

CORRESPONDENCE¹

Professor E. M. Wood writes:

I suppose we must all learn to accept the convention that reviewers may say whatever they like, true or false, and without the customary constraints of scholarly rigour or rules of evidence, while authors are expected to rise above the temptation to reply. But surely there are limits. Scott Meikle (*CR* 39 [1989], 278–9) is, of course, entitled to dislike my views; but should he not try to get them at least approximately right before he makes up his mind?

The core of Meikle's review of my book, *Peasant-Citizen and Slave: The Foundations of Athenian Democracy* (London: Verso, 1988), reads as follows: 'Her chief stalking horse is Ste. Croix (*The Class Struggle in the Ancient Greek World*), whom she represents as perpetuating the view that peasants widely employed slaves, and against whom she inveighs with an acidity which is unfortunate since she has clearly misunderstood him. She gives little weight to the fact that Ste. Croix, when speaking about slavery in ancient agriculture, concentrates on the lands of the propertied classes, the *euporoi* or *oligoi*, and not, as she does, on those of the *aporoi* or *polloi*. Ste. Croix is also at pains to make clear that we should regard the Graeco-Roman world as a "slave-society", *not* in the sense that the bulk of production was done by unfree labour, but in the sense that the propertied classes derived their surplus (in Marx's sense) from the exploitation of unfree labour, in which chattel slavery played a central role until the third century A.D. W. ignores this too (though, oddly, she adverts to it elsewhere), so that much of her invective is beside the point. It is obvious that she has a much weaker command of ancient evidence than Ste. Croix, and since her case is largely argued as a rebuttal of his work, it is especially serious that she should have so misunderstood him.'

I shall leave aside the fact that only one section of one chapter of my book is in any way concerned with Ste. Croix. It will be enough simply to quote what I actually wrote. After examining an article by Michael Jameson concerned with slave-utilisation by small farmers, I turn to the question of large landowners and 'the degree to which wealthy Athenians relied on slaves to produce their wealth', continuing as follows (pp. 63–4). 'These issues are highlighted in the work of G. E. M. de Ste. Croix. Since Ste. Croix regards Jameson's article as the *only* recent study to assign slavery its proper role and to present the evidence accurately, he presumably accepts its reasoning about slavery on peasant holdings. [There follows a footnote, citing the appropriate reference in Ste. Croix (p. 506), and continuing thus: "It is not clear that this endorsement of Jameson's views on the use of slaves by peasants is compatible with Ste. Croix's often repeated observation that the bulk of Athenian small producers stood outside the system of exploitation and seldom went beyond family labour. (See, for example, pp. 33 and 52–3.) In fact, where Jameson would undoubtedly regard Athens as a "slave-society" precisely on the grounds that slavery was so widespread throughout the social spectrum, Ste. Croix generally argues almost the reverse: the system of exploitation, the form in which surplus is extracted from producers, and not the form in which production itself takes place, is the essential characteristic of any society. Athens can, therefore, be regarded as a slave society *despite* the fact that free producers had such a large share in production, precisely because free producers can be set aside as having little part in the system of exploitation." This, incidentally, is the second reference in my book to Ste. Croix's views on this point.] His own arguments, however, seem at least implicitly to have more to do with larger landowners, though we are never told how far down the social scale we should take examples drawn from literary accounts of wealthy Athenians. At any rate, Ste. Croix's discussion, more than Jameson's, allows us to assess the state of the evidence concerning agricultural slavery on the larger properties where we should most expect to find it.'

My argument then proceeds by critically examining the evidence adduced by Ste. Croix.

In short, Meikle accuses me of seriously misunderstanding Ste. Croix (in a way that vitiates my whole argument) because I 'give little weight' to the fact that his treatment of slavery concentrates on large properties, when in fact my discussion of Ste. Croix has to do *precisely* with large properties. Meikle maintains that I 'ignore' the fact that for Ste. Croix the critical

¹ It is the policy of the *Classical Review* to limit correspondence on the subject of reviews to a representation by the author and (if so desired) a reply by the reviewer.

consideration is the form in which propertied classes appropriated their surpluses, when in fact I not only stress his views on that point but discuss his argument on slavery *precisely* in order to explore the degree to which large proprietors derived their wealth from the labour of slaves. What more can I say?

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Dr Scott Meikle writes:

Professor Wood misses the point of the criticism, and perhaps I am partly to blame. Her object had been to show that slavery was not 'widespread' in agriculture (79). This is a thesis about numbers, and even if it were true (which she fails to prove) it would not necessarily be incompatible, as she seems to think even in her reply, with Ste. Croix's thesis which is about the origin of the surplus derived by the propertied class, a minority.

There is a limited number of ways in which surplus can be pumped out of the direct producers; if there are no markets in capital and wage-labour it will have to be done through some form of unfree labour; if debt-bondage and serfdom are unavailable, chattel slavery will be used. This is the gist of Ste. Croix's main argument, not, as she represents it, that chattel slavery is 'inherently more profitable' than other methods of surplus extraction (64, 65, 72).

If Professor Wood were right that the surplus was not largely produced by slaves then how was it produced? For one of her possible alternatives, leasing by landowners, she could produce only one 'notable' piece of evidence, *Lysias* 7.4–11, on which she laid great stress (73, 182–3). I showed in my review that this passage tells directly against her. Another obvious alternative, hired labour that was regular and not merely casual or seasonal, she admits was 'relatively rare in Athens' (71). Her argument fails and her position becomes incoherent. She would have done better to stick more closely to what I suspect was her original intention: to debunk what her first chapter calls 'The Myth of the Idle Mob'.

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