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DOI: 10.5937/adpn2503039S

HETAIRAI OR THE MYTH OF FREEDOM

Abstract

Patriarchy has been dominating the history of gender relations for thousands of years by skillfully transforming its patterns and finding its support in customs, religion and laws. Despite modern efforts, patriarchy not only persisted, but today we are faced with a powerful wave of repatriarchalisation. In order to gain better understanding of the reasons behind the stuborn endurance of patriarchal patterns and learn how to deconstruct them, it is necessary to research their roots in the distant past and try to determine what contributed to their creation and survival. This paper will focus on the Ancient Greek world – in particular ancient Athens. Known as the cradle of democracy, theatre and humanities, Athens showed its dark side through its treatment of women. They were completely erased from the public life, denied education and confined as housewives and child bearers within the walls of their homes. Men on the other hand were heavily oriented towards the public sphere and gaining knowledge and political skills, which created a huge educational and cultural gap between husbands and wives and led to the distancing of the former from the latter. On the other side of the spectrum, there were prostitutes and concubines of various classes: pornai, pallake and the sophisticated hetairai, all of them always at the disposal of men. The only women in the Athenian society that could achieve any semblance of respect and admiration from men were the hetairai, but it came at a steep cost.

Keywords: – Hetairai. – Courtesans. – Prostitutes. – ancient Athens.

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"But fly from Aphrodite's pirates and their ships;
they are worse foes than the Sirens"
Anthologia Palatina 5.161

1. INTRODUCTION

"We keep mistresses (*hetairai*) for pleasure, concubines (*pallakai*) for the daily care of our body and wives (*gynekai*) for the bearing of legitimate children and to keep watch over our house" (Dem. 59.122). It seems appropriate to open the discussion of sex and gender in ancient Athens with this famous quote from a Demosthenic speech, in which the speaker firmly segregates women according to their perceived value and societal role. This division has been widely accepted in scholarship when describing the position of women in Athens: there were public women whose services could be bought, private women who served as objects for sexual relief, and women who were respectable wives, who functioned as vessels to produce heirs and manage the household. Scholars often make an even more simple, clear-cut distinction, reducing the whole Athenian female population to just two archetypes: "the Wife" and "the Rest".[1] This tendency towards simplification is likely the result of scientific endeavour to fit women into well-defined categories, given that historical sources are notorious for not providing unambiguous and straightforward information about their status. However, the reality appears to have been a bit more complex than this suggested dichotomy; such simplification can only produce a distorted image of the different classes of women, their everyday life and legal position.

While "the Wife" belonged strictly to the private sphere of a man's life – the household – women grouped in the category of "the Rest" did not all necessarily belong to the public sphere. "The Concubine" (*pallake*) was usually a slave, but sometimes a free (often metic) woman whom a man kept for sexual gratification and, in some cases, childbearing. By this definition, "the Concubine" was closer to the private sphere and "the Wife" than to "the Prostitute", especially considering that Athenian adultery laws extended to concubines as well, protecting them from the sexual advances of other men and thereby distancing them from public women. The archetype of "the Prostitute" is a complex one.

[1] Kennedy firmly opposes the existing dichotomies in literature (Kennedy 2015, 61-63). Pomeroy offers a summary of existing attitudes towards the division of women in modern scholarship (Pomeroy 1995, 58-59).

Canonically, several types of women fall into this group. There were *pornai,* often described in sources as "common whores" who were either found in brothels or in the streets and harbours seeking clientele; then there were flute-girls (*auletridai*), usually foreign women who provided entertainment and sexual services at symposiums; finally, we reach the *hetairai,* the courtesans – often described as the most elite of public women, sophisticated, educated and exclusive. However, their exact role and position in the Athenian society remain elusive, and scholars have struggled to place them with certainty, as they seem to occupy a position at the intersection of the public and private spheres.

This paper is dedicated to analysing the legal position of the *hetairai*. Most scholarship on these women has been produced by classicists and frequently overlooks—or only briefly addresses—the legal framework that shaped their lives. A thorough understanding of their legal status is essential for comprehending their role in Athenian society and is particularly important for challenging the often idealized and romanticized portrayals that depict them as the only "liberated and autonomous" women of Athens.

2. THE HETAIRA

The "public–private" criterion for distinguishing the *hetairai* from other categories does not seem sufficient to provide a satisfying answer. Although a *hetaira* certainly charged for her services—clearly linking her to the practice of prostitution—the entire transactional process appears to have been discreet. Gift-giving was often preferred to direct monetary payment, which made the exchange more intimate and personal, setting it apart from the raw, impersonal trade of sexual services for money found in brothels and on the streets among the *pornai* (Davidson 1998, 109, 121-122). A *hetaira,* moreover, did not charge solely for the sexual act but for her time and companionship. She worked hard to present herself as respectable, and the discretion she offered protected both her and her clients, whom she never mentioned publicly, usually referring to them only as her "friends."[2] She rarely – if ever – exposed herself in public. Her appearance might at times have been subtly seductive, meant to arouse curiosity and impress with her beauty (for example, Phryne

[2] When Socrates asks Theodote how she was able to provide for her lavish lyfestyle, she wisely answers "I live on the generosity of any friend I pick up" (Xen. *Mem.* 3.11).

entering the sea in her tunic before a crowd of spectators (Ath. 13.59; Davidson 1998, 133-134)), but it was never so overt as to be considered vulgar. This stood in stark contrast to the brothels, with their open doors and naked prostitutes displayed for anyone to choose for an obol. For the *hetaira*, image was everything. Her reputation, presentation, and careful choice of her lovers, set her apart from the common prostitute and gave her exclusivity (Davidson 1998, 112, 125-126). Her domain was not the streets or brothels, but the symposiums held within the walls of private homes.

