



## **ROMAN AFRICA AND SLAVERY: TOWARDS A MEDITERRANEAN PERSPECTIVE**

A África romana e a escravidão: em busca de uma perspectiva mediterrânea

Filipe Noé da Silva <sup>a</sup>

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5075-0131>

E-mail: [fnd.silva@udesc.br](mailto:fnd.silva@udesc.br)

<sup>a</sup> Universidade do Estado de Santa Catarina, Florianópolis, SC, Brazil.

**DEBATE  
ESCRAVIDÃO ANTIGA E HISTÓRIA GLOBAL  
ANCIENT SLAVERY, AND GLOBAL HISTORY**

## ABSTRACT

With the aim of contributing to the debate on the concept of “slave society” once proposed by historian Moses Israel Finley, this paper discusses the presence of slavery in Roman Africa as a result of a process of integration carried out by the Romans, which lasted until the late antiquity period. After identifying the continued influence of Finley’s model in recent historiography on the subject, this study turns to epigraphic documentation with the aim of demonstrating its compatibility with a proposal to study Roman Africa from a Mediterranean perspective, emphasizing the integration of this same slavery into the Roman imperial system. Finally, through the reading and commentary on an epistle by Augustine of Hippo, the article further suggests potential connections between the trade of enslaved people in Africa and other markets and territories of the Late Roman Empire.

## KEYWORDS

Roman Africa. Epigraphy. Augustine of Hippo.

## RESUMO

Com o intuito de contribuir com o debate referente ao conceito de “sociedade escravista”, outrora proposto pelo historiador Moses Israel Finley, o presente artigo discute a presença da escravidão na África Romana como resultado de um processo de integração levado a cabo pelos romanos, e que perdurou até o período tardo-antigo. Após identificar a permanência do modelo proposto por Finley na historiografia recente sobre o tema, este estudo recorre à documentação epigráfica com o objetivo de demonstrar sua compatibilidade com uma proposta de estudo da África Romana sob uma perspectiva mediterrânea, e que ressalte a integração dessa mesma escravidão ao sistema imperial romano. Por meio da leitura e comentário de uma epístola de Agostinho de Hipona, por fim, também são sugeridas possíveis conexões entre o comércio de pessoas escravizadas em África a outros mercados e territórios do Império Romano Tardio.

## PALAVRAS-CHAVES

África Romana. Epigrafia. Agostinho de Hipona.

**F**ew objections have been raised against the widely recognized assertion that Moses Finley's (1912–1986) work significantly influenced the study of Ancient History. His writings have been, and continue to be, pivotal starting points for numerous investigations into ancient societies and their various aspects, including economy, urbanism, politics, citizenship, democracy, slavery, and historiography. In several cases, discussions in these fields have been redefined and reoriented based on his propositions and theories (Morris, 2003). Whether analyzing his debates with Marxist traditions—marked by his well-known skepticism toward the use of concepts like "social class" for the study of ancient societies—or examining his studies on ancient economies, which align with primitivist perspectives inspired by Karl Polanyi's works, the longevity of Finley's reflections in 21st-century historiography remains unquestionable. Similarly, contemporary studies on ancient slavery continue to uphold and build upon the explanatory models Finley initially proposed (Joly, 2005; 2010; Vlassopoulos, 2021; Joly; Knust, in this issue).

Although Moses Finley addressed the topic of slavery across various studies, it was in *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (1980) that the American historian consolidated their key interpretations of slavery in antiquity in a unified and in-depth manner. This volume, composed of four lectures delivered at the Collège de France between November and December 1978, revisits previously published issues while also introducing new assertions. In its first chapter, the book highlights the need to interpret modern historiography on ancient slavery through the lens of its alignment with the imperatives of its own time (Funari, 1992; Palmeira, 2020). Aligned with these propositions, recent research has explored the modern reception of ancient slavery, including its interpretations in light of the present, and even in 19th-century Brazil (Santana, 2014; Chalhoub, 2015; Silva, 2021). For the purposes of this collection, however, another element presented in this volume is particularly relevant: Moses Finley's (1980) definition of a "slave society."

