

From Freedom to Slavery

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Professor Gelb has devoted most of the past academic year to the completion of a large monograph entitled *From Freedom to Slavery*. The monograph represents an expanded version of lectures given in 1970 in Michigan, California, Canada, and Germany. The study deals with the evolution of dependent classes, from free peasantry to semi-free serfdom and fully unfree chattel slavery. The conclusions reached therein are derived from an intensive investigation of early Mesopotamian sources. However, to a varying degree, they can be applied to the whole Ancient Near East, as well as to most of the Ancient World, from the Mediterranean to China. The main conclusions are:

The semi-free serfs (*guruš* in Sumerian, *eṭlum* in Akkadian, helots of Sparta, etc.) are mainly of native origin and lead a full family life on small plots of land owned by large public households of the crown, temple, and nobility. They are employed in agriculture and processing of agricultural produce. They represent the main source of productive labor.

The unfree chattel slaves (*arad* and *ir* in Sumerian, *ardum* in Akkadian, etc.) are mainly of foreign origin, have little or no family life, and own no means of production. They are employed in a domestic, menial capacity, mainly in private households.

Productive labor as represented by chattel slaves (not serfs) is known almost exclusively from Classical Greece (specifically Athens, but not Sparta or Crete) and Rome, and, much later, from the New World plantation slavery.