

## THE HISTORY OF THE IMPOSSIBLE: ANCIENT UTOPIA

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THIS ESSAY WAS INSPIRED by the memory of George Walsh, who contributed so much to the flourishing of the discipline of classics in the twenty-first century, in admiration for his readings, attuned as they are to the unexpected that has become naturalized, domesticated, and familiar.<sup>1</sup> This is a kind of listening I associate with psychoanalysis, with its attention to a surface troubled by unmanageable forces.<sup>2</sup> In this essay I have tried to be attentive to silenced events, voices, and acts of resistance to monarchy, domination, hierarchy, and empire, and to remember gestures of defiance that barely survive. I attend to vestiges, the almost invisible traces of resistance, the other utopias of Greek antiquity, those that we barely glimpse, that never achieved the textual monumentality of Plato's *Republic*, possibly utopian events that emerge in the rifts and crevices of history, that in retrospect express the impossibility of certain kinds of transformation. These are wild, eccentric events, unassimilable in the smooth narration of universal history.

The great German Jewish thinker Walter Benjamin, who killed himself in flight from the Nazis, wrote: "The only historian capable of fanning the spark of hope in the past is the one who is firmly convinced that *even the dead* will not be safe from the enemy if he is victorious. And this enemy has never ceased to be victorious."<sup>3</sup> These words, cited so often, may be difficult to read anew because of their frequent repetition—but I cite them again here because they are so uncannily appropriate to my subject. Fredric Jameson, an heir of Benjamin and other Frankfurt School writers, reads utopia as unexpected symptom, as a figurative practice in narrative, a textual figuring that emerges out of seamlessness. This emergence is almost like an unconscious letting itself speak in history, revealing impossible desires, in ruptures that persist and disrupt sameness.<sup>4</sup> I want to identify the snags, the acts of resistance, barely visible in the historical record, and call them utopic,

1. See, for example, G. Walsh, "Surprised by Self: Audible Thought in Hellenistic Poetry," *CP* 85 (1990): 1–21. I would like to thank Jonathan Hall and the George Walsh Memorial Lecture committee for inviting me to deliver an earlier version of this essay as the George Walsh Memorial Lecture in 2004.

2. See J. Derrida, *Résistances: De la psychanalyse* (Paris, 1996); a reading, a listening attuned to resistances and countertransferences seems to me a more productive deployment of psychoanalysis in the present, in relation to classical antiquity, than projecting a modern psyche onto ancient persons, characters in texts, or social allegories.

3. W. Benjamin, "On the Concept of History," in *Selected Writings*, vol. 4, 1938–40, trans. E. Jephcott et al., ed. H. Eiland and M. S. Jennings (Cambridge, Mass., 2003), 391.

4. See F. Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (Ithaca, N.Y., 1981).

impossible practices. Louis Marin, in a work on Thomas More and his *Utopia* wrote, "... the utopic discourse occupies the unoccupiable place (theoretically because blocked by ideology; historically empty because 'times had not yet come') of the historical and theoretical resolution of contradiction."<sup>5</sup> I will recall a crucified grammarian, the inventor of a new/old language, a tattooed runaway slave, and the bastard grandson of a harpist, not so much from the point of view of a historian, but as a student of culture.

I begin with a late Hellenistic epigram. In his geographical survey of Asia Minor, Strabo recalls a poetic act of resistance by the *grammatikos* Daphitas, in defiance of the Attalids, rulers of Pergamon (14.1.39):

... the city [Magnesia on the Maeander] lies on the plain near the mountain called Thorax, on which Daphitas the grammarian is said to have been crucified, because he reviled the kings in a distich: "purpled with stripes, mere filings of the treasure of Lysimachus, you rule the Lydians and Phrygia" [πορφύρεοι μώλωπες, ἀπορρινήματα γάζης Λυσιμάχου, Λυδῶν ἄρχετε καὶ Φρυγίης]. It was said that an oracle was given out that Daphitas should be on his guard against Thorax.<sup>6</sup>

Joseph Fontenrose associates this incident with Attalus III, who eventually left Pergamon in his will to the Roman people; Fontenrose reads the crucifixion on the mountain Thorax as a symbolic allusion to the victorious armies of the Romans and their allies.<sup>7</sup> Attalus III had killed Daphitas' father's friends, as well as various generals and governors, and in retaliation for the epigram imposed crucifixion, a punishment usually reserved for the low; for example, an inscription from Amyzon commemorates the crucifixion of a slave for killing his master's son, during the later Aristonicus revolt.<sup>8</sup> The stripes of Daphitas' epigram and the contempt expressed by the grammarian for the kings associate them with slaves, with those beaten who paradoxically wear the purple and rule; the image condenses degradation, humiliation and violence, the purple marks of flogging, with the luxurious clothing of kings. (Strabo, geographizing, even discusses the dyeing of garments with madder roots in this region: "The water at Hierapolis is remarkably adapted ... to the dyeing of wool, so that wool dyed with the roots rivals that dyed with the *coccus* or with the marine purple," 13.4.14.) The very water of these sites encourages both a regal apparel and that apparel's metonymy of blood.