A *hetaira*, as already noted, offered above all her companionship. The very meaning of the word implies this: a companion, a friend. The *hetairai* were the only women in the *polis* who received an education, and they relied heavily on their intellect to captivate the men they entertained. Every *hetaira* strove to excel in at least one skill—whether dancing, singing, playing an instrument, or demonstrating knowledge of science and philosophy, sometimes even rhetoric. What Athenian men could not find at home, they could find in a *hetaira*.[3]

By contrast, Athenian wives were deliberately secluded from the outside world and from education: the more innocent and ignorant they were, the more desirable (Aristot. *Econ.* 3.1; Reeder 1995, 20, 22). Spending too much time outside their homes carried the risk of being perceived as indecent.[4] Their role was not to develop as individuals or to be loving companions to their husbands, but rather to bear children and manage the household.[5] This fragmentation of a man's life—where one woman was "reserved" for emotionless family duties and another was "reserved" for sexual and emotional intimacy—had profound consequences. It confined both men and women within a vicious patriarchal structure. To further highlight the hypocrisy, men created an

3 " A man falls in love with a *hetaira*; he takes refuge with her from misfortunes, from home and wife; he seeks her advice, and because of her, he is either happy or suffers." (Acović 2018, 10).

4 In Euripides's play *Trojan Women* 644-656, Ancdromache says: "If a woman does not remain indoors / That very choice brings down a bad reputation / And so I gave up my desire to go out and stayed within." See also: Reeder 1995, 21.

5 Hes. *WD* 702; Xen. *Oecon,* 7.6-14; Plat. *Meno* 71e: "First of all, if you take the virtue of a man, it is easily stated that a man's virtue is this—that he be competent to manage the affairs of his city, and to manage them so as to benefit his friends and harm his enemies, and to take care to avoid suffering harm himself. Or take a woman's virtue: there is no difficulty in describing it as the duty of ordering the house well, looking after the property indoors, and obeying her husband."

atmosphere of legal and societal pressure on themselves to marry.[6] Men, who typically spent most of their day in the Agora, at symposiums, or in the company of sexually available women rather than at home with their families, were nonetheless required to marry, as it was a condition for holding magistracies or any other official functions (Xen. *Oecon,* 7.30-31; Jones 1991, 111-113).

Here we arrive at a potential second criterion that may help distinguish among these different categories of women: their sexual roles and the forms of desire men projected onto them.

"The Wife" was not meant to be an object of desire or passion (Keuls 1993, 114). Sexual relations with her were considered a duty, performed primarily to secure offspring. Marriage is often described in the sources as a partnership or friendship between husband and wife (Aristot. *Econ.* 3.2), but it was never associated with desire or sexual attraction. On the contrary, showing affection or love toward one's wife could invite mockery. Young Athenian girls were kept in the seclusion of their homes and married off at around fourteen, typically to men nearly twice their age, with the average groom being about thirty (Xen. *Oecon.* 7.5; Reeder 1995, 22, 28-29). As a result, the only women adolescent boys and young men encountered before marriage were those who were sexually available: prostitutes and concubines (Dover 2003, 116-117). From the very beginning of their lives, Athenian males themselves created and perpetuated the sexual and emotional rift that separated men and women.

"The Concubine" existed primarily for sexual gratification and, in some cases, for bearing children, without deeper emotional implications. One source recounts an episode in which a disgruntled wife was sent upstairs so that her husband could satisfy himself with his concubine in the basement; the wife remarked that "it would not be the first time he forced himself upon the girl." While some arrangements were likely voluntary – where a woman, often a foreigner, chose to become a man's concubine in exchange for protection and shelter (Writings 2003, 66-67) – the concubine was generally regarded as the man's property, to be kept until he tired of her. If she had the misfortune of being a slave, her master had the legal right to sell her to whomever he pleased, including to a brothel (Antiph. 1.14).

[6] "…public opinion served as a powerful coercive force – men judged others and expected to be judged in return." (Cohen 1991, 97).

"The Prostitute" existed for pure, transactional sexual gratification, where intercourse was reduced to a raw exchange of favours for money. Prostitutes were regarded as the "lowest" group of women in the *polis*, particularly the *pornai* who worked in brothels. Sources state that Solon himself regulated these establishments through a set of laws, making the brothels property of the state and collecting revenue from the activities conducted within. The usual price for their services appears to have been as little as one obol.[7]

"The Hetaira" offered not only sexual pleasure but also emotional and intellectual fulfilment, forming a deeper and more meaningful connection with a man than any of the previously mentioned categories. While literature often merges her with other women who provided services in exchange for payment, it is more accurate to place her in a separate category, since the relationships she cultivated with clients extended beyond the purely physical. Indeed, the essence of her role lay in the quality of her companionship—her wit, intellect, humour, education, and the conversations and debates in which she engaged. If a man sought only sexual release, he could easily find it among other women for a much lower price. What drove men to seek out a *hetaira* was the desire for a more profound form of intimacy. Many authors idealized the *hetaira*, portraying her as a kind of *femme fatale* who lived a life of wealth, comfort, constant male adoration, sexual freedom, and the privilege of choosing her lovers (Keuls 1993, 9-11). Yet, as we will demonstrate, this lifestyle carried a heavy price, and for many women it was pursued not out of desire, but out of necessity.