At the very beginning of the aforementioned work, in a well-known passage, Finley (1980, p. 09) established a distinction, fundamental to his argument, between societies with slavery and those he called genuine slave societies. For the author of *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (1980), the restricted group of slave societies would bring together modern experiences of slavery (practiced in Brazil, the Caribbean and the South of the United States), but also ancient ones. In the case of Antiquity, Finley (1980) highlights the slave experiences of Athens and other communities (during the 6th century BC), and Rome (from the 3rd century BC onwards). The author argues (Finley, 1980, p.80-81) that in slave societies, it would have been the labor of enslaved people that was the substantial source that maintained the elites, and no other forms of compulsory labor or free labor. It is, therefore, as ecumenically observed by Joly and Knust (here), a question about the location of slave labor within these societies. For Finley (1980, p.82): "They were the slave societies of Graeco-Roman antiquity, and they were that precisely because of the location of slavery within them". Within the model of slave society proposed by Finley (1980), moreover, three preconditions should coexist: private property, the existence of markets and the lack of an internal labor force:

The first, in a world which was overwhelmingly agrarian, is private ownership of land, with sufficient concentration in some hands to need extra-familial labor for the permanent workforce. The second is a sufficient development of commodity production and markets (for the present discussion it does not

matter whether the market is a distant one, an export-market in the popular sense, or a nearby urban center). [...] The third is a negative condition, the unavailability of an internal labor supply, compelling the employers of labor to turn to outsiders (Finley, 1980, p.86).

The paradigm of slave society proposed by Finley (1980) invites reflection on how the American historian conceptualized Ancient History in theoretical and methodological terms throughout his intellectual trajectory. First, Finley's writings, including *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology*, reject modern categories like "social class" (see Finley, 1986, p.64, *passim*) in favor of analyzing ancient terminology preserved in primarily textual documentation (Funari, 1982). This approach, as Palmeira (2020) asserts, is tied to Finley's aim to "understand the meanings that ancient populations ascribed to their social experiences" (Palmeira, 2020, p.290). Consequently, his works suggest a differentiation or rupture between the (modern) historical investigation and the (ancient) historical object of study, implying that many questions posed to antiquity could not even have been conceived by members of ancient societies themselves (Palmeira, 2020, p.291).

In the second instance, gaining a deeper understanding of the paradigm of a slave society proposed by Finley requires recognizing his use of Max Weber's concept of the "ideal type." Despite the intrinsic irony in Ian Morris's assertion (2003, p.16) that identifies a "neo-Weberian renaissance" in Finley's writings, it has been acknowledged (Palmeira, 2005; Funari; Garrafoni, 2006) that Finley's reliance on the notable German thinker's work extends beyond the well-known discussion regarding the use of concepts like order and social strata for studying antiquity. By sidelining individual experiences and facts, employing them only to highlight the predominance of socially standardized behaviors (Palmeira, 2020, p.291), Finley adopts Weber's ideal types to propose generalizing explanatory models, such as "slave society" and "consumer city." These models offer simplified, subjective, and approximate explanations of ancient social realities. Evaluating the use of Weber's so-called "ideal types," Finley (2003, pp.255-256), in his commentary<sup>1</sup> on studies addressing the understanding of the ancient economy, clarifies:

Any analysis of the ancient economy that aims to be more than a mere antiquarian list of discrete data must necessarily employ models (Max Weber's ideal types) (p.255). [...] For me, it is clear that this is the way to advance our knowledge of the ancient economy and not the continuous mistake of focusing on particular 'facts' (Finley, 2003, p.256).

In addition to the recognition "that ideal types were, for Weber, a tool for assessing reality and not necessarily a faithful representation or substantive portion of it" (Palmeira, 2020, p.293), critiques have also been leveled at the normative, generalizing, and homogenizing nature of Finley's models (Funari; Garrafoni, 2006), including his proposition of a "slave society." Conceived as an explanatory model juxtaposing forms of slavery practiced across different societies, both ancient and modern, this concept overlooks the historical specificities underlying slavery within these varied societies in general, and particularly among those identified by Finley (1980) as representative of this model. Through a productive dialogue with sociological and anthropological theories regarding human enslavement, scholars have highlighted the merits of approaches that consider the specificity of slavery processes (Kopytoff, 1982) in a given society. Each society, including

<sup>1</sup> This commentary, entitled "Further Thoughts", was originally published in the second (revised) edition of the book The Ancient Economy, dated 1985. In the present study, we use the 2003 version of this same volume (La Economía de la Antigüedad), translated into Spanish, and published by Fondo de Cultura Económica (Mexico).

those in antiquity, established its own criteria for enslavement, possibilities, and limits for emancipation, and the eventual (re)integration of freed individuals into social structures (Joly, 2005).

