Ennio Biondi's monograph fills up a significant gap in historiographical studies on slavery in the ancient world, particularly concerning nomadic societies such as those of the Scythians, that is, societies that have left no written sources, and on which we only have reports by classical historians. First, I will present the work and its parts, in trying to highlight the nubs of the arguments, then I will single out two points that I consider revealing of their importance not restricted to Classical Studies.

The work is divided into nine parts: Introduction, 3 chapters, Conclusions, Appendix, Bibliography, Index of names, and Index of passages cited. The Introduction (p. 13-19) opens with the incisive question «was the Scythian a slave civilization?», thus delimiting the gap the book fills up and, at the same time, the *status quaestionis* from the works of Lorkipanitzé & Lévêque (1990-1999) and Khazanov (2011). As a starting point, Biondi goes over three problems: that of the sources external to the Scythians, that of whom the Scythians were, and that of taking Herodotus as a privileged historical source to be examined through a multidisciplinary approach that interweaves archeology and anthropology, in the wake of what Dumézil had already done.

The first chapter, «The Scythians in Asia» (p. 21-80), is subdivided into 7 parts and discusses the relations between Scythians and Near Eastern empires based on specific paragraphs of Herodotus' book 1. The first part introduces and contextualizes the problem: based on the triad of poverty/mobility/ aggressiveness, the Scythian *logos* would be an interpretative model for distant realities, and the Scythians, a paradigm of the warlike nomad who moves by necessity. The second part describes the areas covered by Scythian migrations. The third part examines the characteristics of nomadism, which would have been invented by the Scythians according to Herodotus (p. 38-39), as well as the problem of Greek hostility against nomads because embodying the antinomy of civilization. This part also criticizes the assumption that nomadism predates sedentarism, in contrast to the classic Marxist interpretation (p. 44). The fourth part discusses Scythian forms of domination articulated around forms of dependence (endogenous and exogenous) and tribute (p. 47). For the Scythians case, however, the exam shall be more complex, since the existence of tribute supposes the existence of a State, something, however, that the Scythians did not have (p. 52). The fifth part focuses on social and political aspects of the Scythian domination, highlighting initially its extension (from the heart of Asia to Egypt and the region of Palestine), the heterogeneity of the groups designated as Scythians, and the importance of the use of the horse and the speed of displacement it provides against sedentary populations. Additionally, this part also discusses the problem of the existence of Scythian cultivators, which Herodotus distinguishes as *aroteres* (specialized in the cultivation of wheat for trade) and *georgoi* (or farmers in a broad sense), a question that will be taken up in the Appendix. The sixth part contrasts Strabo's and Athenaeus' paragraphs with Herodotus' to better circumscribe the latter's singularity, who would have been the first Greek to describe the Scythians as a group of aggressive peoples (in addition to brief hints from Aeschylus); and concludes that the encounter between Scythians and sedentary Asian peoples would correspond to the contact between societies that presented a rational organization on a social level, on the one hand, and heterogeneous communities, structured according to complex and fluid hierarchies, on the other (p. 74). The seventh part brings together the conclusions to be drawn

from the chapter: that the tributary condition of nomadic peoples was equivalent to a condition that was neither free nor slave (p. 75); that it is impossible to speak of modes of production concerning the Scythians, whose organizational forms were too fluid (p. 77-78); and that tribute was a means of asserting domination and moments of predation (p. 80).

The second chapter, «The return of the Scythians to their own homes» (p. 81-135), is subdivided into 10 parts and focuses on the Herodotean *logos* on slaves blinded by Scythians (4.2.1) to discuss the problem of the encounter with the other and the slave mentality, as introduced by the first part. The second part discusses Herodotus' sources and literary models with emphasis on those inherited from Homer (the wandering of a hero and the discourse amidst a situation of impasse) and, above all, that – «molto erodoteo» (p. 84) – of original guilt at the base of war situations. Hdt.4.2.1 is fundamental because it is the first report in Greek literature on the functioning of forms of organization of slavery and personal dependence among the Scythians (p. 86). On a more incisive and programmatic page, which polemicizes against Finley's (1980) conclusions, Biondi emphasizes what he considers a duty: that of seeking whether beyond the models and possible ideologies of the time Herodotus would have tried to provide a true picture of slavery among the Scythians (p. 91-92). The third part is dedicated to examining the symbolism and realities of slavery manifested by the instrument that best characterized it, the whip. The next part details the difficulties of interpreting the passage under examination, insisting on the implausibility that all slaves were blinded, on the one hand, and the relationship between blinding and mare cheese production, through anthropological comparison with practices of Russian and Mongolian tribes, on the other. The fifth part examines the correlation between blindness and violence made by the Greeks, insisting on the need to contextualize what they used to understand by violence. Relying