These records, the poetic weals on the backs of the Attalid, and a ferocious suppression of the epigram as a form of resistance to power, stand for the phenomena I want to consider, other utopias, the barely visible islands in an archipelago overwhelmed by victors. In *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History*, Michel-Rolph Trouillot discusses the forgetting of the Haitian slave revolution led by Toussaint Louverture:

Silences enter the process of historical production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (the making of *sources*); the moment of fact assembly (the making of

5. L. Marin, *Utopics: The Semiological Play of Textual Spaces*, trans. R. A. Voollrath (Atlantic Highlands, N.J., 1984), 11.

6. All translations of Strabo in this article are from *The Geography*, trans. H. L. Jones, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1989).

7. J. Fontenrose, "The Crucified Daphidas," *TAPA* 91 (1960): 83–99; esp. p. 99, n. 41.

8. L. Robert, *Études anatoliennes* (Paris, 1937), p. 389, note.

*archives*); the moment of fact retrieval (the making of *narratives*); and the moment of retrospective significance (the making of *history* in the final instance).<sup>9</sup>

Trouillot insists that, given the categories and mentality of the late eighteenth century, the slave revolution of Haiti was impossible, unthinkable. He sees two “families” of tropes that have governed this history and its loss:

The first kind of tropes are formulas that tend to erase directly the fact of a revolution . . . formulas of erasure. The second kind tends to empty a number of singular events of their revolutionary content so that the entire string of facts, gnawed from all sides, becomes trivialized. . . . Both are formulas of silence.<sup>10</sup>

One of the daunting aspects of an effort to discover signs of defiance, revolt, and utopian practices in the late Hellenistic period is the paucity of information concerning such activities.<sup>11</sup> The silence is evident at the level of material culture, the remnants of the past, and in the work of the ancient historians who most immediately recorded the history to which they belong. Crucial to this history is the perception of the inevitability of the victory of the Romans over the Mediterranean world. The history of Polybius, for example, the most extensive remaining account of these processes, sees the Roman conquest as necessary and right, and a proper object of historical fascination (1.1):

There can surely be nobody so petty or so apathetic in his outlook that he has no desire to discover by what means and under what system of government the Romans succeeded in less than fifty-three years in bringing under their rule almost the whole of the inhabited world, an achievement which is without parallel in human history.<sup>12</sup>

Like modern historians who follow his lead, Polybius sees universal history, the inevitable domination of the Romans, as his theme, and his narrative leads him to subordinate utopianism and rebellion to the narrative of conquest, of the victors.

Yet even with this would-be seamless linguistic narration of Roman victory, there are many tantalizing references to acts of resistance and rebellion, failures to accept monarchy, or the inevitability of absorption into what became a new world system under Roman hegemony. The issue of the homogeneity of language itself—language as a feature of social life that could be reformed—had once been addressed by Alexarchus, soon after the death of Alexander in the late fourth century B.C.E. Athenaeus describes the utopian invention of a new language for the foundation of a city (3.98d–f):

Alexarchus, founder of Uranopolis, introduced peculiar expressions, calling the cock “dawn-crier,” the barber “mortal-shaver,” the drachma “a silver bit,” the quart-measure “daily-feeder,” the herald “loud bawler.”<sup>13</sup>

9. M.-R. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past: Power and the Production of History* (Boston, 1995), 26.

10. Trouillot, *Silencing* (n. 9 above), 96.

11. See R. Martínez Lacy, *Rebeliones populares en la Grecia helenística* (Mexico, 1995).

12. Polybius, *The Rise of the Roman Empire*, trans. I. Scott-Kilvert, selected by F. W. Walbank (London, 1979), 41.

13. Athenaeus, *The Deipnosophists*, trans. C. B. Gulick, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1927).

Athenaeus also here records a strange message sent by Alexarchus to Cassandria, the city named after his brother Cassander, that uses such convoluted, archaizing, and improbable diction. Alexarchus' foundation of Ouranopolis, "heaven-city," may have inspired the later foundation by fiat of Heliopolis, the city of the sun.

Alongside Daphitas' distich, and Alexarchus' private language, stands a runaway slave, a devotee of the sun, another fragmentary symptom of dissonance, the body of this slave bearing resistance in material form. We have a papyrus, an early wanted poster concerning a slave belonging to a Carian ambassador to Alexandria, which offers a detailed, vivid presence of an ancient, recalcitrant body:

Hermon, alias Neilos, Syrian, from Bambyke (Hierapolis), "about 18 years old, of medium stature, beardless, with good legs, a dimple on the chin, a mole by the left side of the nose, a scar above the left corner of the mouth, tattooed on the right wrist with two barbaric letters."<sup>14</sup>

The papyrus may attest to the connection between the sun god and some slaves; these barbaric letters are seen by some scholars, including Bagnall and Derow, as symbols of consecration to the gods of Hierapolis, Hadad and Atargatis—the first letters of their names in Aramaic. It is not clear in this view whether these slaves dedicated themselves, or were dedicated to the sun god. Erica Reiner has argued convincingly that these marks were not religious symbols, but rather Aramaic letters applied after a previous escape to mark the fugitive slave.<sup>15</sup> On the papyrus, a second hand raises the reward for the slaves' capture, since the first offer did not do the trick, and this vividly portrayed slave did, for a time at least, successfully evade capture.