The endogenous nature of the concept of "slave society" as proposed by Finley (1980), as noted by Joly and Knust (2024), also tends to overlook the extraterritorial aspects of ancient slavery, which involve complex connections between local and global realities (Funari, in press). These dynamics can only be fully understood through a Mediterranean perspective of these interactions. The case of Roman Africa, as discussed below, allows for considerations on how the rise of the Roman Empire and its accompanying process of political and economic integration imparted a Mediterranean character to the slavery practiced in this region.

## SLAVERY IN ROMAN AFRICA: A SLAVE SOCIETY?

In a recent study on slavery in Roman Africa, Brent Shaw (2017, p. 50) examined whether the North African region during the imperial period could be classified as a slave society. His response to this question considered the geographical dimension underlying ancient slavery. Shaw (2017, p. 50, *passim*) argued that societies employing slavery as property exhibited a maritime character. Situated within the Mediterranean maritime environment, Roman territory—including North Africa—would not be an exception to this principle: "From the ancient Black Sea to the modern burgeoning of the Atlantic system, this type of slavery was also an insular fact. The Mediterranean world of the Roman was no exception" (Shaw, 2017, p. 50).

Despite the connectivity provided by the sea, Shaw (2017) attributes only a peripheral, minority role to slavery practiced in the provincial territories of North Africa, especially when compared to other Roman provinces of the first centuries. The justification for this definition, in the wake of many other studies dedicated to the subject (Whittaker, 1978; Lepelley, 1981; Magalhães de Oliveira, 2014), would reside in the fact that slavery, in North African territory, coexisted with other forms of compulsory labor (Shaw, 2017, p.50). Indeed, the epigraphic documentation originating from North Africa allows us to understand the so-called *Lex Manciana*. Also known as the "Inscription of Henchir Mettich" (CIL VIII, 0025902), the record in question, drawn up officially by the Roman authorities, responds favorably to the demand presented by the *coloni* (a group formed by sharecroppers and workers of indigenous origin) who worked the aforementioned imperial land under a shareholding regime (Magalhães de Oliveira, 2008). By regulating the conditions for the agricultural exploitation of uncultivated imperial lands, the law in question ensured the so-called "own use" by the *coloni* of the new lands. In fact, in addition to the typical propositions of the agricultural dimension, the *Law of Mancia* also granted the *coloni* the right to "[...] bequeath, mortgage or sell previously uncultivated lands for cultivation, but only on the condition that they cultivate them continuously" (Magalhães de Oliveira, 2008, p.119).

Whether extensive or limited, ancient documentation (textual and material) attests to the presence of servile relations in North African territory from more distant periods that precede the conquest of Carthage by the Romans in 146 BC (Matilla Vicente, 1977; Shaw, 2017). In line with the heterogeneity of the servile institution carried out in Roman Africa, the sources on the people enslaved in this territory are diverse and distinct. Recent historiography (Blázquez, 1998; Revilla, 2013; Magalhães de Oliveira, 2014; Bermejo, 2018; Fávaro, Nápoli; Lima, 2019) has studied North African slavery based on mosaics and their iconography, seals applied to amphorae of olive oil, ancient textual tradition (with emphasis on the writings of Apuleius of Madaura, for example) and Christian tradition (such as the Martyrdom of Perpetua and Felicity and the writings of Augustine of Hippo, in a later period).

