and simpler, for

<sup>22</sup> RICHARDSON, Seth. Mesopotamian Slavery. In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Julianne (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan 2023, p. 23. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_2).

<sup>23</sup> DANDAMAEV, *Slavery in Babylonia*, p. 103.

<sup>24</sup> *The Code of Hammurabi*, §§ 175-176

<sup>25</sup> SPICKSLEY, Judith The Decline of Slavery for Debt in Western Europe in the Medieval Period. In *Serfdom and Slavery in the European Economy. 11th – 18th*. Firenze : Firenze University Press, 2014, p. 466.

<sup>26</sup> BLOK, Josine–KRUL, Julia. Debt and its Aftermath. The Near Eastern Background to Solon's *Seisachtheia*. In *Hesperia* 2017, Vol. 86, p. 625. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.86.4.0607>; SLANSKI, Kathryn. Mesopotamia: Middle Babylonian Period. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.). *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill, 2003, p. 487. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_012](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_012).

<sup>27</sup> *The Code of Hammurabi*, §§ 117.

<sup>28</sup> REID, John Nicholas. The children of slaves in early Mesopotamian laws and edicts. In *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*, 2017. Vol. 111, Iss. 1, p. 12. <https://doi.org/10.3917/assy.111.0009>.

example, through losing land or falling into debt.<sup>29</sup> In the Neo-Babylonian period, debt slavery was again virtually non-existent.<sup>30</sup>

In 1594 BC Babylon was conquered by the Hittites. The Hittite Empire (18th–13th centuries BC), dominating mainly Asia Minor, also established the so-called Hittite legal code, also known as the Code of Nesilim (1650 – 1500 BC), containing several provisions concerning slaves, even in several categories—slaves of a “house of stone”, slaves of the king’s son, etc.<sup>31</sup> Surprisingly, most of the provisions relate to the protection of the slave and his health<sup>32</sup> or their entry into family unions,<sup>33</sup> and there are no provisions relating to debt slavery. It is also possible to interpret this to mean that the Hittite Empire, as a strongly militant power, had an abundance of slaves from among its prisoners of war.

In the northeast of Mesopotamia, under the influence of raids by nomadic tribes, developments took a different course, resulting in the formation of a new state, the Assyrian Empire, around 1350 BC. It followed the Old Assyrian period (1950 – 1750 BC), dominated by the city-state of Assur, which was later conquered by the Babylonian Empire, though this territory was later reunified, with the Assyrian Empire coming to encompass the territories of Syria, Palestine, Egypt, part of Asia Minor, and Iran. In Asia Minor, debt slavery was already quite widespread, as collateral for a loan was often the debtor’s wife or children. Such debt slaves were already commonly the subject of inheritance or sale, and their value was not high.<sup>34</sup> The existence of debt bondage is also pointed out by an inscription of the Neo-Assyrian king Sargon II (ca. 723 – 704 BC).<sup>35</sup>

At the time of Egypt’s greatest flowering, i.e. the period of the Old Empire, Middle Empire, and New Empire, which with intermediate periods lasted from 2686 to 1069 BC, slavery did exist in Egypt, but was probably not widespread<sup>36</sup> and it is conjectured that under Pharaoh Bocchoris (24th Dynasty, ca. 720 B.C.) it was even forbidden.<sup>37</sup> This also applied to debt slavery in both the Old Empire and the New Empire.<sup>38</sup> The majority of the population, despite being of diverse economic

<sup>29</sup> *The Code of Hammurabi*, §§ 117.

<sup>30</sup> OELSNER, Joachim – WELLS, Bruce – WUNSCH, Cornelia. Mesopotamia: Neo-Babylonian Period. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.). *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill 2023, p. 953. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_027](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_027)

<sup>31</sup> HALSALL, Paul. *Ancient History Sourcebook: The Code of the Nesilim*. Fordham University, § 52.

<sup>32</sup> HALSALL, Paul. *Ancient History Sourcebook: The Code of the Nesilim*. Fordham University, § 2, 4, 8, 16, 18 First Part, § 2, 6, 11, 13, 15, 17 Second Part.

<sup>33</sup> HALSALL, Paul. *Ancient History Sourcebook: The Code of the Nesilim*. Fordham University, §§ 31-34, 36 First Part.

<sup>34</sup> VEENHOF, Klaas – EIDEM, Jesper. *Mesopotamia: The Old Assyrian Period*. Zürich : Zurich Open Repository and Archive, 2008, p. 110 – 111.

<sup>35</sup> BLOK, Josine-KRUL, Julia. Debt and its Aftermath. The Near Eastern Background to Solon’s *Seisachtheia*. In *Hesperia* 2017, Vol. 86, p. 624. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.86.4.0607>.

<sup>36</sup> KAREV, Ella. *Slavery and Servitude in Late Period Egypt (C. 900-330 BC)*. Dissertation. University of Chicago, 2022, pp. 371 – 372; KAREV, Ella. Ancient Egyptian Slavery. In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Julianne (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, p. 51. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_3).

