

„Freedom and Liberation in Mediterranean Antiquity”  
(from ca. 400 BCE until the rise of Islam)

International Conference 5-8 October, University of Bonn

*Convener:* Hermut Löhr (responsible; research area A), in cooperation with Ludwig Morenz, Markus Saur, Martin Schermaier, and Konrad Vössing

***Speakers, subjects and abstracts***

**Valentina Arena** (London) - Public lecture!

*Title:* “Ownership, Self-Ownership, and Liberty”

*Abstract:* “This paper will attempt to untangle the relation between property and liberty in ancient Rome. It will focus on how the value of liberty is conceptualised in the historical context of Republican Rome and, at least in principle, preserved under conditions of economic inequality. It will do so by giving centrality to the idea of property and ownership and the extra-constitutional power of people to defend their individual as well as communitarian interests. Conceptualised as pluralistic centres of authority, these individual citizens, *singuli cives*, became the focus of the elaboration of the notion of liberty as a status opposed to that of slavery. This was guaranteed by a set of rights of which the citizens became endowed and for which they fought. By comparing the historical context of the Roman Republic with other ancient contexts of the Mediterranean, this paper will try to assess if this Republican idea of liberty required the enforcement of private property and was incompatible with redistribution of wealth.”

**Jed W. Atkins** (Durham, NC)

*Title:* "Freedom of Conscience and Freedom of Religion in Roman philosophy and Early Christianity"

*Abstract:* tba

**Ulrich Berges** (Bonn)

*Title:* “The Exodus in the OT. Liberation and Divine bondage”

*Abstract:* “The liberation of Israel from Egyptian slavery by YHWH belongs to the most fundamental beliefs in the Jewish and Christian religion. What matters here most is not the reconstruction of the history behind the story but the mental power of the plot itself: “The Exodus story does not write history; it makes history” (J. Assmann, *The Invention of Religion. Faith and Covenant in the Book of Exodus*, Princeton 2018, 392). The „Exodus as Political Myth“ (Assmann, ebd. 334) stands not only at the origins of nations like the USA and South-Africa but releases time and again new strives for freedom from unjust oppression.

The other side of the coin is largely neglected, i.e. the liberation from Egyptian slavery leads straightforward to the absolute obedience and bondage to YHWH alone. The ambiguity of a liberation from slavery that finds its highest fulfillment in the unconditional submission under God, his law and his will is worth of an intensive scrutiny in the Bonn Center of Dependency and Slavery Studies – and not only for the theological disciplines.”

**Vitali Bartash** (Bonn)

*Title:* “Don’t be SAD! Freedom and Liberation in the ancient Near East, 2400-500 BCE”

*Abstract:* “My argument is twofold. On the one hand, all ancient Near Eastern languages have words that convey the idea of liberation from strong asymmetrical dependencies (SAD). The semantics of Sumerian *amargi*, Akkadian *anduraru* and Hurrian *kirenzi* include manumission of chattel slaves, amnesty of prisoners, restitution of debts and cancellation of services illegally imposed on free persons. On the other hand, liberation sometimes led not to freedom but to less strong forms of dependency, such as the practice to dedicate manumitted slaves to temples. I review Sumerian, Old and Neo Babylonian political, economic and legal sources as well as the Hurrian “Song of Release” to illustrate these points. I focus then on the Sumerian concept *amargi*. Its literal meaning “the return to the mother” has been puzzling scholars for decades. In my opinion, it communicates the very essence of what people thought freedom was – being with one’s own family. Which was impossible for chattel and debt slaves, captives, prisoners and forced labourers. These considerations allow me to conclude that the idea of freedom as a natural state of people is at least as old as the first cities and states.”

**Stefan Conermann** (Bonn)

*Title:* “The Islamic Legal Concept of ‘Freedom’ - Continuity or Change?”