Just as this marked body resists captivity, the kind of utopianism he may represent also eludes recognition by a historian of utopianism. In a gesture of what Trouillot might see as erasure or trivialization, the great classicist Moses Finley excluded from his modern consideration of ancient utopianism the schemes of both Alexarchus of Ouranopolis, and Aristonicus of Heliopolis. In an essay on utopianism ancient and modern, written in honor of Herbert Marcuse, Finley argued that Alexarchus, who invented his own language for an Ouranopolis, a "heaven-city," "carries us all the way back to lunacy and its personal fantasies."<sup>16</sup> Apropos of Heliopolis, the sun city, Finley pointed to the "link in Near Eastern religion between divine sun and justice," noting that Near Eastern religions had devotees among slaves and the lower classes in the second century B.C.E.; he made an analogy with

14. No. 144 ("Offer of Reward for Escaped Slaves"), *UPZ* 1:121 (text and German translation in *C. Ptol. Sklav.* 81), in *The Hellenistic Period: Historical Sources in Translation*<sup>2</sup>, ed. R. S. Bagnall and P. Derow (Oxford, 2004), 238.

15. E. Reiner, "Runaway—Seize Him," in *Assyria and Beyond: Studies Presented to Mogens Trolle Larsen*, ed. J. G. Dercksen (Leuven, 2004), 475–82. I am indebted to the late Professor Reiner. See also P. duBois, "The Tattooed Slave," "The Tattooed Orator," in *Slaves and Other Objects* (Chicago, 2003), 3–6.

16. M. I. Finley, "Utopianism Ancient and Modern," in *The Use and Abuse of History* (London, 1975), 178–92 (quote on p. 188); see also C. Mossé, "Les utopies égalitaires à l'époque hellénistique," *RH* 241 (1969): 297–308.

millenarian Christianity in the modern period.<sup>17</sup> Because of its “Near Easternness,” an exoticism, or orientalism, he declared the Aristonicus revolt “outside the Graeco-Roman orbit for all meaningful purposes.”<sup>18</sup> Ancient utopias, he insisted, are always hierarchical.<sup>19</sup> But of course, as the history of the Hellenistic period comes clearer, the line demarcating West and East becomes more and more indistinct, and the effort to demarcate most productively what is purely “ancient,” Western, Graeco-Roman, less and less possible.

This revolt of Aristonicus of Pergamon catalyzes my interest in these forms of defiance, resistance to uniformity of language, to the Olympian gods, to imperial conquest; in contrast to the utopianism of Plato, who imagines an eternally Laconizing, oligarchic aristocratic system, the little we can discover about the plans of Aristonicus reveals a very different sort of ambition for a polity.<sup>20</sup> And Strabo’s intermittent history of the Pergamenes presents several provocative elements that color the account and suggest affinities with slaves, and the violence enacted against them. In his discussion of the foundation of the Attalid dynasty, he mysteriously describes the emasculation of Philetaerus, “who was a eunuch from boyhood” (13.4.1):

For it came to pass at a certain burial, when a spectacle was being given at which many people were present, that the nurse who was carrying Philetaerus, still an infant, was caught in the crowd and pressed so hard that the child was incapacitated [πρωθῆναι].

This decorously described child remained loyal to his commander Lysimachus for a time, but quarreled eventually with Lysimachus’ wife, Arsinoe, who slandered him, and so he “caused Pergamum to revolt” and then died, leaving his nephew Eumenes in power. Is the emasculation of Philetaerus a representation of a premonition of the imminent enslavement of all the Pergamenes, and of resistance by Aristonicus to their enslavement, and to the will of the official Attalids and their Roman heirs?

This intriguing episode sets in motion a whole series of questionable genealogical elements associated with the Attalids; beginning from an emasculating injury, which might allude in some way to the castration of slave eunuchs, it then proceeds to the slander of the legitimate wife, and then to an almost papal succession of nephews, rulers of a kingdom to which

17. Finley, “Utopianism” (n. 16 above), 184.

18. Finley, “Utopianism,” 184.

19. Finley, “Utopianism,” 187. Peter Green dismisses the resistant impulses of the Hellenistic age as “fugal myths”: “only in dreams or fantasy do we find such principles as the abolition of slavery” (*Alexander to Actium: The Historical Evolution of the Hellenistic Age* [Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1990], 394). See also D. Ogden, ed., *The Hellenistic World: New Perspectives* (London, 2002).

20. Doynne Dawson: “The little-known revolt of Aristonicus included mass emancipation of slaves and expansion of citizen bodies. We are also told his followers were called *Heliopolitai*, ‘citizens of the sun’ (Strabo 14.1.38). All this has inspired speculation that Aristonicus’ revolt, uniquely among Greek reform movements, tried to appeal to slaves, and may have tried to put into practice the utopian communism of Iambulus’ novel. . . . Aristonicus’ emancipation of slaves could have been a traditional war measure; his Heliopolis could have been a new city he meant to found for his freedmen, also in the tradition of Hellenistic monarchs, and the name may have signified nothing but the protection of the sun god. This is not to deny that there was an atmosphere of extreme radicalism about this movement” (*Cities of the Gods: Communist Utopias in Greek Thought* [New York and Oxford, 1992], p. 254, n. 32).

Aristonicus, an illegitimate heir, eventually lays claim. Reciprocal violence troubles this history throughout.