The only sexual role deemed socially acceptable for Athenian women was that of "the Wife." Any association between an Athenian woman and sexual desire was considered shameful and dangerous. Women, in general, were regarded as insatiable beings, driven by lust and hedonism, and the only way to keep them on the "right path" was through strict control by both laws and the men who surrounded them (Wright 1923, 183-201). The wife, as a necessary instrument for producing

[7] Athenaios mentioned that Solon was the one who regulated brothels and the activities of prostitutes within them. The brothels became property of the state, which then leased them out to private individuals. Prostitutes were taxed with a special tax called *pornikon telos*. The tax revenue went to the state, while any additional earnings went to the lessee of the brothel. It is believed that Solon regulated brothels in order to establish order and placate rowdy men (Ath. 13.25; see also: Licht 1942, 332-339; Seltman 1956, 115-116; Henriques 1968, 36-82).

legitimate Athenian citizens and preserving the household (*oikos*), was the one who had to be restrained. As a wife and mother, she was expected to be respectable; any lewd behaviour on her part brought dishonour not only upon herself but upon her entire family. Men held two sharply contrasting conceptions of women. The Athenian woman was expected to know her place, remain obedient, and conform to the prevailing moral code of decency and respectability. The foreign woman, by contrast, was imagined as wild and dangerous by nature, yet she too was expected to be subdued and controlled (Keuls 1993, 321-329).[8]

The difficulty in determining whether a woman mentioned in a particular source was a *porne*, a concubine, or a *hetaira* lies largely in the language employed by ancient authors. Terminology was inconsistent and often unreliable, particularly in legal contexts, where women were frequently portrayed as "worse" than they truly were and attacked on the grounds of their sexuality.[9] It was not uncommon for women who had never engaged in prostitution to be labelled as *pornai* in an effort to discredit them—a smear campaign especially common against foreign women. Any behaviour that deviated from what was considered "normal" for a woman placed her at risk of being branded a common prostitute.[10]

2.1. Hiding her status

The main factor that allowed some *hetairai*—and not only them, but all non-citizen women who attempted to obscure their status and infiltrate the citizen body—to slip unnoticed was the citizenship laws

[8] Kennedy analysed well-known dramas in detail and identified these motifs that frequently appear in them (Kennedy 2014, chapter 2).

[9] Plutarch, for instance, uses the term *hetaira* as a euphemism for porne, a common prostitute. Archaic invective is also known for not making any distinction between a *hetaira* and a *porne,* labeling them both as sexually obsessed, impersonal seductresses who exploit others for money (Henriques 1968, 12). Licht compiled a list of all the way in which the ancient authors reffered to prostitutes. The terms were usually very insulting and crude, labelling a woman as an object or connecting her to the place where she usually attracted her clients. Some of the words used were: chopper-up, bridge-woman, parish worker, public woman, runner, bedroom-article...(Licht 1942, 330-332).

[10] In trials, respectable women were never referred to by their own names, but only as someone's daughter or mother. In contrast, these 'disreputable' women were always named personally. The former were thus depicted as part of a family, while the latter were portrayed as 'promiscuous'—rootless, immoral, and uncontrolled (Gilhuly 2008, 29).

(Davidson 1998, 107-108).[11] After Pericles introduced the new citizenship law in 451/450 BC, citizenship was granted only to those whose both parents were Athenians. Prior to this law, having an Athenian father was sufficient for a person to be registered as a citizen at the age of eighteen (Plut. *Per.* 37.3-4). One of the reasons cited for enacting this restrictive law was the increasing number of metics (resident aliens) in the *polis* and the desire of the Athenian elite to limit their access to resources and power: metics had no political rights and could not own real property. The citizen registers (Isoc. 8.88; Harpokr. *Lexiarhikon grammateion;* Dem. 44.35), however, were not infallible. First, there were many of them—every deme (municipality) maintained its own register, kept by the demarch, the magistrate in charge. There was no central citizen register, meaning that anyone wishing to verify a person's status had to go to the deme where the individual resided. Registers were also vulnerable: they could be destroyed by fires or wars, and it was especially difficult to check someone's citizenship during or after periods of mass, prolonged displacement. Second, sources mention cases of corruption and fabrication of ancestry, used to deceitfully have individuals inscribed into the registers (Dem. 18. 261; 44.37-38, 41-42, 57.26, 58, 59, 60, 64, Aeschin. 1.77,86, 114; 2.76; Isae. 4.10; 12.12).

