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***HO DOULOS TOU BASILEÔS: The Master-Slave Metaphor in the Construction of Elite Identity in Late Antiquity***

Recent work on the Julio-Claudian period has demonstrated how the metaphorical transposition of the language and imagery of slavery from the realm of social practice and juridical norms into the sphere of politics served not merely to describe, but also to contest and constrain the relationship between an emperor and his subjects, progressively shaping the character of the incipient Principate ("Modeling the Emperor" in M. Roller, *Constructing Autocracy* [2001] 213-87). In the hands of elites, such language was usually (but not invariably) derogative, and potentially subversive: rhetorical magnification of an emperor could be dismissed as servile flattery, while the characterization of oneself or one's peers as slaves of the emperor "implies the desirability of some sort of liberation from this master" (op. cit. 233).

The indisputable distance that separates the Julio-Claudian dynasty from the proto-Byzantine monarchy of the sixth century C.E. is aptly demonstrated by two inscriptions associated with Justinian's reconstruction of the Hexamilion wall at the Isthmus of Corinth. These acknowledge the contributions of one Victorinus, who describes himself both as the *pistos doulos* of Justinian and as *gnêsiôs douleuôn* (IG IV 204-205, see also SEG 2.377; bibliography in T. E. Gregory, *Isthmia* vol. 5 [1993] 12-14, D. Feissel and A. Philippidis-Braat, *Travaux et Mémoires* 9 [1985] 279-81). Other epigraphical evidence (e.g. SEG 11.52a, CIG 8740) gives us a reasonable basis for concluding that in the course of the sixth century comparable expressions identifying the dedicators as *pistoi* or *gnêsioi douloi* of the emperor became established as a recognized, and presumably an honorable, mode of self-identification for imperial functionaries. These expressions may plausibly be linked with the oath Justinian imposed upon such figures, obliging them to swear to render *gnêsia douleia* to himself and the empress Theodora (Nov. 8 iusur. [15 April 535], 89.50-90.3 Schoell-Kroll).

An explanation for this startling metaphorical turnabout must be sought with reference to contemporary social practices and juridical developments, and in particular to the complex interplay of classical Greco-Roman and Christian influences in the reproduction and dissemination of imperial ideology and elite identity at the end of antiquity. Just as the repeated invocations of master-slave metaphor illuminate the politics of the early Principate, a comparable sixth-century phenomenon furnishes a thread upon which the various bases of political and cultural allegiance in the latter period may be reconstructed. In this context, the questionable identification of the expression *ho doulos tou basileôs* as "an oriental usage" lacks explanatory force (M. Guarducci, *Hommages à Claire Préaux* [1975] 531; cf. H. Köpstein, in *Untersuchungen ausgewählter altgriechischer sozialer Typenbegriffe*, ed. E. C. Welskopf [1981] esp. pp. 322, 325 and nn. 17-21, 36; eadem, *Zur Sklaverei im ausgehenden Byzanz* [1966] esp. pp. 33-34; O. Treitinger, *Die oströmische Kaiser- und Reichsidee* [1956] 228 and n. 84; A. Kazhdan in *La notion de liberté au Moyen Age*, ed. G. Makdisi et al. [1985] 219-220; for the Near Eastern background, A. Missiou, *CQ* 43 [1993]).

Nor is the phenomenon monolithic: a profound political and cultural fault-line divides Victorinus, whose affirmation of *douleia* was presumably ungrudging, from figures like Procopius of Caesarea (*HA* 30.26) and John Lydus (*De mag.* 1.5-6), for whom the derogatory classical associations of such an affirmation were inescapable. These latter authors negotiated their own accommodations with autocracy through appeals to the authority of the past and recollections of an idealized imperial order, in which the Julio-Claudian legacy figured prominently. Their efforts both responded to, and attempted to shape, the regime's own attempts to lay claim to that legacy.