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**Paulin Ismard, Jane Marie Todd, trans., *Democracy's Slaves: A Political History of Ancient Greece*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2017. Pp. 208. Cloth (ISBN 978-0-674-66007-6) \$35.00.**

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of practice combined with theoretical grounding can lead to deeper overall understanding. The Greek world indeed was a crossroads of culture and practice, and these twelve essays capture the possibility for new insights when scholars include evidence and perspectives unexplored in the past.

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*Democracy's Slaves: A Political History of Ancient Greece.*

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This work, originally published in French as *La démocratie contre les experts: Les esclaves publics en Grèce ancienne* (2015), is the first book-length treatment of ancient Greek public slavery since Oscar Jacob's *Les esclaves publics à Athènes* appeared in 1928—an astounding interval, given the importance of the subject. In classical Athens, there were probably well over a thousand public slaves (*dēmosioi*) who did much of the day-to-day work of *polis* administration, handling everything from filing documents in the public archives to serving as the city's police force. And while the ancient evidence on public slavery is depressingly scanty, Ismard's book shows just how much can be said about it. Admittedly, many of the conclusions Ismard draws are speculative, and his use of sources is in some instances open to challenge, but this is, nonetheless, a tremendously valuable book.

Although Ismard's focus is democratic Athens, he attempts a comparative perspective and draws on material not only from other Greek city-states but from throughout history and across the globe. Despite fairly numerous typos, a few obvious mistranslations from the French, and other errors, the book is engagingly and even thrillingly written, carrying the reader to such far-flung destinations as seventeenth-century Malacca, the nineteenth-century Sokoto Caliphate in West Africa, and Athens, Georgia, during the American Civil War. *Democracy's Slaves* unites breadth with brevity, a combination that will no doubt frustrate some classicists while attracting the well-deserved interest of less specialized readers. This book is

not a complete or rigorous survey of public slavery in ancient Greece. Rather, it is a powerful demonstration of the significance of an understudied phenomenon.

In his first chapter, Ismard addresses the origins of public slavery in the Hellenic world. He identifies an institutional precursor in the pre-classical *dēmiourgoi*, itinerant professionals like craftsmen, scribes, and heralds whose services were contracted by entire communities. The transformation of the *dēmiourgoi* into *dēmosioi*, Ismard suggests, was occasioned not just by the development of chattel slavery but also by the rise of democratic government. Since the existence of professional expertise posed a threat to the people's collective authority, those who possessed such expertise, according to Ismard, had to be radically separated from, and subordinated to, the political community. Jobs in the public administration that required professional skills—the ancient equivalent of the civil service or bureaucracy—were therefore entrusted to the *dēmosioi*, “democracy's slaves.” This, in brief, is the main argument of the book.

In his second chapter, Ismard surveys the many sorts of public services performed by *dēmosioi* in Athens and elsewhere. The range is impressive: they were clerks and accountants; policemen, prison guards, and executioners; mint workers, marble haulers, and maintenance men. They were even, apparently, in two late inscriptions from Delos and Rhodes, priests (48–49). In many of these jobs, Ismard emphasizes, the slaves had considerable power and autonomy, yet they were not, strictly speaking, public officials (*archai*) and did not possess the rights accorded to ordinary citizens. At the same time, however, they were not like other slaves. In his third chapter, Ismard seeks to show that they often possessed privileges that distinguished them from slaves owned by private citizens. These could include, according to Ismard, the right to live on their own, to possess and bequeath personal property, and even, in some instances, to own slaves themselves. In Athens, they sometimes received public honors, and in a few cases they or their sons may have been granted full citizenship rather than the more common post-manumission status of resident alien (*metoikos*). Such peculiarities of status are not nearly as well-documented as we might wish, and in this chapter especially Ismard is perhaps too credulous: without much hesitation, for example, he accepts claims concerning the servile origins of prominent Athenians like Hyperbolus and Nicomachus (66–67). Still, he may be right to contend that the *dēmosioi*'s position gives the lie to any idea of the Greek city as a simple hierarchy of clearly distinct statuses: rather, it was “a multidimensional social space,” a “kaleidoscope” (78) in which rights and privileges could be renegotiated and recombined.

The book's final chapters are its most theoretical. Chapter Four develops Ismard's thesis that the individual expertise required by some government jobs conflicted with the democratic ideal—best articulated, according to Ismard, by Plato's *Protagoras*—according to which all necessary political knowledge could be derived from the collective deliberations of the citizen body. The relegation of technically demanding jobs to slaves served to conceal expertise and thus preserve democracy's epistemological convictions. Chapter Five pursues this idea still deeper into theoretical territory through a consideration of three public slaves in Greek literature: the king's shepherd in *Oedipus Tyrannos*, the *dēmosios* in Plato's *Crito*, and the Ethiopian royal eunuch converted by Philip in the *Acts of the Apostles*. In these texts, Ismard argues, the slave who is also the agent of the state offers the key to revealing what has been hidden and thus to understanding the political and social order as a whole.

Ismard is surely right to argue that the *dēmosioi*'s existence tells us something important about Greek democracy, and he is also no doubt correct to insist upon his subject's relevance to the crisis of democracy in the present day (ix–x). On the other hand, there are reasons to doubt his thesis that the assignment of government jobs to slaves was chiefly a way to hide the threat posed to democracy by expertise. There were more pragmatic reasons why many public services should be performed by slaves, and some of these reasons occasionally surface on the pages of Ismard's book. As with the royal slaves whom Ismard frequently cites as comparanda, the servile status of the *dēmosioi* tended above all to guarantee their loyalty (107) and encouraged them to serve as a useful check on the power of citizen officials (40). Perhaps the extensive use of *dēmosioi* was intended less to conceal the fact of expertise than to maintain the tightest possible hold on public servants—a well-attested preoccupation of the Athenian *dēmos*. More fundamentally, it seems unlikely that most *dēmosioi* were the highly-trained experts imagined by Ismard. A few public slaves, like the verifiers of coinage (*dokimastai*) mentioned in an Athenian law of 375/4 (83–86), may perhaps have required an unusual degree of skill, and some public slaves certainly had to be literate, but for most *dēmosioi* the relevant competence was probably acquired, relatively quickly, in the course of the job itself. With luck, these issues will be among those debated in the wake of Ismard's stimulating book.