All of this demonstrates that proving a man's status was not always an easy or straightforward process. What is even more interesting is that only men were inscribed in these registers. At no point in the history of ancient Athens were women formally registered as citizens, which helps explain some claims in the literature that women were technically not considered citizens—certainly of Athenian origin, but not citizens in the sense of possessing civil and political agency (for example Wohl 2002, 1). A woman's status and background were accounted for primarily through witnesses—people present at the name-giving ceremony, when the father formally acknowledged his child, and others who observed key milestones in her life. Since Athens had no registers for women, and the only formal context in which a woman's status might be questioned was during a trial—often initiated maliciously against her or a man connected to her—a foreign woman could easily conceal her origins and present herself as Athenian with the support of a few friends or an Athenian lover who participated in the deception. Her only task was to

[11] At one point it became difficult to distinguish even citizens from slaves, as they all started dressing and looking alike (Xen. *Ath. Pol.* 1.10).

keep a low profile, avoid attracting attention or making enemies, and she could easily spend her entire life successfully passing as Athenian.

Why is this relevant to the story of the *hetairai*? Our sources indicate that *hetairai* were almost always metic women (resident foreigners). They were either free foreign women who had settled in Athens, or freedwomen—former slaves of foreign origin who gained metic status after their masters emancipated them. Under the right circumstances, with assistance and a measure of luck, a *hetaira*, cloaked in the veil of discretion that was of utmost importance to her, might have been able to pass as a "reputable" Athenian woman—at least temporarily. Naturally, the more notorious and popular *hetairai* did not enjoy this luxury; however, the lesser-known ones could benefit from it. It is uncertain whether native Athenian women ever became *hetairai*, given that such a choice would have been strongly opposed to the moral values of the *polis*. It is difficult to imagine a woman from a well-established Athenian family embarking on such a path, as it would bring extreme shame and public disdain upon her relatives. Women from poorer backgrounds, however, might have been enticed to attempt this career when faced with poverty or the loss of all male family members. What is certain is that any involvement in the prostitution trade would result in *atimia*, the loss of all citizen rights.

If a *hetaira* attempted to conceal her background and present herself as a citizen, with her lover acting as her *kyrios*,[12] a great danger lay in the consequences of this deceit being discovered. If anyone pressed charges against a woman, accusing her of pretending to be a citizen, she was liable to enslavement, and her pretend-*kyrios* could face exorbitant financial penalties and disenfranchisement. Such was the case in Demosthenes' speech *Against Neaira* (Dem. 59), in which Neaira was accused of being a *hetaira* who falsely presented herself as the wife of the Athenian citizen Stephanos. The citizenship laws strictly forbade mixed marriages between citizens and foreigners; the best a foreigner could hope for in a relationship with a citizen was concubinage. Neaira was put on trial with severe charges: falsely presenting herself as an Athenian and marrying an Athenian man; committing fraud and extortion in partnership with her "husband"[13]; fraudulently passing off

12 A Greek equivalent to *paterfamilias*.

13 Allegedly, Neaira devised a scheme with Stephanos, in which she presented herself as an Athenian wife to lure men into sleeping with her. Stephanos would then catch

their illegitimate daughter, Phano, as a citizen and giving her in marriage to an Athenian man. Neaira's and Phano's entire sexual histories were exposed in court, using crude and insulting language before a courtroom consisting entirely of men, with the goal of proving that they were unfit to live as citizens' wives. They were portrayed as morally corrupt and socially dangerous, and their reputations were discredited through shame and public judgment. The motivation behind this prosecution, however, was far more personal and vindictive than a genuine desire to prevent a foreigner from infiltrating the citizen body. It stemmed from revenge: Stephanos had previously successfully brought a charge against the prosecutor's father-in-law, Apollodorus, resulting in substantial penalties and additional consequent charges. Apollodorus's pettiness led him to deliver this speech himself, rather than leaving it to the prosecutor, and he chose to launch an attack that would not only humiliate Stephanos but also potentially result in Neaira's enslavement and the loss of Stephanos' citizen rights and property.[14]

Finally, we reach the question: why would a *hetaira* go to such lengths to conceal her status? The desire to do so was deeply rooted in the negative perception of foreigners in Athenian society. Over time, Athenian fear of "foreign" elements within the state became so pronounced that it eventually developed into sheer xenophobia. Foreign women, regardless of their profession, were often seen as evil seductresses, accused of undermining Athenian families and drawing men away from their wives and children. By presenting herself as a reputable Athenian woman, a *hetaira* could avoid public scrutiny as well as potential abuse or malicious prosecution. She was especially vulnerable if her lovers had enemies willing to use any means necessary to harm them, and such enemies were particularly prone to targeting the women in their lives.

2.2. *Auten autes kyrian*

A topic that is rarely acknowledged in scholarship concerns a very specific status held by some women in Athens—one that the sources themselves seldom mention. Nevertheless, there is evidence suggesting

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them *in flagrante* and exercise his rights as a husband to extort money from the seducer.

[14] Further reading on Neaira: Bakewell 2008/2009, 97-109; Kapparis 1999; Patterson 1993, 199-216; Gligić 2023, 122-136.

that such women were not few in number, although their presence has been obscured by the scarcity of surviving sources. This issue forms part of a broader discussion about the status of metics, particularly metic women in Athens, and it is also highly relevant to the study of *hetairai*. While this subject has been explored in depth in previous papers (Divac 2021a, Divac 2021b), the basics will be outlined here.