<sup>37</sup> KAREV, *Slavery and Servitude*, p. 202 – 203.

<sup>38</sup> JASNOW, Richard. Egypt. Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.). *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill 2003, p. 118. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_003).

circumstances, was otherwise equal. The basis of society was the peasantry, who worked land that belonged to the pharaoh and were obliged to pay for it. They also had to maintain the irrigation system or work free of charge on public buildings (including the pyramids).

*“Slavery existed but it seems to have been less fundamental an institution than the forced labour demanded of the peasantry”.<sup>39</sup>*

In the pre-antique period, therefore, debt slavery underwent significant changes: it was a permanent part of the social structure, although its importance fluctuated considerably. Reactions to this phenomenon varied accordingly. Initially, its general acceptance was interrupted only by one-off acts by the ruling structures, consisting of its (mostly local) abolition. The question of any limitation on the duration or conditions of debt slavery had not yet arisen, just as the question of the prevention of debt slavery was not yet relevant. The Code of Hammurabi, which effectively singled out debt slaves from among other slaves and also allowed for the forgiveness of debts, can be considered an important step in this period, which led precisely to the decline in the importance of debt slavery.

### *Old Testament period*

In contrast, the situation was quite different in biblical Israel. Semitic nomadic peoples had already participated in the establishment of the Akkadian Empire but played some role throughout the entire ancient history of Mesopotamia. Despite a turbulent history, the Jewish people retained not only their religious identity, expressed in the Torah or Tanakh, but also their social identity, expressed in a number of oral and later written documents of a canonical nature (Mishnah, Talmud, Halakhah, etc.), wherein we find a range of information about slavery among the Israelites. The Bible mentions several causes of slavery, including debt slavery, where the debtor could sell himself into slavery, which occurred, for example, as a result of crop failure. For example, the prophet Nehemiah has a well-known passage confirming this fact.<sup>40</sup>

However, the possibility of redemption from slavery is also known, as we find, for example, in the Second Book of Kings.<sup>41</sup>

According to an analysis of the Old Testament lament of Jeremiah by M. T. Terblanche, the author of Jeremiah 34:8-22 not only recognised the debt release and the slave release laws in Deuteronomy 15:1-18 as divine commands, but also shared their “humanitarian” concerns. The debt slaves should be treated as brothers and not as mere objects.<sup>42</sup> As J. W. Watts states,

*“in the desperate last years of the Judean kingdom, when King Zedekiah declared debt slaves free, landowners quickly re-enslaved the same people”.<sup>43</sup>*

<sup>39</sup> ROBERTS, John Madox. *The New Penguin History of the World*. 5th ed. London : Penguin Books, 2007, p. 79.

<sup>40</sup> *Neh* 5, 1 – 5.

<sup>41</sup> *2Kgs* 4, 1 – 7.

<sup>42</sup> TERBLANCHE, Marius D. The Author of Jeremiah 34:8-22 (LXX 41:8-22): Spokesperson for the Judean Debt Slaves? In *Acta Theologica, Supplementum* 2019, Vol. 27, Iss. 1, pp. 67 – 78. <https://doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.Sup27.4>.

<sup>43</sup> WATTS, James W. The Historical Role of Leviticus 25 in Naturalizing Anti-Black Racism. In *Religions*, 2021, Vol. 12, Iss. 8, p. 3. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080570>.



Slavery could be ended in another way—by release from slavery: the Book of Exodus says: “When you purchase a Hebrew slave, he is to serve you for six years, but in the seventh year he shall be given his freedom without cost”.<sup>44</sup> It was also subject to the general principle of the Sabbatical year (Dt 15:1-3):

*“At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts.<sup>2</sup> This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord’s time for cancelling debts has been proclaimed.<sup>3</sup> You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your fellow Israelite owes you.”*

In the Old Testament period, we can observe a refinement in the understanding of slavery, particularly debt slavery, compared to both earlier and some later approaches

However, the short period we have covered here has been very significant in the evolution of the approach to debt slavery. For one, debt slavery became the subject of ethical evaluation not only in the Old Testament texts directly but also in other interpretive treatises (e.g., Shemot 21, Berakhot 5a). The inclusion of debt slavery among the ethical issues did not imply its rejection either, but of practical significance was the temporal limitation on the maximum duration of debt slavery. It was no longer possible for debt slavery to be a lifelong affliction, and the possibilities for its termination were expanded.

### *Debt slavery in antiquity*

Ancient Greece and ancient Rome were still developing what is sometimes termed a slave society. Although slavery differed between the Greek city-states, and even more so in ancient Rome, the basic feature—the deep division of society along an almost impenetrable boundary between free citizens and slaves—is a fact.