According to Justinus, “There was a son of Eumenes, named Aristonicus, not born in wedlock, but of an Ephesian mistress, the daughter of a harpist, and after the death of Attalus, this young man laid claim to the throne of Asia as having been his father’s” (36.4.6).<sup>21</sup> Strabo recalls the revolt of Aristonicus, which we know of from other sources, in his survey of the landscape of Asia Minor (14.1.38):

After Smyrna one comes to Leucæ, a small town, which after the death of Attalus Philometor was caused to revolt by Aristonicus, who was reputed to belong to the royal family and intended to usurp the kingdom. Now he was banished from Smyrna, after being defeated in a naval battle near the Cymæan territory by the Ephesians, but he went up into the interior and quickly assembled a large number of resourceless people, and also of slaves, invited with a promise of freedom [καὶ δούλων ἐπ’ ἐλευθερίᾳ κατακεκλημένων], whom he called Heliopolitæ.

The association with the sun, Helios, had led to speculation about Near Eastern cults such as that connected to the runaway slave Hermon/Neilos, about Stoicism and a link between the sun, which gives its light to all equally, and the utopian city of the sun described by Iambulus. Other sources confirm other elements of the story; some say that the Roman Marcus Perpernas captured Aristonicus after the defeat of his forces, and that he died in Rome, in prison.<sup>22</sup> Yet another intriguing aspect of this episode, besides the dangerous eruption of this rebellion, an aspect silenced by the paucity of material remains, by the accidents of extant histories, is the issue of the Roman Empire, its inevitability, and the attribution of the masterminding of the rebellion to the Stoic philosopher Blossius of Cumæ, who was also the advisor of Tiberius Gracchus, and who after the defeat of the Gracchi came to join Aristonicus and died in Asia Minor.<sup>23</sup>

One of the most tantalizing and ambiguous pieces of evidence concerning Aristonicus’ revolt, a provocative shred, a vestige, appeared only when the archaeologists Louis and Jeanne Robert, in excavating the ancient oracle

21. For a detailed discussion of these reports, see E. V. Hansen, *The Attalids of Pergamum*<sup>2</sup> (Ithaca, N.Y., 1971).

22. See Hansen, *Attalids* (n. 21 above), 15–18; on Aristonicus, 150–60.

23. For the lively debate on the import of the Aristonicus revolt, see G. Cardinali, “La morte di Attalo III e la rivolta d’Aristonico,” *Saggi di storia antica e di archeologia offerti a G. Beloch* (Rome, 1910), 269–320; J. Bidez, “La Cité du Monde et la Cité du Soleil chez les Stoïciens,” *Bulletin de l’Académie Royale de Belgique, Classe des Lettres*, 5th ser., 18 (1932): 291; D. R. Dudley, “Blossius of Cumæ,” *JRS* 31 (1941): 94–99 (“For the slaves and poor of all the Orient the Sun-cult promised freedom and a better world: Aristonicus and Eunus were the messianic rulers whose task was to bring this world into being for their followers,” 99); T. W. Africa, “Aristonicus, Blossius and the City of the Sun,” *International Review of Social History* 6 (1961): 110–20. J. D. Dumont (“À propos d’Aristonico,” *Eirene* 5 [1966]: 189–96) argues for a similar pattern of freeing slaves among other rulers, as a tactic of war: “cette utilisation militaire des esclaves de l’adversaire . . . qui compte sur l’esclave comme l’ennemi virtuel de son propriétaire . . . traduit une opposition fondamentale” (194–96). See also F. Carrata Thomes, *La rivolta di Aristonico e le origini della provincia romana d’Asia* (Turin, 1968); V. Vavrinek, *La révolte d’Aristonico* (Prague, 1957), and “Aristonicus of Pergamum: Pretender to the Throne or Leader of a Slave Revolt?,” *Eirene* 13 (1975): 109–29. In *La révolte*, Vavrinek argues for “une lutte entre esclaves et esclavagistes” (193).

of Claros, near Colophon in Asia Minor, found an inscription recording a decree that honored Polemaeus, a notable of Colophon. In the course of the decree, a fascinating biographical-autobiographical text in its own right, worthy of serious generic study, the text mentions a site otherwise unattested, a δούλων πόλις (city of slaves): “looting and armed attacks taking place with damage at the city of the slaves” (γίλνομένης ἀρπαγῆς καὶ ἐφόδου | μεθ’ ὅπλων καὶ ἀδικημάτων ἐπὶ τ(ῇ)ς ὑπαρχούσ(η)ς (ῆ)μεῖν χώρας | ἐπὶ Δούλων πόλεως).<sup>24</sup> This mysterious and tantalizing reference, set in a genitive absolute, therefore without clear agency, and tactfully, diplomatically vague, stands out in the context of praise for the man of good deeds, prominent benefactor of Colophon. Where is this city of slaves—somewhere in the territory of Colophon? Who are the slaves? Are they still there? How can there be a city of slaves?

The Roberts tentatively connect the city of slaves with Aristonicus. They explain the inscription with reference to a decree of Pergamon, a threat against those who would leave the city and the territory of the city shortly after the death of Attalus III, that is, after the bequest of the city to the Romans.<sup>25</sup> They conjecture, as others do, that some residents must have left, and joined Aristonicus.<sup>26</sup> In their view, the place retained, a little later, at the time of the Polemaeus decree, the name of the City of the Slaves, and was favorable for “quelque agitation, pillages, et dégâts, au maintien de bandes incontrôlées et nuisibles.”<sup>27</sup> They argue that for the Roman senate to intervene, as the decree states, the attacks must have been made by Roman soldiers. Again, very tentatively, they ask “est-il permis” that these designations would serve simply to recall that place where Aristonicus’ people had held sway before the defeat, and where Roman bands afterwards had imposed themselves?<sup>28</sup> All this, in the process of passing from occupation to normal order in the new Roman province of Asia.