With regard to epigraphic documentation, for example, we can mention the so-called Tariff of Zaraï (CIL VIII, 04508), originating from a region of the same name and which in Berber evokes the idea of a region of passage (Trousset, 2002). The document in question, dated 202 AD, is a stele measuring 1.28 m (height) x 0.40 m (width), and bearing a long Latin inscription of a customs nature, the interpretation of which has been challenging since its discovery in 1858 (France, 2014; Albana, 2020). In a recent study, Jérôme France (2014) highlighted the uniqueness and historical importance of this inscription, associating it with at least four main themes:

C'est aussi un texte fort riche, dont le contenu intéresse au moins quatre grands aspects: la réglementation et la procédure douanières ; les relations entre le portorium et l'armée, spécialement dans une zone qui est fortement marquée par l'implantation militaire ; la question des marchés locaux ; les circuits commerciaux à grande et petite échelle, la nature des produits concernés et la situation de la douane de Zaraï, en particulier dans le contexte de la frontière africaine... (France, 2014, p.94. Grifos do autor).

It is also a very rich text, whose content pertains to at least four major aspects: customs regulations and procedures; the relationship between customs duties and the military, especially in a zone strongly marked by military presence; the question of local markets; trade circuits on large and small scales; the nature of the goods involved; and the situation of the Zaraï customs office, particularly in the context of the African frontier ... (France, 2014, p.94, Author's translation).

Among the “products” listed by the Zaraï Tariff (CIL VIII, 04508) as subject to taxation, we can observe the presence of enslaved people. In general, as proposed by Troussert (2002), the inscription in question attests that Roman Africa occupies a privileged position, of commercial connection, between the Mediterranean world and other distant areas. Given the impossibility of attributing a definitive origin to the people who were being traded in a servile condition, and who are mentioned in the first lines of the customs document, the author even suggests (Troussert, 2002, p.364 *passim*) a possible connection with the slave trade carried out by the Garamantes, responsible for supplying enslaved people to the Mediterranean, already well known in current historiography (Fentress, 2011). Below, we present the inscription known as Tarifa de Zaraï (CIL VIII, 04508) and an authorial proposal for its translation:

Impp(eratoribus) Caes(aribus) L(ucio) Septimi/o Severo III et M(arco) Aurelio / Antonino Augg(ustis) Piis co(n)s(ulibus) / lex portus post discessum / coh(ortis) instituta / lex capitularis mancipia sin/gula |(denarii) I s(emis) equ(u)m equam |(denarii) I s(emis) / mulum mulam |(denarii) I s(emis) asinum / bovem s(emis) porcum |(sestertius) porcellu(m) |(dupondius) / ovem caprum |(sertertius) edum agnu(m) |(dupondius) / pecora in nundinium immunia / lex vestis peregrinae abollam ce/natori(a)m |(denarii) I s(emis) tunicam ternar/iam |(denarii) I s(emis) lodicem s(emis) sagum / purpurium |(denarius) cetera vestis / afra in singulas lacinias s(emis) / lex coriaria corium perfectu(m) s(emis) / pilos(um) |(dupondius) pelle(m) ovella(m) caprin(am) |(dupondius) / scordiscum malac(um) p(ondo) C [s(emis)] / rudia p(ondo) C s(emis) glutinis p(ondo) X |(dupondius) spon/giaru(m) p(ondo) X |(dupondius) lex portus m(a)xim(a) / pe<c=Q>uaria iument(a) immunia ce/teri rebus sicut ad caput / vini amp(horam) gari amp(horam) |(sestertius) / palmae p(ondo) C s(emis) fici p(ondo) C [1] vatassae <m=N>odios dec[em] / resina(m) pice(m) alum<e=l>n {in} p(ondo) C ferr[i]

The pious emperors Caesar Augustus Lucius Septimius Severus, for the third time, and Marcus Aurelius Antoninus, being consuls, the customs tariff, after the withdrawal of the cohort. Tariff per head: each slave one denarius and a half, horse and mare one denarius and a half, male mule and female mule one denarius and a half, oxen half a denarius, pig one sesterce, suckling pig one dupondius, sheep and goat one sesterce, kid and lamb, two asses, cattle from the local fair are exempt. Tariff for outer garments: one banquet garment one denarius and a half, one tunic of three aurei one denarius and a half, one linen cloth half a denarius, one purple garment one denarius, other African garments each half a denarius. Tariff for leather materials: well-finished leather, half a denarius, hairy, one dupond, sheep or goat hair, one dupond, brushed leather, one hundred pounds each, half a denarius, rawhide, one hundred pounds each, half a denarius, gum, one ten pounds each, one dupond, sponges, one ten pounds each, one dupond. General customs tariff: grazing and pack animals are exempt, for the others, as above, an amphora of wine or garum, one sestertius, dates, one hundred pounds, half a denarius, figs, one hundred pounds each, half a denarius, ten modios of vatassas, ten modios of walnuts, one hundred pounds each of resin, bitumen, alum, may pass exempt (CIL VIII, 04508, Author's translation).