*Abstract:* tba

**Athanasios Despotis** (Bonn)

*Title:* “Liberating Knowledge in the Gospel of John and Ancient Philosophical Discourses on Human Freedom”

*Abstract:* “The idea of attaining freedom from slavery (in a moral sense) by liberating knowledge has been crucial in the early imperial philosophical debates. Especially Roman Stoics promised perfect freedom to their students by adopting the respective theories and lifestyle of their tradition. This model mostly referred to the inner self, i.e. liberation from slavery to passions, freedom from committing rational faults (*ἀμαρτάνειν*), freedom of choice (*προαίρεσις*), and had an exclusive sense (The wise alone is free/ *μόνος ὁ σοφὸς ἐλεύθερος*). In the view of some current scholars (Gitte Buch-Hansen 2010; Troels Engberg-Pedersen 2017), the author of the Fourth Gospel is engaged with Stoic concepts. Thus, this paper intends to investigate John's contribution to popular philosophical debates regarding freedom, slavery and knowledge of the truth. Johannine Jesus provides his audience in the context of an inner-Jewish conflict in John 8:31–36 with a new liberation model based on knowledge of the truth (8:32) that is embodied in him (14:6) and endowed by the "Spirit of truth" (14:17). While Johannine Jews were longing for more political freedom in the face of Roman

imperialism (Ripley 2015:615), and thus attempting to make Jesus their king (John 6:14–15), John's Jesus promises liberation from slavery to sin (8:34) and freedom that leads to life eternal (8:35). Accordingly, this paper reconstructs the early imperial philosophical debates on freedom and slavery. It shows how John transforms widespread philosophical concepts in his Gospel in order to describe a new path to freedom. The survey also considers similar amalgams in representatives of Hellenistic Judaism, especially Philo of Alexandria, that reflect on the Stoic conception of freedom (cf. Philo's treatise *Περὶ τοῦ πάντα σπουδαῖον ἐλεύθερον εἶναι*) and stylized Jewish life as a path to 'true' freedom.“

**Jan Dietrich** (Bonn)

*Title:* “Freedom and Liberation in Ancient Israel and Ancient Greece - a typological comparison”

*Abstract:* “In ancient Israel and ancient Greece, main strands of the idea of freedom and liberation emerge about the same time, i.e. in the Persian period. But what do have JHWH the liberator and Zeus the liberator in common? And how is the religious idea of liberation connected to the emergence of the idea and history of a ‘nation’? This paper aims at drawing some parallels and threads between ancient Israel and ancient Greece regarding religious and cultural moves towards building a collective identity with a little help from the idea of freedom.”

**Adam Fagbore** (Bonn) – short paper

*Title:* “Concepts of hierarchical freedom and the other in Pharaonic Egypt”

*Abstract:* “My paper will analyse concepts of hierarchical freedom in pharaonic Egypt. The conceptual relationship between labour, patronage, and hierarchy can be assessed in a traditional philological methodology through vocabulary in ancient Egypt. In other words, the terms used to describe the autonomy of an individual can be directly related to whether the individual was inside or outside a patron-client hierarchy. For instance, terms like Hm ‘slave’, bAk ‘servant’, twA ‘low-status person’, bAk ‘dependent worker’, sr ‘official’, or saH ‘noble’, can indicate the social and economic status of the individual, and also, the nature their relationship with central or local government. During the New Kingdom, the term nmHw ‘freeman’ is used to refer to young men who did not hold office or full employment, but do appear as land holders and tenants in revenue documents, which may relate to military service. The term is closely related to the concept of the AHt nmHw ‘field of a freeman’; they were typically independent farmers, who worked plots of royal and temple land for themselves, but still had to pay revenues based on the harvest to the treasury of the Pharaoh. On the other hand, such terms also can have socially negative connotations. The term nDs is closely associated with the notion of ‘little man’, or ‘orphan’, which can be taken to represent the opposite of the bAk ‘servant’, which is someone whose household is socially and economically dependent on another, in the sense that those without patronage, cannot rely on such relationships in difficult times as an outsider.”

**Wolfram Kinzig** (Bonn)

*Title:* “Liberating the Dead – The Descent to Hell as Redemptive Event in Late Antique Explanations of the Creed”

*Abstract:* “The descent to hell was added to the Old Roman Creed, the precursor of the Apostles’ Creed, in the late fourth century. It was ultimately seen as symbolizing Christ’s ‘triumph over Satan and death, and, consequently, the salvation of mankind as a whole’ (J.N.D. Kelly). The paper analyses the interpretations which are given for this article in Latin explanations of the creed. It shows that in these explanations Christ’s liberating the dead from the power of the devil is often compared to the release of captives from prison and asks for the motives of such an interpretation.”