The Gortyne Laws (from the 5th century BC) from ancient post-Mycenaean Crete, despite their brevity, contained in Article XVI a formulation on debt slavery according to which “one may not buy a man while he has a mortgage until the mortgagor has released him”.<sup>45</sup>

A more archaic type of Greek antiquity was that represented by Sparta. The well-known Spartan militarism was just one response to a problem that other Greek polises faced: overpopulation and food shortages—Greece does not have much fertile land. While Athens and other cities, for example, solved this by establishing *apoikia* and *klerúchia* all over the Mediterranean, with which they also maintained harmonious relations and from where they imported grain, Sparta directly subjugated the fertile territory of the Messenian plain to the west of its own territory—and this could only be maintained by military force, as evidenced by several revolts in this occupied territory.

The whole social organisation of the Spartan polis was subordinated to this: the *Spartans*, according to the well-known laws of Lycurgus, had to prove their pure descent, and their numbers never exceeded the limit of 9 000 men. The

<sup>44</sup> *Shemot* 21, 2.

<sup>45</sup> HALSALL, Paul. *Ancient History Sourcebook: The Law Code of Gortyn*. Fordham University : Internet Ancient History Sourcebook, 2020.

second stratum was the *perioics*, who, though they had personal liberty, had no rights. The third layer was the *helots*—slaves of the state. An individual Spartan could not privately own them, but any Spartan could kill any helot at any time and without cause. Mass public physical punishment of the helots was also organised annually to commemorate their slave status. These were mostly the enslaved inhabitants of Messenia, whose enslavement occurred in the 7th century BC. In addition, the Spartans also had their own private slaves, but their number was not significant.<sup>46</sup> The status of slaves in Sparta represents the sharpest form of social segregation in European history, for which there were no exceptions and no possibility of ‘escaping’ from slave status. History also records an attempt in Sparta to abolish slavery (and, in the original version, debt slavery) under King Agis IV, which was unsuccessful.

The situation in Athens was different. The population consisted of both free citizens (who, according to various estimates, made up 20–30%), the so-called *metics*—mostly foreigners with property but not political rights—and completely lawless slaves. The status of slaves in Athens was considerably better than in some other Greek *polises*: they had neither civil nor economic rights and were not treated as human beings in the eyes of the law, only as objects. However, in Athens, a slave could be put to death only if a court so decided. A slave could be set free or could also be bought out of slavery (because he could own property), but this was very difficult; even then the slave became only a *metic*, which was especially the case if their owner decided to release them from slavery (*apeleutheros*). It was in the Athenian *agora* that the first of the Stoics, Zeno of Citium, spoke of slavery as unfreedom. On the other hand, the poorest peasants were often in debt. When a peasant was indebted for his land, he guaranteed the loan with his person or family. The *eupatrids*, the large agricultural landowners, then sold such a peasant or a member of his family as slaves abroad or kept them to work on their property (*hektemoroi*). Athenian slaves were chattels of their master (or the state), who could dispose of them as he saw fit. A slave could have a husband and a child, but the family of slaves was not recognized by the state, and the master could divide the family members at any time.

*“Solon’s reforms in early sixth-century BCE Athens prohibited debt slavery; Athenians could no longer be enslaved for debt within their community. We have no concrete evidence about most other Greek communities, but we get the impression that enslavement for debt was marginal, if not equally prohibited. On the other hand, the existence of debt bondage is attested; free people had to work for their lenders in order to repay their debts in conditions that were often akin to slavery, although they retained their free status while in debt bondage.”<sup>47</sup>*

<sup>46</sup> KULESZA, Ryszard. *Starożytna Sparta*. Poznań : Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2003, pp. 37 – 54.

<sup>47</sup> VLASSOPOULOS, Kostas. Slavery in Ancient Greece. In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Juliane (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, p. 70. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_4).

This difference between enslavement for debt and debt bondage in ancient Greece was already pointed out by E. Harris.<sup>48</sup> Although slavery was an inherent characteristic of the Greek polis, slaves in most cases were not Greek.<sup>49</sup>

Solon's reforms of 594 and 593 BC in Athens brought about a fundamental change. Their main focus was the partial prohibition of debt slavery—*seisachtheia*. Debt slavery was the worst social situation a free Athenian citizen could find himself in, as noted above. Although Solon did not abolish it altogether, he did abolish for the future those contracts that tied the life and body of the debtor to the outstanding debt. Thus, debts were not abolished completely (as is sometimes simplistically stated), but only their value was diminished, primarily by fixing the interest, which corresponds to the translation of their name: burden-sharing. On the one hand, this reform protected private property; on the other hand, it gave some former debt slaves back their freedom and thus their civil rights.<sup>50</sup> An important part of Solon's reforms was also the use of public resources to redeem Athenians from debt slavery.<sup>51</sup> Although Solon is said to have been inspired in his reforms by the models for dealing with debt slavery that he encountered during his travels in Mesopotamia, the tradition of forgiveness of debt slavery there was not applied in Athens.<sup>52</sup>

Ancient Greece thus recorded attempts to legally establish, as well as attempts to prohibit debt slavery, at least for free citizens. There was, however, a general relaxation of the conditions of its application, an extension of the possibilities for its termination by release or even by redemption, even with the use of public funds.