Beyond the Zaraï inscription (CIL VIII, 04508), epigraphic records related to the enslaved population in North Africa reveal a significant number of occupations, both agricultural and non-agricultural, performed by individuals under servitude. The frequent mention of professions, serving as a form of recognition for labor despite the hardships of slavery, can be seen in various inscriptions from African territories. This includes, for instance, the freed bakers of Carthage (CIL VIII, 024678)<sup>2</sup>, a city where the nutrix Gellia was also buried (CIL VIII, 013191)<sup>3</sup>. Mentions of other professions, such as shoemakers<sup>4</sup>, butchers<sup>5</sup>, and glassmakers<sup>6</sup>, among others, are also documented (Matilla Vicente, 1977). These inscriptions, alongside epigraphic records of official public slaves (Matilla Vicente, 1977; Carlsen, 2020), underscore the constant presence and contribution of enslaved individuals to the daily life of North African cities during the Roman era. Although their role was comparatively minor—whether evaluated against other provinces or the agricultural work of tenant farmers—slavery undeniably played a significant part in the economy and administration of Roman North Africa.

Intersected by commercial land and maritime routes connecting the Mediterranean to the heart of the African continent, the slavery practiced in this territory far exceeds the “slave society” model previously proposed by Moses Finley (1980), which emphasized only

<sup>2</sup> (CIL VIII, 024678), L(uci) Atilius L(uci) l(ibertus) Hiero furnari(us) / Valeria l(mulieris) l(iberta) Euterpe furnaria / vivit / C(aius) Valerius C(ai) l(ibertus) Dionisius triari(us) / vivit. Author's translation: Lúcio Atílio Hiero, freedman of Lúcio, baker. Valéria Euterpe, woman, freed, lives. Gaius Dionísio, freed, triary, lives.

<sup>3</sup> (CIL VIII, 013191), Ge]llia En[3] / [3] nutrix [3] / [3 v]ixit an(nos). Author's translation: Gélia, wet nurse, [...] lived [...] years.

<sup>4</sup> (CIL VIII, 016710), D(is) M(anibus) s(acrum) / Vitalis / sutor / v(ixit) a(nnos) XXXV / Iucundus / frat(ri) car(issimo) fe(cit). Author's translation: Consecrated to the manes gods. To Vital, the shoemaker, who lived for thirty-five years. Jocundus made [this monument] for his dearest brother. (CIL VIII, 09329 = CIL VIII, 020939), [I]ngenuis Sutor / Dom(i)no Saturno v(otum). Author's translation: Naive, the shoemaker. I vote for Saturn, the Lord.

<sup>5</sup> (CIL VIII, 09332), Africanus / Ianio votum / solvit libens / animis. Author's translation: Africanus, the butcher, fulfilled the vow of his own free will.

<sup>6</sup> (CIL VIII, 09430), Saburio Antae vi/triari et Paulas (=Paulae) f(ilius) vix/it menses sex dulcis h(ic) s(itus) e(st). Author's translation: Sabúrio and Anta, glaziers, and Paulas, son, who lived for six sweet months and here rests.

endogenous factors. The Mediterranean connection of slavery in Roman Africa, in turn, persisted into Late Antiquity and can be observed through the works of the well-known bishop of Hippo: Aurelius Augustine.