**Hermut Löhr** (Bonn)

*Title:* “Freedom at the Crossroads. Philo’s *Quod Omnis Probus Liber Sit* in First Century Discourse Context”

*Abstract:* tba

**Noel Lenski** (New Haven)

*Title:* “Varieties of Manumission as Cultural Expressions in Roman and Post-Roman Societies - 200 BCE - 700 CE ”

*Abstract:*

**Ludwig Morenz** (Bonn)

*Title:* “Neue ‚Freiheit‘? - Begriffliche Umschichtungen, veränderte konzeptionelle Muster und sozio-ökonomische Verschiebungen am Ende des Dritten Jahrtausends v. Chr. im Niltal”

*Abstract:* tba

**Markus Öhler** (Wien)

*Title:* “Freedom through Participation? Slaves and Slavery in Greco-Roman Associations and Early Christianity”

*Abstract:* “A frequently mentioned feature of early Christian communities is their egalitarian composition of free persons and slaves, which would have supposedly distinguished them from other groups in the Greco-Roman world. However, it can also be shown for several ancient associations that both free persons and slaves were members. This lecture will examine in more detail how these associations defined relations between those social status groups and whether they actually differed from communities of Christ believers.”

**Sarah Pearce** (Southampton)

*Title:* "Philo and Josephus on Freedom"

*Abstract:* tba

**Ilaria Ramelli** (Milano)

*Title:* "Gregory of Nyssa: Freedom in Theology and in Human Society: Theological and Anthropologico-Social Arguments"

*Abstract:* I shall argue for a strong link between the theological field and the human-societal one in Gregory Nyssen's conception of freedom. I shall point out the theological arguments that Gregory employs to make such a connection between the two levels, namely the so-called "theology of freedom", based on the Genesis account of creation, and, related to this, the "social analogy" between the Persons of the Trinity and human persons. I shall contend that some important theoretical lines in Gregory's concept of freedom derive from Plato and Origen, as well as directly from Scripture.

**Markus Saur** (Bonn)

*Title:* "Does Liberation Imply Freedom? Hebrew Bible Perspectives on the Meaning of Freedom"

*Abstract:* „Taking the Hebrew root  $\text{הָפַד}$  and its derivatives as a starting point, the question of implicit ideas of freedom within the Hebrew Bible can be raised. However, the mainly cultic contexts of  $\text{הָפַד}$  must be taken into account: To what extent can cultic contexts of  $\text{הָפַד}$  be understood as *one* background of Greek conceptions of freedom, and what subtexts arise in the Greek texts when they are read in the light of implicit conceptions of the Hebrew tradition? In any case, it should be clarified what is meant by freedom and liberation in Hellenistic Judaism and where these terms can be understood and interpreted as explications of implicit ideas within Hebrew texts and traditions.“

**Martin Schermaier** (Bonn)

*Title:* ***Favor libertatis* in Roman law: a remorse towards slavery?**

*Abstract:* Hundreds of cases stored in Justinian's Digests solve conflicts between owner and slave in favour of the latter. Some of them stress that the decision is based on *favor libertatis* but others remain quiet about their motives. Most modern legal historians ascribe *favor libertatis* to a growing influence of Stoic philosophy in public discourses and its importance for the self-representation of the princeps. This sounds reasonable. But such a big theory might neglect other rationales, such as the rule of *in dubio pro reo*, the balance of proof in court, or the protection of reliance (especially of bystanders). The paper will present a handful of examples in order to demonstrate that the ethical appearance of some decisions might as well be explained by simple legal concepts.

**Christian Schwermann** (Bochum)

*Title:* “The So-Called Act of Manumission in Ancient China: What Exactly Was It that a Chinese Dependent Was Released Into?”

*Abstract:* tba

**Nicolai Sinai** (Oxford)

*Title:* “Notions of social hierarchy and inequality in formative Islam”

*Abstract:* tba

**Konrad Vössing** (Bonn):

*Title:* “Freedom, Liberation and Dependency of Roman Freedmen in the Reflection of their Epitaphs”

*Abstract:* „The subject of this paper is not only the tension between self-portrayals and external portrayals of freedpeople, but also the, as it were, ideological tensions that arose between the polar opposites of liberation and freedom, which Roman *liberti* and *libertae* already bore in their names and to which they alluded in many ways in their self-portrayals; and, on the other hand, the various continuing dependencies on their former – and in many ways on-going - masters. These relations were also inscribed in freedpeople’s names and so impossible to forget, although in many cases the freed probably did not wish to forget. Paradoxically, it seems to have been in part their very dependency on former masters that provided freedpeople with opportunities, while at the same time ‘chaining’ them to their unfree past. This study is primarily based on the discourses in freedpersons’ inscriptions and funerary monuments, but it will also examine the relationship between freedom and dependency expressed from the opposite perspective, such as in a famous literary (and satirical) depiction of freed men and women by a member of the elite: in ‘Trimalchio’s Dinner’ in Petronius’ ‘Satyricon’.“

**Alexander Weiß** (Frankfurt a.M.)

*Title:* „Freedmen in Corinth: some thoughts on 1Cor 7:21-23“

*Abstract:* „Chapter 7:21-23 of the Apostle Paul’s First Letter to the Corinthians is the only passage in all of the New Testament writings in which the Greek term for ‘freedman’ (*apeleútheros*) is used. It is a highly stylized passage heavily laden with soteriological statements. Two issues shall be investigated in this paper.

