

Monday, 19.12.2022; 4:15 - 6:00 pm CET

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**Slave and free labour in early Greece (750-450 BC)**

Abstract:

In 1898, Eduard Meyer published an account of the development of slavery in the ancient Greek world that has dominated modern views. Despite making some sharp criticisms in several publications from 1959 onwards, the highly influential ancient historian M.I. Finley did little more than modify Meyer's model. Both believed that a variety of forms of dependent labour was the norm in early Greece (and throughout the ancient world) until the sixth century BC, when most forms of dependent labour were abolished by political reform in Athens and elsewhere and the need for a replacement labour force was met by importing 'chattel' slaves from outside the Greek world. Recent work (above all David Lewis's *Greek Slave Systems in their East Mediterranean Context*, 2018) has shown that the ancient evidence simply does not support this superficially attractive model. Lewis argues instead that most of the supposed dependent statuses were forms of slavery, and that by the time of our earliest textual evidence, c. 700 BC, the Greek world already consisted of 'slave societies'. My paper addresses questions that arise from these new insights. When and why did 'slave societies' first emerge in Greece? How can we explain the wide variation in types of slavery attested? Could the spread of slavery and its detrimental impact on free hired labour have been the main cause of the social crises that erupted across Greece in the decades around 600 BC?

Bio:

Hans van Wees is Grote Professor of Ancient History in the Department of History at University College London (UCL). He is the author of three books – *Ships and Silver, Taxes and Tribute: a fiscal history of archaic Athens* (2013), *Greek Warfare: myths and realities* (2004), and *Status Warriors: war, violence and society in Homer and history* (1992) – and (co-)editor of eight volumes, including 'Aristocracy' in *Antiquity: redefining ancient elites* (with Nick Fisher, 2015).