Is it possible that the city of slaves remained the site of slave habitation, or that the supporters of Aristonicus were called as a group “slaves,” a collective noun, by metonymy naming them all, in an effort perhaps to discredit them all by association? And that the Roman soldiers were to eradicate the problem, ordered by the senate, but without damaging the demos, that is, the good people of Colophon who remained safely within the bonds of the polis and its ideology? The slightly nervous care with which the inscription cites this particular good deed of Polemaeus, its genitive absolute, its unwillingness to name the actors and subjects of the pillaging and damage,

24. L. Robert and J. Robert, *Claros I: Décrets Hellénistiques*, fasc. 1 (Paris, 1989).

25. *OGI* 338, a stele from Pergamum. See D. Magie, *Roman Rule in Asia Minor*, vol. 2 (Princeton, N.J., 1950–51), p. 1040, no. 17; R. Sherk, ed. and trans., *Rome and the Greek East to the Death of Augustus* (Cambridge, 1984), no. 39 [*OGI* 338]; “Decree of Pergamum on citizenship after the death of Attalus III, 133 BC,” passed by the Pergamenes “to forestall further defection to his [Aristonicus’] cause. . . . the text continues . . . depriving certain others who had left the city or who may hereafter leave it of their civic rights.” See also *ibid.* no. 40.

26. Robert and Robert, *Claros I* (n. 24 above), 38.

27. Robert and Robert, *Claros I*, 38.

28. Robert and Robert, *Claros I*, 38.

could of course be caused by the fact that the Romans were responsible, but there is clearly some felt danger here, even years later, in this episode so deftly steered to the right end by Polemaeus.

One question remains: what is a δούλων πόλις? The degree to which the phrase is an oxymoron can only excite speculation.<sup>29</sup> A polis cannot be made up of slaves, except in some utopian world. In terms of Greek thinking, a polis has citizens, free persons, perhaps metics, and slaves. A city that consisted only of citizens exists only in the imaginary, in the fictional realm, in the work of a writer, for example, like Iambulus in his account of a remote island and city of the sun, detailed by Diodorus Siculus (2.58.1):

The islanders do not marry but they have their women in common. They raise the children born of their unions in common and cherish them equally. When these children are still infants, the wet nurses will exchange the children they are nursing so that not even their actual mothers can recognize their own children. Thanks to this institution no rivalry arises among them and they live their lives free of internal discord, setting the greatest value on social harmony.<sup>30</sup>

Although Finley believed all ancient utopias to be hierarchical, Iambulus' islanders exhibit a remarkable degree of equality and undifferentiation of status; the only ruler is the oldest man. Iambulus points out too that the islanders sing hymns to the gods, especially to Helios, "who has given his name to both the islands and their inhabitants" (58.7). There is no mention of slaves.

This is a thought experiment that has been entertained, the city of the free. But a δούλων πόλις, a city made up of slaves? Is it possible to think such a thing? Who would own the slaves, and if no one owned them, would they be slaves? What model of identity is being assumed here? Are these former slaves, now free, runaways, or the mass of resisters once led by Aristonicus, who take their name from the least among them?

Aristotle in the *Politics* says, "Every state<sup>31</sup> [πόλιν] is as we see a sort of partnership" (ἐπειδὴ πᾶσαν πόλιν ὁρῶμεν κοινωνίαν τινὰ οὖσαν, 1252a1).<sup>32</sup> For him, the partnerships are male/female, ruler/ruled, and by this latter he seems to mean master and slave: "for one that foresees with his mind is naturally ruler and naturally master, and one that can do these things with his body is subject and naturally a slave" (1252a4). Can there be a master without a slave, a slave without a master, a δούλων πόλις, a city of slaves, in such a world? Aristotle describes the necessity of relation, of reciprocity, in the *Categories* (7a20): "All relatives are referred to their correlates, provided

29. The Roberts refer to other such nominations (*Claros* I, p. 38, n. 159): "Pour le tour avec un génitif local, ἐπὶ πόλεος, ἐπὶ Χίου, ἐπὶ Ῥώμης; cf. L. R. [Louis Robert], *Rev. Ét. Anc. [Revue des Études Anciennes]* 1960, 328, n. 3 (*Opera Minora*, 844)."

30. Diodorus of Sicily, *Works*, vol. 2, trans. C. H. Oldfather, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1933; reprint, 1953).

31. On the question of the state, see Ranajit Guha, *History at the Limit of World-History* (New York, 2002), 7–47.

32. Aristotle, *Politics*, trans. H. Rackham, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1944).



they are rightly defined. . . .”<sup>33</sup> Perhaps because the master-slave relation is fragile, or arbitrary, impossible to naturalize exhaustively, Aristotle returns to it repeatedly in his discussion of correlation. The master/slave correlation is not immediately legible, perhaps, or even presumptively legible, as is a kinship relationship, for example, and must therefore rather be compulsively insisted on (7a30):

Let “slave” be defined in relation to “man” or to “biped” or what not, instead of its being defined (as it should be) by reference to “master,” then no correlation appears, for the reference is really inaccurate [οὐ γὰρ οἰκεία ἡ ἀπόδοσις ἐστίν].