But antiquity had not yet had its last word:

*"The Roman Empire developed one of the largest and most economically and culturally integrated systems of slavery in world history. It thrived on a remarkably robust supply stream that included enslavement by birth, capture, sale from foreign and domestic sources, the reclaiming of exposed infants, and—in late antiquity—self-sale, child sale, and debt bondage. Enslavement was imposed upon people from all regions, inside and outside the empire, and was never inflicted exclusively on a particular racial or ethnic group. Those enslaved to Rome worked in agriculture, industry, service, and even knowledge production, allowing them to be the primary workforce behind the generation of elite wealth. Escape from slavery could at times involve resistance, including everything from open revolt to flight, but Roman society was also remarkably generous with manumission.*

<sup>48</sup> HARRIS, Edward M. Did Solon Abolish Debt-Bondage? In *The Classical Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 52, Iss. 2, pp. 415 – 430. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/52.2.415>.

<sup>49</sup> HARRISON, Thomas. Classical Greek Ethnography and the Slave Trade. In *Classical Antiquity*, 2019, Vol. 38, Iss. 1, pp. 36 – 57. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2019.38.1.36>.

<sup>50</sup> BLOK, Josine–KRUL, Julia. Debt and its Aftermath. The Near Eastern Background to Solon's *Seisachtheia*. In *Hesperia* 2017, Vol. 86, p. 615. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.86.4.0607>.

<sup>51</sup> *Encyklopedie antiky*. Praha : Academia, 1973, p. 154.

<sup>52</sup> BLOK, Josine–KRUL, Julia. Debt and its Aftermath. The Near Eastern Background to Solon's *Seisachtheia*. In *Hesperia* 2017, Vol. 86, p. 615. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.86.4.0607>.

*This and many other features reflect a hybridity between ancient patterns of captive integration and modern habits of slave exclusion.”<sup>53</sup>*

In ancient Rome we find a reference to debt slavery with reference to Aulus Gellius already in the Laws of the XII Tablets (III, 5).<sup>54</sup> It is stated that a Roman who fell into (debt) slavery lost his Roman citizenship,<sup>55</sup> but when he ceased to be a slave, he could regain it.<sup>56</sup> Debt slavery, however, underwent a certain development in ancient Rome:

*“In the earliest period, the addictus (debtor) became the slave of his creditor, and the latter, as his master (dominus), could kill him. Over time, when the principle that a Roman citizen could not become a slave in Rome was put into practice, changes in this area occurred: the addictus did not lose his freedom (status libertatis), but his freedom was effectively limited.”<sup>57</sup>*

Thus, even a freed slave remained in a subordinate relationship to his former master (Dandamaev 1984, p. 178; Stoutjesdijk 2021, p. 35). Officially, although debt slavery had already been outlawed in Rome in 324 BC, it continued to emerge in reality (Štěpánek 2020). But still under the Republic debt slaves,

*“lamented their condition by showing their chains and deformities, that is they showed how this condition of being nexi had affected their physical state... Those who had fallen into debt-bondage claim to have been oppressed and treated as slaves and sustain their right to be protected in their status of Roman citizens.”<sup>58</sup>*

And as R. Brtko writes:

*“It was not until 326 B.C. that the lex Poetelia Papiria de nexis relaxed personal distraint by forbidding creditors to keep debtors in chains and under house arrest, on the principle that the debtor was liable with his property and not with his person. Under that statute the convict was in the possession of the creditor until he had served his debt. During this sixty-day period, the creditor was obliged to bring the debtor three times in succession on a market day (trinundium) to the praetor in the forum, there to state publicly the reason for the distraint. It is evident that the purpose of the above performances was to enable possible suitors (family, friends, etc.) to redeem the prisoner by paying off the debt. If the sixty-day period had elapsed and the debtor was not redeemed, the creditor could sell him*

<sup>53</sup> LENSKEI, Noel. Slavery in the Roman Empire, In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Juliane (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, p. 87. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_5).

<sup>54</sup> BRUNS, Georg – GRADENWITZ, Otto (eds.). *Leges XII tabularum*. Tübingen : Mohr, 1909, III: 5.

<sup>55</sup> *Encyklopedie*, p. 425.

<sup>56</sup> *Encyklopedie*, p. 111.

<sup>57</sup> BRTKO, Robert. Počiatky súdnej ochrany subjektívnych práv v rímskom práve – päť legisakcií. In BRTKO, Robert et al. *Prvky a princípy rímskeho a kánonického procesného práva*. Praha : Leges, 2016, p. 60.

<sup>58</sup> ARENA, Valentina. Debt-Bondage, Fides and Justice: Republican liberty and the notion of economic independence in the first century BC: Livy and the issue of debt-bondage. In CECCONI, Giovanni Alberto – TESTA, Rita Lizzi – MARCONE, Amaldo (eds.). *The Past as Present*. Turnhout : Brepols 2020, pp. 631. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.STTA-EB.5.119109>.