Firstly if Paul’s usage of the term *apeleútheros* does have anything to do with the local context of Corinth. Literary sources tell us that the main bulk of the colonists of Corinth, after Caesar’s re-foundation of Corinth as a Roman *colonia* in 44 BC, consisted of freedmen. It is also supposed that freedmen played a dominating role in the society and especially among the

political elite, the magistrates of Corinth. On closer inspection it seems that the proportion of freedmen among the Corinthian magistrates has already been over-estimated for the early decades of the colony. In the middle of the first century AD, when Paul stayed at Corinth and wrote his letters, it is fairly unlikely that freedmen still played a dominating role in Corinthian society.

The second issue concerns the matter from what the freedman really „became free“ according to Paul. The passage has often been interpreted in the sense of a philosophical, inner freedom, which the freedman acquired. But it is rather a change of status which plays the central role.“

**Carla Weitensteiner** (Bonn) – short paper

*Title:* „Inevitable Sinfulness? – Freedom of Choice & Liberation from ‚Original Sin‘ in Jewish Apocalypticism in Late First Century“

*Abstract:* Is sin inevitable? The idea of an inherent inclination to sin is both a prominent and a complex topic in the texts of ancient Judaism. The authors grapple with the question of whether the individual herself/himself is responsible for the evil around and in her/him and whether she/he is destined to sin or is free to choose sin. The apocalyptic literature of the late first century illuminates this issue immediately after the devastating catastrophe of 70 AD. In this historical context writings like ApcMos, 4Esr und 2Bar show that in addition to the concepts of an inherent evil inclination or free will in the choice to sin, the idea of ‘Original Sin’ became central to explain sin in the light of destruction. The paper aims to present and discuss the answers these writings give to the question posed at the beginning.

**Chris de Wet** (Pretoria)

*Title:* “*Libera servitus?* The Physical Enslavement of Some Ancient Eastern Christian Monks as a Strategy toward Spiritual Freedom”

*Abstract:* The metaphor of slavery is a very common feature in early Eastern Christian Monastic literature. Monks are frequently called “slaves of God” or “slaves of Christ”, and asceticism is often construed in terms related to slavery. However, there are several select tales in which monks move from being “metaphorically” enslaved to God to becoming physically and institutionally enslaved, usually by being captured or kidnapped by others. The purpose of this paper is to consider these literary accounts of enslaved monks, and to ask how the terrible threat of enslavement was re-envisioned as a strategy for attaining spiritual freedom—with special reference to the influence of the *Acts of Thomas*—and to what ends. I also ask how such stories may have impacted slavery more generally. The narratives under consideration include: the enslavement of Malchus in Jerome’s *Life of Malchus*, Theodoulos in Pseudo-Nilus’s *Narrations*, the enslaved missionary-monks in *History of the Great Deeds of Bishop Paul of Qeṯos and Priest John of Edessa*, and also the enslavement of Faymiyūn and Ṣāliḥ, in Ibn Ishāq’s *Life of the Messenger of God*.

**Julia Winnebeck** (Bonn)

*Title:* “*Manumissio in ecclesia:* Liberation and Lasting Obligation”

*Abstract:* „The so-called *manumissio in ecclesia*, i.e. the practice of liberating slaves in the Church, still provides one of the last strongholds to be cited as evidence for the Christian Church’s fight against slavery. Recently, however, it has been suggested by Mary E. Sommar to balance its traditional interpretation as an expression of Christian charity with the acknowledgement that this rather pragmatic legal procedure ultimately benefitted the Church. In this paper, I will therefore examine the evidence for the practice of *manumissio in ecclesia* in the council records of the late antique and early medieval Western Church (4th to 7th century) with a view to establishing whether the Church’s involvement with the liberation of slaves did indeed serve as a way to prolong dependency relations or to generate dependent labor for the church.“