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## SLAVEGENTS: Enslaved persons in the making of societies and cultures in Western Eurasia and North Africa, 1000 BCE - 300 CE

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*SlaVEgents* is a project directed by Prof. K. Vlassopoulos and funded by a European Research Council Advanced Grant (2023-8). It aims to develop a revolutionary 'history from below' approach to slave agency and make a pioneering contribution to the study of ancient history, shifting the focus of research away from the elites towards the subaltern classes.

Studies of slavery have typically been approached from a top-down perspective, with a tendency to portray slaves as mere objects; *SLaVEgents* will shift from what was done to slaves to what slaves did, by focusing on the concept of slave agency. In addition to the daily resistance, slave agency can be defined as a conglomerate of highly diverse and contradictory phenomena involving diverse degrees of power and intentional action exercised by enslaved persons.

A significant focus of research is the study of the diverse identities, communities, and networks constructed by enslaved people. These identities were shaped by the roles that masters assigned to their slaves, which included domestic servants, agricultural workers, artisans and traders, bankers, bureaucrats, entertainers, teachers. At the same time, enslaved persons created a range of alternative identities on the basis of family, kinship, work, ethnicity, status and cult. The analysis will assess how these diverse identities influenced the ways in which agency was exercised. The objective is thus to evaluate the extent to which the agency of slaves impacted the economic, legal, political and religious systems of ancient societies.

*SlaVEgents* diverges from the conventional focus on Greek and Roman slavery; instead, it examines all ancient societies that engaged in the practice of slavery across Western Eurasia and North Africa, examining Greek and Roman slaveries alongside the slaveholding societies of Assyria, Babylonia, Judea, Syria, and Egypt.

The principal aim of the project is to construct an exhaustive prosopography of all known enslaved persons between 1000 BCE- 300 CE. In order to create the digital prosopography, the project team will conduct a comprehensive analysis of the sources (literary, documentary, epigraphic, legal and archaeological) written in the major ancient languages, including Aramaic, Assyrian, Babylonian, Egyptian, Hebrew, Greek and Latin. The open access digital database will include all relevant texts in the original language and in English translation, accompanied by maps, locations, and images. This approach will facilitate the examination of both the individual biographies of ancient slaves and the collective trends in their lives and will enable a systematic comparison of all ancient slave systems, encompassing their spatial diversity and temporal change.

The project will be conducted by an international research team comprising 25 researchers from Brazil, Britain, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Romania, Spain, and the USA. The interdisciplinary team will be based at the IMS in Rethymno under the guidance and supervision of Prof. Vlassopoulos. The *SlaVEgents* team will organise and participate in a series of academic meetings and international conferences, and produce several open-access publications, including three books and four PhD theses. This way the project will revolutionise the study of ancient slavery, creating the foundation for multiple future projects.