*to foreigners (peregrines) for Tiber (trans-Tiberium) as a slave, but this was only possible at the time when Roman citizens could still fall into slavery”.*<sup>59</sup>

All in all, a breakthrough in the development of social policy occurs in ancient Rome: for the first time, the previously impassable, almost caste-based boundary between slaves and free citizens becomes permeable, and slaves, including, without exception, debt slaves, become almost equal to free citizens. Of particular interest from our perspective are the *collegia funeratica*, or burial societies. Their task in Roman culture was to arrange relatively expensive funerals, to look after the *columbaria* and all related matters. They functioned on the basis of a fixed monthly fee (*funeraticum*) as a kind of archaic form of social insurance.<sup>60</sup> Even slaves could be members if their owner consented. Since debt slaves can be assumed to be destitute or poor (after all, if they were wealthy, they would not have fallen into debt slavery), it is also necessary to distinguish between slaves in this regard and the use of the terms ‘*collegia funeratica*’ and ‘*collegia teniorum*’ as synonyms is problematic. The term ‘*teniorum*’ (or more correctly ‘*tenuiorum*’) does refer to the poor, but the use of this term in relation to burial societies is not fully established<sup>61</sup>. The fact is that Roman legislation (e.g. the *Lex Collegii Funeraticii Lanuvini* from the time of Hadrian) regulates the membership of slaves to only one group of *collegia funeratici*, and there is little support in Roman legislation for distinguishing between the two types of *collegium* (Marcianus in the *Digesta*),<sup>62</sup> although some authors<sup>63</sup> refer the membership of slaves to the *collegium tenuiorum*. It is in the case of the *collegium Lanuvium*, which was a *collegium funeraticum*, that it is stated that a slave must pay for membership with an amphora of good wine; slavery was therefore not a bar to membership of the *collegium*. However, membership of the *collegium* was not cheap, and these societies did not operate on a charitable principle.<sup>64</sup> *Collegia teniorum* are often characterised as associations of the poorest.<sup>65</sup> However, it can be assumed that in practice, only in relation to the *collegia teniorum*, was it true that their owners could also pay the *funeraticum* for their slaves.<sup>66</sup>

<sup>59</sup> BRTKO, Počiatky, pp. 66 – 67.

<sup>60</sup> CAMPBELL, William John. *Insurance*. Research Report No. 27. Chicago : National Youth Administration of Illinois, 1938, p. 43.

<sup>61</sup> DUINKER, Heleen. *Buried in collectivity. The social context of the early imperial Roman columbaria*. Groningen : University of Groningen, 2015, p. 13.

<sup>62</sup> BENDLIN, Andreas. Associations, Funerals, Sociality, and Roman Law: The collegium of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium (CIL 14 2112). In ÖHLER, Markus (ed.). *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen. Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung*. Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 2011, p. 233.

<sup>63</sup> PFEFFER, Marina Elisabeth. *Einrichtungen der sozialen Sicherung in der griechischen und römischen Antike*. Berlin : Duncker & Humblot 1969, p. 105. <https://doi.org/10.3790/978-3-428-42104-6>

<sup>64</sup> GRAHAM, Emma-Jayne. *The Burial of the Urban Poor in Italy in the Late Roman Republic and Early Empire. BAR International Series 1565*. Oxford : Archaeopress, 2006, pp. 45 – 46. <https://doi.org/10.30861/9781841719955>.

<sup>65</sup> DUFF, Patrick William. *Personality in Roman Private Law*. Cambridge, 1938, p. 102; SANO, Mitsuyoshi. Collegia through their funeral activities: new light on sociability in the early Roman Empire. In *Espacio Tiempo y Forma Serie II Historia Antigua*, 2012, Vol. 25, p. 397. <https://doi.org/10.5944/etfii.25.2012.10298>.

<sup>66</sup> LUČIĆ, Zdravko. *Plinijeva pisma. Doprinis razumijevanju rimskog prava*. Sarajevo : Univerzitet u Sarajevu, Pravni fakultet, 2022, pp. 18 – 19.

A change in the attitude towards slavery also occurred in ancient Rome under the influence of Neo-Stoic philosophy. Although Cicero, in the fifth of his Stoic Paradoxes, states that “only a wise man is free and every fool is a slave”,<sup>67</sup> he means that through reason one can free oneself from slavery. However, he considered the killing of a slave an ethically worse crime than pater murder.

For the first time, in the period of the Roman Republic, free Roman citizens and slaves found themselves on an almost equal footing. Although economically and socially there no longer existed such a gulf between the two groups in the Roman Empire, their legal statuses converged for the first time in the *collegium funeraticum*. And overall, the status of slaves was already being relaxed under the empire. In a way, the dawn of new value structures was already arriving, brought about only by Christianity, explicitly placing the free and the slave as equals at least before God (Ef 6, 8).