## AUGUSTINE AND SLAVERY IN ROMAN AFRICA

Slavery in the North African territory persisted well into Late Antiquity, as evidenced by the writings of Saint Augustine, Bishop of Hippo, which reflect its endurance, scope, and connections to other regions of the Ancient Mediterranean in the 5th century CE. Augustine addressed the topic of human enslavement with varying depth across his diverse theological and philosophical works. In his theological reflections, Augustine argued that servile relationships were not natural or inherent to humanity but rather constituted a "just punishment" for humanity's sins. He stated: *Condicio quippe servitutis iure intellegitur imposita peccatori* [Indeed, it is understood that servitude was justly imposed upon sinners] (AUGUST. *De civ. D.* XIX, 15. Author's translation).

Reiterating the principles of authority presented in the pseudo-epigraphical New Testament epistles (Lourenço, 2018, p.17; Serrano Madroñal, 2019), Augustine's writings in *The City of God* (XIX, 14) defend the importance of perpetuating hierarchies within the domestic sphere, aligning with the obedience principles underpinning relationships involving enslaved individuals. On the (supposed) right to care for, command, and obey for the sake of "domestic peace," Augustine emphasizes:

First, therefore, belongs the care of one's own. He has the most opportune and easiest chance to aid them, whether due to natural order or to human society itself. On this, the Apostle [Paul] says: 'Those who do not provide for their own, especially those of their household, have denied the faith and are worse than unbelievers.' [1 Tim. 5:8, cited in the Latin *Vetus Latina* translation]. Hence originates domestic peace, that is, the ordered concord of commanding and obeying among those who dwell together. Those who care command: as the husband to the wife, the parents to the children, and the masters to the slaves. Those who are cared for obey: as the wives to the husbands, the children to the parents, and the slaves to the masters. But in the household of the just man, who lives by faith and still journeys toward the heavenly city, those who command serve those over whom they appear to rule. Thus, they do not command for the pleasure of commanding but out of the duty to care; not for the pride of governance but for the mercy of provision" (AUGUST. *De civ. D.* XIX, 14. Author's translation).

Although Augustine recognized the unnatural nature of slavery, he did not propose the creation of a society devoid of slavery (Garnsey, 1996). This observation can also be gleaned from a second type of Augustinian writing transmitted to posterity: his epistles. When compared to other works preserved from Antiquity, Augustine's writings exhibit remarkable organization and consistency. Not only did Augustine himself undertake revisions of his works (*Retractationes*), but the contributions of Possidius, his friend and first biographer (responsible for compiling a small index (*Indiculum*) of his writings), were crucial to ensuring the relatively intact transmission of Augustine's works to later generations (Brown, 2011; Magalhães de Oliveira, 2020).

The caution demonstrated by Augustine and Possidius, however, did not prevent some of Augustine's writings from being lost. Indeed, several of his epistles (and sermons), although listed in ancient indices, were only rediscovered in the 20th century (Brown, 2011). This is the case, for example, of the epistles known as *Divjak* (01\*-29\*), found in the

Municipal Library of Marseille in the 1970s by scholar Johannes Divjak. Similarly, in the 1990s, philologist and historian François Dolbeau discovered another set of Augustine's sermons in Mainz (Brown, 2011). As highlighted by historiography (Lepelley, 1981; Brown, 2011; Elm, 2017; Magalhães de Oliveira, 2020), the epistolary documentation offers a unique perspective on the daily activities of the Bishop of Hippo: a prosaic view that often contrasts with the authoritarianism and severity present in many of his theological works.

Regarding slavery specifically, it is essential to highlight the significance of the so-called *Epistle 10* (Divjak), written by Saint Augustine. Addressed to Alypius, Bishop of Tagaste and envoy to the imperial court (Serrano Madroñal, 2019), this letter was produced between the years 422 and 423, or possibly 428 (Elm, 2017; Serrano Madroñal, 2019). It takes the form of a *commonitorium*, a confidential memorandum intended to remain strictly between the two interlocutors (Elm, 2017). While the epistle reflects Augustine's concern about the persistence of Pelagian ideals (Magalhães de Oliveira, 2020), its main subject is the illegal enslavement and trade of individuals from Roman Africa to other Mediterranean territories. Consulting with other clerics and advisors to seek legal counsel on addressing the kidnapping and sale of free persons from African territories (Lepelley, 1983), Saint Augustine reports the following to his friend and colleague, Bishop Alypius<sup>7</sup>:

2. I would like to add something: there are so many slave traders, who in Africa are called mangones, or adorners, that Africa is emptied of people, sent to the overseas provinces. People born free but traded! A few are sold according to Roman law, to work for twenty-five years, but the vast majority are not. They, on the contrary, are bought and sold as slaves, here, also sold as slaves overseas. It is very rare that they buy slaves from their actual and legal masters. I will say more: this gang of traffickers, with so many seducers and predators, acts in an organized manner and in gangs. They shout to scare, wear military or savage clothing and operate in remote and deserted places, invading lands and kidnapping people by force and selling them to merchants or traffickers (AUGUST. *Ep. 10\* Divjak*. Translation: Silva; Funari, 2022).

7. If I were to list crimes of this type, only those we know firsthand, it would not be possible. Look at this case and imagine what happens throughout Africa, particularly on the coast. Four months ago, Galatian traffickers captured people from all over, especially from Numidia. These Galatians are the biggest human traffickers on the coast of Hippo. There was no shortage of believers, aware of our charity, who reported this practice to the Church. I was outside Hippo. At the time, 120 were freed by our believers, some already on board, others hidden before boarding. It was possible to learn that five or six were sold by their own parents. Of all the others, it is impossible to hold back the tears, upon learning of the circumstances, through seducers and predators, in which they ended up in the hands of the Galatians (AUGUST. *Ep. 10\* Divjak*. Translation: Silva; Funari, 2022).

The referenced Augustinian *Epistle 10* (Divjak) provides what may be the most comprehensive account of the trafficking of enslaved persons in Antiquity. Among the details presented by the Bishop of Hippo, notable points include the violent actions of traffickers,

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<sup>7</sup> In this text, we reproduce only two of the excerpts that make up the aforementioned Augustinian epistle. The full Latin text, as well as its translation into Portuguese, can be consulted at: Silva; F. N.; Funari, P. P. A. Translation of Saint Augustine's *Epistle 10* (Divjak). *PhaoS. Rev. Est. Class.*, Campinas, v. 22, p. 1-10, 2022. Available at: <https://econtents.bc.unicamp.br/inpec/index.php/phaos/article/view/16647>. Accessed on: October, 20<sup>th</sup> 2024.

carried out individually or in groups, targeting peasants; the redistribution of enslaved persons to other Mediterranean territories; and the complex involvement of religious leaders, particularly bishops, in addressing illegal slavery and the commercialization of individuals reduced to servitude. Acknowledging that freeborn individuals (*ingenui*) were being kidnapped, enslaved, and sold in other provincial territories, Augustine expresses frustration with the inefficacy of Roman laws against *plagium* in African territory. He emphasizes that even members of the Church were implicated in the sale of free persons into the slave trade.

Despite the clear dissatisfaction and occasional rhetorical exaggerations presented in the epistle (10\* *Divjak*) addressed to the Bishop of Tagaste, it is evident that Augustine's efforts to secure the release of enslaved individuals were carried out, or sought to be carried out, within the legal framework of the Empire and its legislation concerning enslavement (Lepelley, 1981). In this regard, the sender hopes that his friend Alypius might achieve some success on this matter during his stay at the imperial court in Italian territory (Serrano Madroñal, 2019). The law referenced by Augustine, promulgated by Honorius, has not survived to the present day. This legal measure, however, prescribed physical punishments, torture, and perpetual exile for slave traffickers, known as *mangones*<sup>8</sup>. Augustine of Hippo was seemingly reluctant to enforce the penalties outlined in the legislation, as he understood it was not intended to punish "traffickers who deceive and abduct free persons [...]" (AUGUST. Ep. 10 *Divjak*, 3).