And again (7a35):

The correlative of “slave” [δοῦλος], for example, is properly said to be “master” [δεσπότην]. Suppose we remove all his other—I mean, his irrelevant—attributes, such as his being “two-footed,” “receptive of knowledge,” or “human,” and leave but his being “a master,” then “slave” will be still the correlative, “slave” meaning slave of a master [ὁ γὰρ δοῦλος δεσπότου δοῦλος λέγεται].

And again (7b1–7):

On the other hand, let us suppose one correlative named incorrectly. Then, if we strip off its attributes, saving that only in virtue of which it was called a correlative, all correlation will vanish. Let “a slave” be defined as [of a man] “a man’s” [ἀνθρώπου]. . . . Take the attribute “master” from “man”: then indeed, the correlation subsisting between “man” and “slave” will have vanished. No master, in short, then no slave.

And again (7b15–20):

Correlatives are commonly held to come into existence together, and this for the most part is true, as, for instance, of double and half. That a half exists means that the double of which it is half must exist. The existence of a master involves the existence also of a slave. If a slave exists, then must a master. . . . Moreover, this holds of them also: to cancel one cancels [συναναιρεῖ] the other.

Actually, the word Aristotle uses here, συναναιρεῖ, translated by Cooke as “cancels,” can be taken as “destroy, destroy together with, destroy altogether, utterly,” suggesting a more violent end to both master and slave; if one is erased, so is the other.

The logic here attempts to master difficulties that may have become more unmanageable in the fluidity of the new social circumstances of the Hellenistic world, in the time after the conquests and death of Alexander the Great, the period of the monarchies of his heirs, on the threshold of the conquest of Greece and Asia Minor by the Romans. Aristotle may already be looking beyond the polis, already figuring in his text new instabilities, working on the problematic of the master-slave relationship in light of new imperial possibilities. New ideas about universalism in the philosophers of the day emerge in the utopianism that so indistinctly emerges in these late Hellenistic conditions. Doyne Dawson has discussed in great detail the utopian

33. Aristotle, *The Organon*, vol. 1, *The Categories, On Interpretation*, trans. H. P. Cooke, *Prior Analytics*, trans. H. Tredennick, Loeb Classical Library (Cambridge, Mass., 1938).

thinking of the ancient Greek world,<sup>34</sup> arguing that the utopian tradition that has survived intact is for the most part Spartanizing and conservative, looking to an aristocratic oligarchic model for ideas of perfect societies, ones that serve as a thought problem for the elite, or for guiding reforms for less sophisticated, less philosophically inclined residents in ancient cities. He points to the supposed utopian thinking of the Cynics and the Stoics as offering alternatives to these more conservative models, showing that even when Plato imagines a communist utopia, that is, a situation in which there is a community of shared property, and of shared women, this is in the interest of aristocratic rule: "The utopian writings of Plato and Aristotle were meant to reassure [the propertied]. They provided a new ideology to reform and revitalize traditional aristocratic values; their practical goal was the creation of a unified and disciplined upper class, generous with patronage and immune to the temptations of faction."<sup>35</sup> Although one might find fault with this characterization of the Platonic project as a whole, setting aside its commitment to *παιδεία*, critical thinking, and the invention of philosophy as a way of life, this account does point to a crucial element of Platonic thinking on social structure, the necessity for specialization and hierarchy among men.

The Cynics and Stoics, at least in the beginning, had different ideas about ideal societies, and in the turmoil of the fourth and third centuries B.C.E., when the form of the polis was being called into question by the conquests and legacy of Alexander, these new forms of thinking about community had their effects. The fictional utopias of Euhemerus and Iambulus may owe a debt to philosophical discussions of polity. The sources concerning Cynic utopian thinking, however, are for the most part lost to us, themselves erased or trivialized.

Stoicism, following Cynicism, written "on the tail of the dog," has its own history, one that by the time of the Roman Stoics had lost the critical power of the earlier Cynic influence. Yet Stoic universalism went beyond the city, to the cosmos, "a whole world of ideal cities."<sup>36</sup> Plutarch makes this clear (*De Alex. fort.* 329a–b):

The amazing *Republic* of Zeno, founder of the Stoic school, is directed by one principle: that we should not live in cities and demes separated by different laws, but should regard all men as our demesmen and fellow citizens, and there should be one way of life and one world order, like a herd feeding together under the care of a common law. Zeno wrote this to create a model based on a dream or vision of an orderly philosopher's constitution. But out of these words Alexander produced deeds.<sup>37</sup>

"Zeno, and . . . Chrysippus after him, were assuming a world in which all people would be completely rational followers of nature in the Stoic sense. All existing cities, by contrast, they described as based on slavery of some

34. Dawson, *Cities* (n. 20 above). See J. Ferguson, *Utopias of the Classical World* (London, 1975), especially "Blossius, Tiberius Gracchus and Aristonicus," 138–45.