The shift in the perception of the debt slave from the Aristotelian concept to the realm of human equality was complex, and it took place thanks to the overall development of civilization, where Judaism, antiquity, and Christianity played a decisive role in the European region.

### Conclusion

The example of slavery as a social contingency allows us to understand that interventions that mitigate it, or even individually eliminate it, have only a limited effect. The analytical perspective we have offered in our study also highlights the differences that accompanied the development of debt slavery throughout the period when slavery was an essential, or at least important, form of ensuring the economic functioning of societies.

Slavery was not equally represented in pre-feudal societies: in militantly organised societies (Hittites, Sparta) it was more likely to take the form of public slavery, whether in the form of prisoners of war (a form that also occurred in non-feudal societies) or in the form of the enslavement of certain ethnic groups. However, the subjugation of ethnic groups also occurred in societies in which the majority of the rest of the population was also heavily exploited (Egypt). A significant source of private slavery was debt slavery, which, while socially viewed as a natural state of affairs, was nevertheless a phenomenon that deserved special attention in terms of social policy. It was thus necessarily accepted as a reason for some intervention, directed first towards preventing its occurrence (Sumer), then to facilitating or protecting the position of the debtor slave (Sumer, Hammurabi), limiting the time in which he could remain in debt slavery (Hammurabi, Exodus), enabling individual redemption without or with a return to the status of free citizen (Athens), viewing it as a ‘jointly shared burden’ (Athens after Solon), to his being at least partially equated with free citizens (Rome).

Although it cannot be proven that there was any significant direct transmission of experience between the different periods in dealing with the position of the individual who had fallen into debt slavery, it may be assumed that the general development of civilization, characterized also by a general tendency to lessen the differences between men, was also manifested in this field. Unfortunately,

<sup>67</sup> CICERO, Marcus Tullius. *Paradoxa Stoicorum*. 2002, p. 16. Available at: <<http://athenaphilosophique.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Cic%C3%A9ron-Les-Paradoxes-des-stoiciens.pdf>> [01. 03. 2024].

just as new forms of social exclusion and disproportionate social differentiation have emerged throughout history, new forms of debt slavery have also emerged in modern times, both before and after the Industrial Revolution, though these have not been a subject of our study. Slavery, which was an ancient form of profound social exclusion, could only cease to operate through the acceptance of slaves as human beings. The condition, then, is primarily to see social exclusion not as a natural state of affairs, but as the unfreedom of a part of the human community. In the case of slavery, and especially debt slavery, this occurred gradually and in fact only in antiquity. The process unfolded first philosophically (ideologically), then economically, and finally legally.

This sequence of steps in approaching social exclusion as a phenomenon may serve as inspiration for sociopolitical thinking today. Any partial interventions at the level of the individual have only a limited effect, even if targeted approaches are argued for here. Social exclusion must always be tackled in a systemic way: achieving social acceptance of the socially excluded is the first necessary step, only after which their economic and legal integration can successfully follow. In this, we also see the broader contribution of our analysis to the development of social policy theory and practice.

## BIBLIOGRAPHY SOURCES

### Bibliography

- ARENA, Valentina. Debt-Bondage, Fides and Justice: Republican liberty and the notion of economic independence in the first century BC: Livy and the issue of debt-bondage. In CECCONI, Giovanni Alberto – TESTA, Rita, Lizzi – MARCONE, Amaldo (eds.). *The Past as Present*. Turnhout : Brepols 2020, pp. 621 – 646. <https://doi.org/10.1484/M.STTA-EB.5.119109>
- BARKER, Ernest. *The Political Thought of Plato and Aristotle*. New York : G. E. Putnam's Sons, 1909.
- BENDLIN, Andreas. Associations, Funerals, Sociality, and Roman Law: The collegium of Diana and Antinous in Lanuvium (CIL 14 2112). In ÖHLER, Markus (ed.). *Aposteldekret und antikes Vereinswesen. Gemeinschaft und ihre Ordnung*. Tübingen : Mohr Siebeck, 2011, pp. 207 – 296.
- BLOK, Josine – KRUL, Julia. Debt and its Aftermath. The Near Eastern Background to Solon's Seisachtheia. In *Hesperia* 2017, Vol. 86, pp. 607 – 643. <https://doi.org/10.2972/hesperia.86.4.0607>
- BRTKO, Robert. Počiatky súdnej ochrany subjektívnych práv v rímskom práve – päť legisakcií. In BRTKO, Robert et al. *Prvky a princípy rímskeho a kánonického procesného práva*. Praha : Leges, 2016, pp. 50 – 70.
- BRUNS, Georg – GRADENWITZ, Otto (eds.). *Leges XII tabularum*. Tübingen : Mohr, 1909.
- CAMPBELL, William John. *Insurance*. Research Report No. 27. Chicago : National Youth Administration of Illinois, 1938.
- CHIRICHIGNO, Gregory. Debt-Slavery in Israel and the Ancient Near East. In *Journal for the study of the Old Testament. Supplement Series 141*. Sheffield : Sheffield Academic Press, 1993.