Metics were foreigners who moved to Athens with the intention of residing there for a prolonged period. Since Athens wanted to keep track of all foreigners living in the *polis*, there was an obligatory registration process for them. By registering, these foreigners transformed from *xenoi* (common foreigners) into *metoikoi* (resident aliens). Every metic was required to have a *prostates* present at their registration. There has been much scholarly discussion regarding the role and duties of a *prostates*, but it appears that his primary function was simply to be present at the registration process and to serve as a witness to the foreigner's metic status.[15] If anyone pressed charges against a metic, claiming that they lacked a *prostates* and were therefore unregistered, the metic was obligated to summon their *prostates* to help defend their status in court. Failure to present a *prostates* could result in the enslavement of the metic. The *prostates* was always required to be an Athenian citizen.

Apart from needing a *prostates*, a metic was also obligated to pay a special tax called the *metoikion*. The amount was not high, and its purpose was not to impose a financial burden on the metic; rather, it functioned as a symbol of the metic's subordination—in other words, a mark of their status as second-class residents. The *metoikion* was 12 drachmas per year for men and 6 drachmas per year for women.[16] The reason it was regarded as a mark of subordination lay in the fact that Athenian citizens were never subjected to a regular tax, as such a levy was considered degrading.

Here is where it gets interesting. We have already mentioned that female metics were also liable to the metic tax; however, a closer

[15] It is highly unlikely that the *prostates* was the legal representative of a metic in legal affairs and before state authorities. It is difficult to imagine that any citizen was willing to take on such a burden on behalf of a foreigner and thereby expose himself to potential sanctions and expenses. Moreover, there were a great many metics in Athens, and we know from the sources that in many disputes they represented themselves in court.

[16] The daily wage in Athens generally amounted to 1 drachma; it is therefore clear that the metic tax was by no means a major financial burden, since the obligation was 1 drachma per month for men and half a drachma for women.

examination of the sources and the exact wording of the law prescribing it reveals that not all metic women were obliged to pay. Those who had a *kyrios*—a man responsible for them (such as a father, brother, husband, or other male relative acting as guardian)—were exempt, since they were "covered" by the head of the household. The only metic women who did in fact pay the tax were the autonomous metic women, in other words, those without a *kyrios*. The very idea that there could have been women in Athens who were not under a *kyrieia* is remarkable. From the sources, we know it was practically impossible to find a citizen woman without a *kyrios*, since, as already mentioned, the *polis* took exceptional care to ensure that every citizen woman was under the control and protection of a man responsible for her. If a woman's father, brother, or husband did not exist, she was placed under the guardianship of a relative appointed by the archon. This was especially crucial if the woman in question was an *epikleros* (heiress)—the only living direct descendant of her late father and the sole vessel for producing male heirs to continue the family line. The control of citizen women was vital for Athenians in order to preserve the *oikos*.[17]

It was entirely normal for metic women to be placed under guardianship if any male relatives were available. However, a number of metic women found themselves in Athens completely alone. It was not unusual for foreign women to travel to Athens in search of a better life than in their homeland. Others were sometimes forced to flee their cities due to war and turmoil, as Aspasia and Phryne famously did. As a result, many arrived in Athens entirely on their own. While the *polis* attempted to hold metics to the same standards and values as citizens, it was not equally invested in preserving metic *oikoi* to the extent that it protected those of citizens. Moreover, since metics were barred from owning real estate, the *polis* had far less incentive to safeguard their property than it did the land of citizens—one of the most valuable and jealously protected resources an Athenian could possess.

Consequently, the *polis* recognized these women as a special exemption to the general rule of *kyrieia*. Unable to provide them with guardians,[18] it labelled them autonomous women, who—just like

[17] Family name, tradition, cult, and property.

[18] The motive behind accepting guardianship was usually economic. The guardian gained access to his ward's property, which he could manage or lease. Although the property was to be returned in full value once the ward came of age, in the meantime the guardian could make full use of it and even profit from it. There

male metics—were required to have a *prostates* and to pay the metic tax. At first glance, this may appear to be an incredibly emancipatory development: in Athens, of all places, there existed a group of women who possessed a semblance of autonomy. Their names were recorded in tax registers, and they were able to own and freely dispose of movable property.[19] These independent women are described in the sources with the phrase *auten autes kyrian* ("[she is] her own *kyria*"), and they could be found in many professions—one of which was that of a *hetaira*.

When the initial amazement at this discovery fades, one begins to see where the problem lay. While the *polis* acknowledged the existence of these women, it failed to define them as a legal category. In other words, being "her own *kyria*" was a descriptive formulation, not a juridical one. On the one hand, they were indeed freer than the average Athenian woman, but on the other, they were still women. This meant that they continued to lack political rights and, more importantly, remained unable to represent themselves in court. For anyone, but especially for a *hetaira*, this was a nightmarish scenario. Normally, a woman's rights and interests in court were defended by her *kyrios*—it was both his legal and moral duty, since any attack on a woman under his care was considered an attack on the family's honour. But who was there to stand up for these independent metic women? We know for a fact that they could be prosecuted—one of the most notable examples being the trial of Phryne. The *polis*, however, did not appoint anyone with the legal obligation to represent them, leaving these women to fend for themselves.[20] Their only hope was that someone—usually a close friend or a lover—might take pity on them and agree to act on their behalf in trial. Despite being regarded as "independent," this situation proves that, in reality, they were highly dependent on men and on male goodwill.