Although the memorandum emphasizes that the abductions carried out by traffickers targeted individuals from various social groups, it particularly highlights that one of the primary victims of the *mangones* were rural workers, or *coloni*. According to Claude Lepelley (1983), this vulnerability derived from the marginal social position occupied by rural workers in Roman Africa, situated between servitude and freedom. The abduction and sale of free individuals into slavery (*plagium*) were not novel practices among the Romans, nor unfamiliar to Augustine himself. In one of his letters addressed to Hesychius of Salona (Ep. 199, 46), dated between 420/421 CE, the Bishop of Hippo mentions the abduction of "barbarian" individuals who had yet to encounter the Christian gospel. Lepelley (1983) posits that such invasions likely targeted Moorish peoples beyond Roman borders and laws. In *Epistle 10 (Divjak)*, Augustine references a possible escalation in the activities of the *mangones* in Numidia. Studies by Susanna Elm (2017) and Raúl Serrano Madroñal (2019), who date the letter to around 428 CE, suggest that the intensification of slave trafficking incursions in Numidian lands may have been linked to the Vandals' activities in the Iberian Peninsula and Mauretania. Their presence disrupted the usual trade routes for enslaved persons in the Mediterranean, redirecting these traffickers' operations toward regions like Hippo.

In this instance, too, we are presented with an institution that connects distant and distinct regions and peoples, which can only be comprehended through an exclusively endogenous perspective by adopting a forced and overly generalizing approach. It is undeniable, therefore, that the study of ancient slavery in general, and the servile relations carried out in Roman Africa in particular, can greatly benefit from a Mediterranean and globalizing historical perspective.

<sup>8</sup> As demonstrated in the study by Raúl Serrano Madroñal (2019), the term *mangones* was already used in classical Latin (by authors such as Pliny the Elder, Martial and Macrobius) to refer to those who trafficked enslaved people. In etymological terms, the author argues, the word *mango* would derive from the Greek verb μαγγάνευω, used to refer to the idea of "using magic or deception" (Serrano Madroñal, 2019, p.253). The term "Galatians" used by Augustine of Hippo, in the same way, would also have been used since the republican period to refer to traders of enslaved people.

## FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

By adopting the Weberian ideal-type concept as its foundational framework, the model of "slave society" proposed by Moses Finley (1980) proves to be imprecise and overly generalizing when applied to specific cases. The study of slavery in Roman Africa, as demonstrated in this article, reveals particularities that significantly exceed the strictly endogenous configurations (Joly; Knust, in this issue) of the explanatory model proposed by the American historian in *Ancient Slavery and Modern Ideology* (1980).

In contrast to Moses Finley's (1980) concept of "slave society," it seems pertinent, first and foremost, to acknowledge the existence of slave relations in Roman Africa beyond their "location" in African cities or countryside. Indeed, as evidenced by examples from epigraphic documentation, enslaved individuals, across a variety of occupations, played a significant role in the economy and even in provincial administration. The so-called "Cemetery of the Officials of Carthage," a designation by French historiography since its discovery, contains a notable number of funerary inscriptions for public slaves and their families who lived in the city between the first and third centuries (Carlsen, 2020).

Secondly, slavery in Roman Africa was fully incorporated into the ongoing dynamics of Mediterranean integration, both in the classical and late antiquity periods. The trade of enslaved individuals (transformed into commodities), as evidenced by customs taxation, was also part of the long-distance commerce conducted along maritime and terrestrial routes. These routes connected African territories not only to distant and desert regions but also to the Roman Mediterranean. This interconnectedness is further corroborated through the reading and examination of Augustine's *Epistle 10 (Divjak)*, which outlines a dynamic of abduction, enslavement, and trade of enslaved individuals across an interprovincial framework.

Slavery practiced in North Africa, thirdly, coexisted with agricultural labor performed by sharecropper *coloni*. The distinction between the *colonus* and enslaved individuals was tenuous and not always fully observed or understood by contemporaries (Lepelley, 1983). Augustine, an advocate for the legal differentiation between *coloni* and enslaved persons, expressed dissatisfaction upon witnessing free individuals being unjustly reduced to servitude. In this context, his writings suggest that, during his time, there may have been an intertwining of the compulsory labor performed by African *coloni* with a slavery system conducted under a broader Mediterranean framework. The complexity arising from the intersection of local and global realities, as appears to be the case with Roman Africa, cannot be adequately addressed within the framework of Moses Finley's (1980) concept of a slave society.

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## NOTAS DE AUTOR

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### AUTHORSHIP

**Filipe Noé da Silva:** PhD in History, State University of Santa Catarina, Departament of History, Florianópolis, SC, Brasil

### ADDRESS FOR CORRESPONDENCE

Inserir endereço completo.

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