- CICERO, Marcus Tullius. *Paradoxa Stoicorum*. 2002. Available at: <http://athenaphilosophique.net/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Cic%C3%A9ron-Les-Paradoxes-des-stoiciens.pdf> [01. 03. 2024].
- DANDAMAEV, Muhammad Abdulkadyrovich. *Slavery in Babylonia. From Nabopolassar to Alexander the Great (626-331 B. C.)*. DeKalb : Northern Illinois University Press, 1984.
- DENNY, Rose – ROWAN, Allen. *Ancient Civilizations of the World*. ED-Tech Press, 2021.
- DUFF, Patrick William. *Personality in Roman Private Law*. Cambridge, 1938.
- DUNKER, Heleen. *Buried in collectivity. The social context of the early imperial Roman columbaria*. Groningen : University of Groningen, 2015.
- Encyklopedie antiky*. Praha : Academia, 1973.
- GRAHAM, Emma-Jayne. *The Burial of the Urban Poor in Italy in the Late Roman Republic and Early Empire*. BAR International Series 1565. Oxford : Archaeopress, 2006. <https://doi.org/10.30861/9781841719955>
- HALSALL, Paul. *The Code of the Nesiim*. New York : Fordham University, Internet Ancient History Sourcebook 2020. Available at: <https://origin-rh.web.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/1650nesiim.asp> [01. 03. 2024].
- HALSALL, Paul. *The Law Code of Gortyn*. New York : Fordham University, Internet Ancient History Sourcebook 2020. Available at: <https://sourcebooks.fordham.edu/ancient/450-gortyn.asp> [01. 03. 2024].
- HARRIS, Edward M. Did Solon Abolish Debt-Bondage? In *The Classical Quarterly*, 2002, Vol. 52, Iss. 2, pp. 415 – 430. <https://doi.org/10.1093/cq/52.2.415>
- HARRISON, Thomas. Classical Greek Ethnography and the Slave Trade. In *Classical Antiquity*, 2019. Vol. 38, Issue 1, pp. 36 – 57. <https://doi.org/10.1525/ca.2019.38.1.36>
- JASNOW, Richard. Egypt. Old Kingdom and First Intermediate Period. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.). *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill, 2003, pp. 91 – 140. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_003](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_003).
- KAREV, Ella. Ancient Egyptian Slavery. In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Juliane (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, pp. 41 – 66. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_3](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_3)
- KAREV, Ella. *Slavery and Servitude in Late Period Egypt (C. 900-330 BC)*. Dissertation. University of Chicago, 2022.
- KLÍMA, Josef. *Lidé Mezopotámie: cestami dávné civilizace a kultury při Eufratu a Tigridu*. Praha : Orbis, 1976.
- KONEČNÝ, Stanislav. K vymedzení predmetu sociálnej politiky. In *Aktuální otázky sociální politiky – teorie a praxe*. Pardubice : Univerzita Pardubice, Fakulta ekonomicko-správní, 2011, pp. 44 – 52.
- KRAMER, Samuel N. *The Sumerians. Their History, Culture and Character*. Chicago – London : The University of Chicago Press, 1963.
- KULESZA, Ryszard. *Starożytna Sparta*. Poznań : Poznańskie Towarzystwo Przyjaciół Nauk, 2003.
- LENSKI, Noel. Slavery in the Roman Empire, In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Juliane (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, pp. 87 – 107. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_5)
- LEWIS, David M. *Greek Slave Systems in their Eastern Mediterranean Context c. 800-146 BC*. Oxford : Oxford University Press, 2018. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198769941.001.0001>