A scorned lover might refuse to help; likewise, a man could deny assistance out of fear that his reputation would be tainted by association with a *hetaira*. Finally, in high-stakes cases where the prosecutor risked

was little incentive for anyone to become the guardian of a metic woman who possessed no real estate, could not be married off to a wealthy citizen, and in general represented not an asset but a burden.

19 Women were generally permitted to conduct independent transactions only up to the value of less than a medimnos of barley. To put this into perspective, a medimnos of barley was sufficient to sustain an average family for several days (Isae. 10.10).

20 The *prostates* was not a legal counselor or lawyer; his only task was to appear as a witness in cases where the woman's status was being challenged. He had no role in other prosecutions.

fines if unsuccessful, a man might value his finances more than helping a courtesan. We must not forget the element of class as well: a successful and well-connected *hetaira* might secure the support of an influential and affluent man to defend her, while the less successful *hetairai* likely had a far more difficult time finding a skilled and willing defender.
When we take into consideration that *hetairai* were often prosecuted for serious crimes carrying severe punishments (such as pretending to be a citizen, which could result in enslavement, or impiety, which was punishable by death),[21] and were then left to their own devices with no legal guarantees of being able to defend themselves, a terrifying picture of their complete legal insecurity emerges. To live in a *polis* where the prevailing attitude toward them was deeply hypocritical—on the one hand, they were celebrated for who they were and what they had to offer, yet on the other, hated and attacked for those very same reasons—and to be left entirely without legal protection, must have been a profoundly frightening existence. Sources are filled with examples of not only *hetairai* but also other independent metic women being exploited and abused, with no means to seek justice or prosecute their offenders.[22]

3. POLITICS OF REPUTATION

We finally reach the ultimate question: who were the *hetairai*, and where were they placed in Athenian society? A particularly interesting and refreshing approach to this topic was offered by Kennedy. Traditionally, scholars have viewed *hetairai* as elite courtesans. Kennedy, however, suggests otherwise: in archaic and classical Athens, the word *hetaira* was used not only to describe a class of women but also to label a specific set of behaviours (Kennedy 2015, 61). She notes that in lyric, elegiac, and epinician poetry, the term *hetaira* never denotes a prostitute and is devoid of erotic connotation; sometimes it refers to a female friend circle, sometimes to female peers, and sometimes to female housemates (Kennedy 2015, 64-65). She further argues that not all women depicted on vases representing symposium scenes were prostitutes—some were elite citizen or foreign women simply partaking in the festivities. That free-spirited and bold behaviour—where women loudly and visibly acted

[21] During the 4th century BC, in 28 preserved judicial speeches, either complete or in fragments, one of the parties in the disputes were women – Athenian citizens or metic women – and among them, *hetairai*: (Kapparis 2021, 23–101).

[22] Some of the mentions: Dem. 25.57, 55, 58, 65; Dem.47.55; Dem. 59; Ath. 13.59.

as companions in typically male surroundings—earned them the title of *hetaira*, meaning "companion." Only over time did this behaviour become associated with prostitution and with other women who imitated the conduct of these elite women without sharing their citizenship or social status (Kennedy 2015, 67). This interpretation seems reasonable. Historically, members of the elite were often allowed to operate "above the law," and their eccentric behavior was, to some extent, tolerated. It might be risky to claim that all elite women displayed such behavior, but there were certainly citizen women in history who did, most famously Elpinice and Coisyra, two women from the most elite families of 5th-century BC Athens. These women are sometimes labeled in scholarship as *hetairai*, which can be confusing, since it seems implausible that members of the most elite citizen families were allowed to be courtesans. However, if we understand *hetaira* as a label for the behavior of a free-spirited, adventurous, and educated elite woman—which only later became associated with elite prostitutes who mimicked that behavior—the term fits. In the words of Kennedy: the original citizen elite *hetaira* became the model for the non-citizen prostitute *hetaira*. The word itself could then be used as a slander or slur against any woman displaying behavior deemed scandalous to some degree (Kennedy 2015, 72-73).

That being said, all women in Athens, including the *hetairai*, were subjected to the hypocritical views on women perpetuated by the patriarchal system.[23] As a result, "obedient" citizen women were largely alienated from men, with whom they shared little common language. While men engaged in discussions of logic, morality, virtue, democracy, and philosophy, their respected wives were denied education beyond rudimentary reading and writing and focused solely on domestic duties.[24] This separation extended even within the household. Although the sources often present the house as a symbol of unity between husband and wife, there was a clear demarcation of space and activity. Women were confined to the women's quarters, the *gynaikeion*, while the center of male activity was the dining room, the *andron*, where symposiums were held without the presence of wives. A good wife was expected

[23] "If "social structure" is understood to involve gender as well as status or class, then women are more likely than men to suffer under it and to have a stake in its suspension" (Geoff 2004, 16).

[24] "Is there anyone to whom you entrust a greater number of serious matters than your wife? And is there anyone with whom you have fewer conversations?" (Xen. *Oecon.* 3.11-13); see: Cohen 2020, 7-24.

to be subservient, obedient, quiet, and knowledgeable only in basic household management and child-rearing. Her reputation was considered her greatest virtue (Lys. 3.6). Interestingly, although her primary role was to bear children, legally she was not regarded as a parent – a child without a father was considered an orphan even if its mother was alive.