35. Dawson, *Cities*, 102.

36. Dawson, *Cities*, 175.

37. Cited by Dawson, *Cities*, 170.

kind; and Plato's attempt to reform such a slave system by education of the rulers they dismissed as useless."<sup>38</sup> The Stoic utopia would contain only the wise, and therefore no one would be a slave. All subordination is unwise, is slavery; in the best of all worlds, there would be no subordination, no slavery. The impact of these ideas on political life is difficult to assess, but it does seem that speculation and critique flourished among these philosophical tendencies, in the context of a mutable political situation. Dawson points out that "Zeno lived at Athens as a metic or resident alien for about fifty years (ca. 312–ca. 261). During that time there were seven constitutional changes, several of them brought about by the intervention of kings, three unsuccessful revolts; and four sieges, in two of which the city was taken."<sup>39</sup>

The philosophers' utopian imaginings, now mostly lost, erased or trivialized in Trouillot's sense, mark a transition. The change from focus on the ancient polis to focus on kingdom and empire must be considered as a radical break, a shift from one world to another, even if many historians now argue for the preservation and persistence of the city and its institutions, even as they caution against seeing radical transformation and abrupt difference. A profound change marked the difference between definition of identity in terms, say, of Athenian citizenship in the democratic polis, based on autochthony and οἶκος, and the definition of identity as a Roman citizen, one who may never have seen Rome himself. Emile Benveniste points to this radical difference in his essay on πόλις/πολίτης, and *civis/civitas*, where the Greek notion of city logically precedes the derivative word for citizen, while the Latin *civis* produces the notion of city, empire, civilization, as an extension of its primary meaning.<sup>40</sup> The citizen is the atom, the unbreakable unit of the Roman Empire, and the city is the huge and extended body of all its citizens. If, as historians of ancient culture, we cannot see the difference, and are fixed at the level of minute studies of particular details, then we lose the analytic power of the difference in the inertia of the *longue durée*, which has its own analytical power but which risks missing change. The Roman Empire is not the same as the Greek polis, and Greek poleis within the Empire mean something very different from Greek poleis in their time of relative autonomy. The break between these two great systems, although impossible to locate punctually, affords the opportunity for new kinds of ideological imaginings.

Our own utopianism, desire, presentism, and anachronism inevitably contaminate our scholarly practices. In light of the collapse of the Soviet Union, there emerges a certain embarrassment about scholarship of the recent past that celebrated revolutionary impulses and such seemingly suspect categories as universal humankind, smacking of dreams of world government, as

38. Dawson, *Cities*, 178.

39. Dawson, *Cities*, 197.

40. E. Benveniste, "Cities and Communities," in *Indo-European Language and Society*, trans. E. Palmer (London, 1973), 295–304; "It follows that the connexion established in Latin between *civis* and *civitas* is the exact reverse of that shown in Greek between πόλις 'city' and πολίτης 'citizen' " (299). See also E. Benveniste, "Civilization: A Contribution to the History of the Word," in *Problems in General Linguistics*, trans. M. E. Meek (Coral Gables, Fla., 1971), 289–96.

in W. W. Tarn's view of Alexander.<sup>41</sup> Mikhail Rostovtzeff, for example, in his account of the Hellenistic economic situation, uses what many would see as the anachronistic language of capitalism; in the Hellenistic period, in his view, there was a sharper conflict "between the working classes and the government, which enjoyed in general the support of the bourgeoisie."<sup>42</sup> He identifies the transformation of Aristonicus' war of independence "into a war of the 'oppressed' against the oppressors. . . ."<sup>43</sup> All this may now seem ill-fated, sentimental, and utopian, tainted by association with twentieth-century fantasies of revolution and progress. Some scholars argue that the offer of freedom to slaves was simply a customary tactic in war, for example. The hard-nosed contemporary historian must eschew fictions of liberation, report just the facts.

But while we need to be wary of anachronism and presentism, we also need to be wary of the notion that knowledge of the past can exist in a form unmediated by the present, and by our desire. Questions of globalization, empire, and resistance have come to the fore in the present, even as Trouillot points to the investment that academics have in their assessments of the past, and the difficulty they have in relating the stories they tell to the present:

The traditions of the guild, reinforced by a positivist philosophy of history, forbid academic historians to position themselves regarding the present. A fetishism of the facts, premised on an antiquated model of the natural sciences, still dominates history and the other social sciences. It reinforces the view that any conscious positioning should be rejected as ideological. Thus the historian's position is officially unmarked: it is that of the non-historical observer.<sup>44</sup>

Yet we are all implicated in politics of the present; an historian such as Niall Ferguson cannot help but celebrate the British Empire as he urges assumption of a new empire on the United States.<sup>45</sup>

Political programs that ultimately prove unrealizable, such as the Spartan reforms, or even Aristonicus' plans, such as we can discern them, emerge

41. See W. W. Tarn, "Alexander the Great and the Unity of Mankind," *ProcBritAc* 19 (1933): 123–66, *Alexander the Great* (1948; reprint of vol. 1, Boston, 1956), 146–148 (in reprint ed.): "If he could not fuse races, he transcended the national State; and to transcend national States meant to transcend national cults; men came to feel after the unity which must lie beneath the various religions. . . . Before Alexander, men's dreams of the ideal state had still been based on class-rule and slavery; but after him comes Iambulus' great Sun-State, founded on brotherhood and the dignity of free labor. Above all, Alexander inspired Zeno's vision of a world in which all men should be members one of another, citizens of one State without distinction of race or institutions, subject only to and in harmony with the Common Law immanent in the Universe, and united in one social life not by compulsion but only by their own willing consent, or (as he put it), by Love. The splendour of this hopeless dream . . ."

42. M. Rostovtzeff, *The Social and Economic History of the Hellenistic World*, vol. 2 (Oxford, 1941), 807; "the failure of Aristonicus in his naval venture and the hostility of the cities transformed a war of independence . . . into a war of the 'oppressed' against the oppressors, a war of the country against the cities, of slaves and serfs against their masters" (808). On slave rebellions in the West, see K. R. Bradley, *Slavery and Rebellion in the Roman World, 140 B.C.–70 B.C.* (Bloomington, Ind., 1998).