on Taylor (2001), the author concludes for a practical purpose of blinding (p. 103-104): to prevent slaves from wandering the steppes with the horses they treated. The quick sixth part examines the dread aroused by slaves as a destabilizing factor for nomadic societies. The seventh part discusses the origin of slaves, as a rule, linked to war. The eighth part examines late mentions in literary or epigraphic sources on the circulation and use of Scythian slaves. Against Gavriljuk (2003), for whom there would be a clear antithesis between nomadic societies and a large presence of slaves, Biondi resumes Herodotus' paragraph on the sacrifices of slaves by the Scythians (4.62.3), which testifies in the opposite direction. Among the conclusions of this part, there is a point that might be worth digging a little deeper. Biondi concludes: «i rapporti tra l'Egeo ed il Mar Nero per quest'epoca non sono ancora consolidati così come lo saranno nel V secolo; di conseguenza anche le fonti non dicono molto» (p. 120). Surely the author has more data to support the statement; the way it is phrased though leaves the impression of upside down reasoning. The penultimate part discusses the relationship between forms of power and slavery among the Scythians, emphasizing the fact that in Herodotus there are few features of rational structuring linking authoritative relations between them (p. 122). Hence, the conjunction of societies dealing with centrifugal forces, the absence of State, and the fact that slavery is the result of military conquest form the primordial scenario of slave revolts against the power of aristocrats. The final considerations structured in the tenth part are based on a comparison between Herodotus' passages hitherto discussed and Aristotle, *Pol*.1253b27-1255a2.

The third chapter, «Other forms of slavery» (p. 127-152), is subdivided into 6 parts and discusses other Scythian customs mentioned in Herodotus' book 4, as well as other forms of subjection. The first part introduces the problem of other forms of slavery as one reads in Hdt.71-72, an issue that is developed in the

second part (the relationship between the burial of slaves in royal tombs with forms of religiosity and mentality) according to Ivantchik's (2011) terms, for whom evidence extracted from the traditions of other Iranian-speaking peoples can also be considered sources about the Scythian society (p. 130). As one of the foundations of the old «horror of barbarians», the problem of the burial of slaves is discussed in the context of the encounter between peoples. The third part examines the problem of the absence of a central authority among the Scythians and possible Persian influences on their forms of socio-political organization. The fourth part investigates whether the *therapontes* strangled with dead kings would reveal a type of privileged servitude or not. The penultimate part examines the situation of slave women who, as a rule in antiquity, were fully subjected to their masters. The last part aligns the conclusions of the chapter for the existence of servants and domestic workers as a sign of social evolution among nomads; and discusses the difficulties inherent in interpreting the situation of domestic slaves, which were perhaps understood as nothing more than luxury objects to be taken also beyond the grave.

The «Conclusions» (p. 153-160) reformulate, amplifying, the question of the introduction: instead of asking whether the Scythians would have been a slave society, it is preferable to ask whether slavery among them played a decisive role in their social, economic, and cultural lives. Answering this is not a problem-free activity though: first, it is necessary to address the difficulties of interpreting societies that are different from Greeks and Romans; for this, Biondi insists on the need to question the source, not to indiscreetly disprove it (p. 155-156); finally, it is still necessary to pay attention to the specificity of the phenomenon of slavery among Scythians. In the wake of Andreau & Descat (2009), the author returns to the distinction between «society with slaves» and «slave society», concluding that the Scythians were of the second type, as the ancient sources that dealt with them had also recognized.

The «Appendix» (p. 161-167) discusses Hdt.1.17-20 resuming the distinction between *aroteres* and *georgoi* Scythians to argue for the notion of intermediate forms between nomadism and sedentarization. The work also contains a Bibliography (p. 169-189), Index of names (p. 191-195), and Index of passages cited (p. 197-202).

As for the edition, I detected just a few typos (p. 54, 60, 79, 95, 118, 124, and 166) of writing, translation and/or printing that, if they do not alter the scientific value of the work in any way, it is desirable to be corrected in future editions.

Of the two points that I would like to single out as distinctive samples of the value of the work, the first concerns the quality of its multidisciplinary approach, which is at once as comprehensive as precisely executed, thus filling up another gap that has been increasingly noticed in the Classical Studies. The second point concerns an issue that, if understandably it remained just enunciated and subtly suggested throughout the work, I think it would be worth exploring in perhaps a second appendix: the criticism of the exploitation of man by man (p. 19). The theme is neither unprecedented nor unchallenged; detecting it, however, in the Classical Studies and exploring parallels between ancient sources and contemporary practices will never fail to be a pressing task, especially in times when contacts with several ways of otherness are as intense as never before, as well as all kinds of (mis)information about them, spread. Times that cry out for all the shrewdness of the *métier d'historien* when examining the past and, mainly, pointing out ways to better solve the many problems left by it. Biondi's monograph is a welcome invitation to this vast endeavor.

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