On the other hand, the *pornai*, the *auletridai*, and the *hetairai* were women who existed primarily as objects of male desire and attention. Ignoring the wife, who was supposed to be the primary focus of a man's affection and care, these men left their homes to seek what was lacking within them. Yet even in this, men demonstrated hypocrisy. Instead of valuing these "other" women for providing what they were missing, men often used it against them—to attack, degrade, and constantly remind them that their lives were shaped by male whims and the laws of the *polis*. These sexually available women, and especially the *hetairai*, attracted men through their loudness, free behavior, lewd jokes, flirting, eloquence, and non-obedient nature—qualities that wives were never permitted to display. Men enjoyed these traits but then chastised the women for them, labeling their behavior immoral and a threat to social order, thereby perpetuating a misogynistic "damned if you do, damned if you don't" view of women. One of the most frequently depicted mythological themes in Athenian art was men slaying the Amazons; the idea of free women who ruled, made decisions, and had agency terrified Athenian men (Keuls 1993, 3-5; Reeder 1995, 26).

Thus, a stark line was drawn between wives and *hetairai* not only on the basis of demeanor but also in terms of social roles: a wife was to obey and rear children, whereas a *hetaira* was to entertain and entice—but never to marry and bear legitimate children, and never to experience the security of a household or a family. Several depictions exist of aging *hetairai* whose beauty had faded, showing how increasingly difficult it became for them to find patrons willing to lavish substantial gifts upon them, leaving them with little choice but to turn to common prostitution.[25]

While some *hetairai* chose this lifestyle as a means to attain a semblance of autonomy and freedom of expression, avoiding the constraints of a loveless, dutiful marriage, others adopted it out of sheer necessity. Although fictional and satirical, Lucian's *Dialogues of the*

[25] For example, in Menander's *Samian Women* 392-396: "Whores like you, Chrysis, make ten drachmas running around to dinner-parties, and drink neat alcohol until they die; and if they don't look sharp and jump to it, they starve."

Courtesans were certainly inspired by real-life situations. In a few instances, the dialogue highlights the difficult economic circumstances of mothers and their daughters, who resorted to becoming *hetairai* to provide for their family. After ignoring her patron throughout the night, Philinna is scolded by her mother: "And then not sitting near him! Singing while he was in tears! Think how poor we are, girl; you forget how much we have had from him, and what last winter would have been if Aphrodite had not sent him to us" (dialogue *Philinna and Her Mother*). In another dialogue, a mother is advising her hesitant daughter, a newly-initiated courtesan, on how to launch her career as a *hetaira:* "Now, listen carefully to what you must do and how you should deal with men. We have no other choice, my daughter – have you forgotten how we've lived these past two years since your father died? While he was alive, we had everything in abundance; he was a blacksmith, and his name meant something in Piraeus… When he died, I first sold his tools – the hammer and the anvil – for two minas, and we lived off that for seven months. After that, I could barely earn enough for food, sometimes weaving, sometimes spinning the weft, sometimes the warp. I fed you, my daughter, and waited for my hopes to be fulfilled… I had counted on the fact that, when you reached this age, you would feed me without effort and dress yourself up, that you would be wealthy, own a scarlet dress, and have servants… You will associate with young men, drink with them, and sleep with them for money… That's nothing to be afraid of! You too will be rich like her [another *hetaira* Lyra] and will have numerous lovers. Why are you crying, Corina? Don't you see how many *hetairai* there are, how sought-after they are, and how much they earn?" (dialogue *Crobila and Corinna*).

In the following chapters, we will discuss two of the most famous *hetairai* in Athens: the legendary *Phryne* and *Aspasia*. While other well-known and celebrated *hetairai*,[26] such as Theodota, Rhodopis,[27] Laïs, Naïs, Thaïs, Sinope, and others also existed, these two are the

[26] The *megalomisthoi* – the most elite, independent *hetairai* who were wealthy and famous, and therefore ended up being recorded in historical sources (Davidson 1998, 106-108).

[27] Mentioned in Herodotus (Her. 2.134). It is the oldest source in which the word *hetaira* appears. Rhodopis was said to have been incredibly affluent and famous. If Herodotus is to be trusted, she apparently financed a pyramid in Egypt, though that may have been nothing more than a legend. More on Rhodopis see: Lidov 2002, pp. 203-237; Kurke 1997, 106-150.

most extensively documented. Their lives offer not only a glimpse into the world of the most exclusive *hetairai*, but also illustrate how their connections to powerful men made them vulnerable to attacks, and how Athenian society could both admire and despise them simultaneously.