- LUČIĆ, Zdravko. *Plinijeva pisma. Doprinis razumijevanju rimskog prava*. Sarajevo : Univerzitet u Sarajevu, Pravni fakultet, 2022.
- MASSE, Martin. Gudea, Urukagina and the Mesopotamian Origin of the Concept of Liberty. In *Le Québécois Libre*, 2010, Iss. 274.
- MORALES, Abel Maria Cano – PINEIDA Carlos Maria Restrepo – MONSALVE Omar Osvaldo Villa (2019). La primera reforma tributaria en la historia de la humanidad. In *Entramado*, 2019, Vol. 15, Iss. 1, pp. 152 – 163. <https://doi.org/10.18041/1900-3803/entramado.1.5419>
- OELSNER, Joachim-WELLS, Bruce – WUNSCH, Cornelia. Mesopotamia: Neo-Babylonian Period. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.). *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill, 2023, pp. 911 – 974. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_027](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_027)
- PARGAS, Damian Alan. Introduction: Historicizing and Spatializing Global Slavery. In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Juliane (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, pp. 1 – 16. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_1](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_1)
- PAULUS, Susanne. Babylonien in der 2. Hälfte des 2. Jts. v. Chr. – (K)ein Imperium? Ein Überblick über Geschichte und Struktur des mittelbabylonischen Reiches (ca. 1500-1000 B.C.)» In GEHLAR, Michael – ROLLINGER, Robert (eds). *Imperien und Reiche in der Weltgeschichte. Epochenübergreifende und globalhistorische Vergleiche. Teil 1: Imperien des Altertums, Mittelalterliche und frühneuzeitliche Imperien*. Wiesbaden : Harrassowitz Verlag, 2014.
- PFEFFER, Marina Elisabeth. *Einrichtungen der sozialen Sicherung in der griechischen und römischen Antike*. Berlin : Duncker & Humblot, 1969. <https://doi.org/10.3790/978-3-428-42104-6>
- REID, John, Nicholas. The children of slaves in early Mesopotamian laws and edicts. In *Revue d'assyriologie et d'archéologie orientale*, 2017. Vol. 111, Iss. 1, pp. 9 – 23. <https://doi.org/10.3917/assy.111.0009>
- RICHARDSON, Seth. Mesopotamian Slavery. In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Juliane (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London : Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, pp. 17 – 39. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_2)
- ROBERTS, John Maddox. *The New Penguin History of the World*. 5th ed. London : Penguin Books, 2007.
- ROTH, Martha T. *Law Collections from Mesopotamia and Asia Minor*. Atlanta : Scholars Press, 1995.
- SANO, Mitsuyoshi. Collegia through their funeral activities: new light on sociability in the early Roman Empire. In *Espacio Tiempo y Forma Serie II Historia Antigua*, 2012, Vol. 25, pp. 393 – 414. <https://doi.org/10.5944/etfii.25.2012.10298>
- SLANSKI, Kathryn. Mesopotamia: Middle Babylonian Period. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.). *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill, 2003, p. 485 – 520. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_012](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_012)
- SOCIAL SECURITY (Minimum Standards) Convention (No. 102). International Labour Organization, 1952.
- SPICKSLEY, Judith *The Decline of Slavery for Debt in Western Europe in the Medieval Period*. In *Serfdom and Slavery in the European Economy. 11th – 18th*. Firenze : Firenze University Press, 2014.
- ŠTĚPÁNEK, Tomáš. Len hovoriace veci. Otroci v starovekom Ríme. In *Historická revue*, 2020, Vol. 31, Iss. 5, pp. 12 – 16.

- STOUTJESDIJK, Martijn. "Not Like the Rest of the Slaves?" *Slavery Parables in Early Rabbinic and Early Christian Literature*. Dissertation. Tilburg University.
- TERBLANCHE, Marius D. The Author of Jeremiah 34:8-22 (LXX 41:8-22): Spokesperson for the Judean Debt Slaves? In *Acta Theologica, Supplementum*, Vol. 27, Iss. 1, pp. 67 – 78. <https://doi.org/10.18820/23099089/actat.Sup27.4>
- TESTART, Alain. The Extent and Significance of Debt Slavery. In *Revue française de sociologie. Supplement: An Annual English Selection*, 2002, Vol. 43, pp. 173 – 204. <http://doi.org/10.2307/3322762>
- The CODE of Hammurabi, King of Babylon*. Chicago : The University of Chicago Press, 1904.
- UHLIG, Helmut. *Die Sumerer : Volk am Anfang der Geschichte*. München : Bertelsman, 1976.
- VEENHOF, Klaas – EIDEM, Jesper. *Mesopotamia: The Old Assyrian Period*. Zürich : Zurich Open Repository and Archive, 2008.
- VLASSOPOULOS, Kostas. Slavery in Ancient Greece. In PARGAS, Damian A. – SCHIEL, Juliane (eds.). *The Palgrave Handbook of Global Slavery throughout History*. London: Palgrave-Macmillan, 2023, pp. 67 – 85. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-13260-5_4)
- WATTS, James W. The Historical Role of Leviticus 25 in Naturalizing Anti-Black Racism. In *Religions*, 2021, Vol. 12, Iss. 8, pp. 1 – 10. <https://doi.org/10.3390/rel12080570>
- WESTBROOK, Raymond. The Character of Ancient Near Eastern Law. In WESTBROOK, Raymond (ed.). *A history of ancient Near Eastern Law*. Leiden – Boston : Brill, 2003, pp. 1 – 92. [https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091\\_002](https://doi.org/10.1163/9789047402091_002)
- YARON, Reuven. *The Laws of Eshnunna*, 2nd ed. Jerusalem – Leiden : The Magnes Press - E. J. Brill, 1988. <https://doi.org/10.1163/9789004665361>

Doc. PhDr. Ing. Stanislav Konečný, PhD., MPA  
Pavol Jozef Šafárik University in Košice  
Faculty of Public Administration, Department of Public Policy  
and Theory of Public Administration  
SK-04011 Košice, Popradská 66  
e-mail: <stanislav.konecny@upjs.sk>  
ORCID: 0000-0001-7757-6639