43. Rostovtzeff, *Hellenistic World* (n. 42 above), 808.

44. Trouillot, *Silencing*, 151.

45. N. Ferguson, *Empire: The Rise and Demise of the British World Order and the Lessons for Global Power* (New York, 2003). See also M. Hardt and A. Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge, Mass., 2000); Hardt and Negri use the work of Polybius on the Roman Empire to frame their analysis of the current world order (314–16).

at moments when there is a sense of change without perceptible direction. One would not want to impose a teleological rhythm on these changes, to see them as subject to a Hegelian inevitability—especially not as a progress from the individual polis to the empire. Yet change occurs, and it is in the break that a thousand flowers bloom; before the stabilization of Roman forms of Stoicism, and acceptance of things as they are, new and radical and impossible things happen, the revolt of the Maccabees, private languages, the defiant epigram, the refusal of Romanization, the fantasy of Heliopolis, and the δούλων πόλις. These are instances of some “suspension of the political in the utopian moment,” as Jameson calls it,<sup>46</sup> a denial of the material limits of things as they are.

In the unsettled conditions of the late Hellenistic period, oscillating between democracy, oligarchy, and monarchy, a new organization of the οἰκουμένη is immanent, and it is in the border zone of a new arrangement of social and political relations that all can be put in question, critiqued, and rethought. New political, economic, and social conditions in contemporary globalization illuminate what is at stake in Hellenistic utopian thinking. We might draw an analogy between the circumstances of the present and the opening up of boundaries and definitions of identity after the conquests of Alexander of Macedonia in the fourth century B.C.E.

Jameson considers the possibility of the utopian demand, of the demand that can “not be satisfied without transforming the system beyond recognition, and which would at once usher in a society structurally distinct from this one in every conceivable way. . . .” In the present the demand would be for “universal full employment around the globe.”<sup>47</sup> Capitalism cannot in fact accommodate such a demand; imagining a future of this sort serves a diagnostic and critical role. It seems to me that in the case of Hellenistic antiquity, Aristonicus’ call to free Pergamon’s slaves may serve a similar diagnostic and critical role, in that ancient society could not function, could not remain itself if slavery were abolished, and therefore that even the representations of such a scheme became impossible, even as a few historical traces of an experiment to bring it about are ineradicable. Utopianism—and the specificity of its modeling—comes to the fore when

. . . the system really seems in danger of losing its legitimacy, when the ruling elite is palpably uncertain of itself and full of divisions and self-doubts, when popular demands grow louder and more confident, then what also happens is that those grievances and demands grow more precise in their insistence and urgency. We focus more sharply on very specific wrongs, the dysfunctioning of the system becomes far more tangibly visible at crucial points.<sup>48</sup>

This is the situation not only in Sparta, where the revolutionary proposals concerning land redistribution took place in the third century, but throughout the Greek world, where the model of Sparta and the reform attempts of Agis

46. F. Jameson, “The Politics of Utopia,” *New Left Review*, n.s., 25 (2004): 35–54; passage referenced, 43.

47. Jameson, “Politics,” (n. 46 above), 37.

48. Jameson, “Politics,” 44.

and Cleomenes seem to have had an effect on many cities and their notions of increasing freedom for those previously landless or disenfranchised, as in Sicily, but where these efforts at reform, resistance, and revolt were successfully repelled.

It is easy for us to disregard such moments, since nothing came of them, and remembering them, retrieving them, is nearly impossible; utopia's function is perhaps not in imagining a better future, "but rather in demonstrating our utter incapacity to imagine such a future . . . so as to reveal the ideological closure of the system in which we are somehow trapped and confined."<sup>49</sup> It is that entrapment and confinement within the system of slavery that the utopian proposals of Aristonicus reveal. It is indeed the very question of self and identity that a slave utopia calls into question, in a world in which social relations and identity require both the free and the unfree for very existence.

Jameson, following Althusser, assumes that each of us is "shackled to an ideological subject-position";<sup>50</sup> just as postmodern persons establish pairs of opposites that define their existence, identity, and choices, such as oppositions between full employment and no employment (laziness), or between ecological planning and a naturalization of the market, so the moment of truth of each is realized through its negation, each offering an ideological critique of its opposite, in a double negation without cancellation of the opposite. Such a model is fruitful in relation to Aristotle's labor on the necessary and enabling opposition between master and slave. A city of slaves as a real, material city, is inconceivable, unrealizable, impossible. How can there be a city of free men, the universal freedom imagined in an early Stoic utopia, all masters and no slaves, no slaves to allow for the possibility of freedom? How can there be a city of slaves, a city of the unfree, where there are no masters?

The slave in the real city becomes the citizen in the slaves' city, in an impossible rip, or crevice, in historical continuity, ephemeral as an invented language, a caustic epigram, a fugitive slave. Yet in the present sorry state of the world, with its new conception of the οἰκουμένη threatened by new imperial initiatives, we should not forget, not abandon, trivialize, or erase our fragmentary memories, the vestiges of hope, impossible demands, and struggles for a better world that can be discerned in the crevices of the great narratives of conquest, even if these liberatory experiments, like all those whom the gods love, died young.

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49. Jameson, "Politics," 46.

50. Jameson, "Politics," 46.