3.1. Phryne

Probably one of the most famous and intriguing women in the history of Athens was the *hetaira* Phryne. Despite the patriarchal environment, in which everything was subject to men and women were almost invisible, excluded from public life, deprived of education, and under constant scrutiny by the *gynekonomoi*,[28] this metic woman managed to secure a place in society through her skills, sharp mind, breathtaking beauty, and careful choice of lovers. She became one of the richest women in Athens. Since late antiquity, her life has been considered controversial: whether she truly existed or was a product of fiction,[29] her biography—and especially her notorious trial, during which she was disrobed in front of the jurors—remains shrouded in mystery. It is therefore not surprising that she has captivated the attention of sociologists, psychologists, historians, and lawyers, as well as the imagination of artists, particularly from the 17th to the 20th century.[30]

Most details about her come from Atenaios Naukratios and his work *Deipnosophistaí* (Ath. 13.59-60).[31] We know that she originated from Thespiae, a city in southern Boeotia that had been continuously ravaged by the Thebans from 373 to 371 BC. Many migrants, especially women and children, sought refuge in Athens. It is assumed that Phryne, then a mere ten-year-old girl, also arrived in Athens at that time. Mnesarete, as she was originally named, daughter of Epicles, seems to have come from an established aristocratic family, though there is

[28] Magistratres who, among other tasks, observed the behaviour of women in public (Ath. 6.46).

[29] Authors who unequivocally support the theory that she was a historical figure: Corso 1997, 123-150; Eidonow 2016; Kapparis 2021.

[30] One of the most famous depictions of her is *Phryne before the Areopagus* (1861) by Jean-Léon Gérôme (McClure 2024, 1-17).

[31] Quoting Apollodorus and his *Book on Courtesans,* Athenaios states that there were two women named Phryne, one of whom was nicknamed Clausigelos (*Laughing through tears*), and the other Saperdium (*Little fish*). One of them was also known as Sestos because she “sifted and stripped bare” her lovers, while the other one was Thespian, without mentioning which one was which.

no mention of her parents after her arrival in Athens. At some point, she took on the name Phryne (meaning 'Toad,' a reference to her pale complexion) and became a *hetaira*. Her beauty and figure were said to have been captivating, which she cleverly used to escape poverty. She became a frequent guest at elite symposiums and participated in intellectual conversations on equal footing with men, sometimes even mocking them. She chose her lovers carefully, refusing advances from braggarts and overbearing men regardless of their wealth, while at times devoting her attention to less affluent Athenians if she fancied them. Aware of her beauty, she stirred sighs even in public baths, which she never attended unclothed. One notable exception, when she did grace the public with her seductive presence, was during the Eleusinian festival and the feast of the Poseidonia., when "she laid aside her garments in the sight of all the assembled Greeks, and having undone her hair, she went to bathe in the sea" (Ath. 13.59). Extremely self-aware, she defied the patriarchal morals of Athenian society; she was audacious, cynical, and at times even vulgar—a complete opposite of the typically secluded Athenian women.

One of her most important lovers was the incredibly wealthy and famous Athenian sculptor Praxiteles, whom she met around 365 BC. She served as his model for two statues of Aphrodite, one of which was the renowned *Aphrodite of Knidos*, known today only through numerous replicas made across the ancient world. It was the first life-sized, hyper-realistic statue to depict a completely nude female body in Western art.[32] In return, Praxiteles gifted his muse a statue of Eros, which she later donated to her hometown as a votive offering, demonstrating her wealth and influence.

Grateful Thespians commissioned a golden statue of Phryne from Praxiteles, which they dedicated to the temple of Apollo in Delphi. It ended up being situated between the statues of the Spartan king Archidamus III and the Macedonian king Phillip II, with an inscription "*Phryne, daughter of Epicles from Thespiae*". The erecting of this statue Cynic philoshoper Crates called "a monument to Athenian moral decline and decadence". Only a handful of statues in this temple were a gift from women, which is a further testimony of Phryne's affluence. Praxiteles

[32] The citizens of Kos had the first right of choice and selected the veiled Aphrodite, while the second, nude statue went to the island of Knidos and very quickly became a major attraction for visitors from across the ancient world (Morales 2011, 72).

sculpted another statue of Phryne called *Happy Hetaira,* as a counterpart to the *Weeping Matron*, metaphorically – and perhaps unconsciously – depicting the difference in social status between *hetairai* and Athenian wives. She also served as the model for the painter Apelles in his painting *Aphrodite Rising from the Sea*, which again celebrated the beauty of her nude form.

During her lifetime, she was often a generous benefactor. Sources mention that she even offered the Thebans – the people who had burned her hometown – the funds to rebuild their city after it was destroyed by Alexander the Great, on the condition that an inscription would be placed: "This wall was destroyed by Alexander and rebuilt by Phryne." The Thebans allegedly refused, but the *hetaira* had already humiliated them through her offer.

Apollodorus testifies to Phryne's great influence, mentioning that one of her loyalists and a *parasite* was a member of the Areopagus. It is no wonder that Posidippus, in his work *The Women of Ephesus*, describes her as the most famous *hetaira* of them all (McClure 2024, 17-24; Acović 2018, 79-80, 127,146; Morales 2011, 72).

Probably the most interesting episode from Phryne's life, especially for the purposes of this paper, was her infamous trial for *asebeia* (impiety). She was prosecuted either by a *graphe asebeias* or *eisangelia*; in both cases, however, the punishment upon conviction was death. The same charges were at one point brought against Socrates, who was condemned, and in the history of ancient Athens there is not a single recorded case of a verdict acquitting the accused of *asebeia.* The prosecutor was Euthias, her ex-lover, while her other lover, the famous orator Hyperides ran into her defence. The trial took place in front of the Heliaia.[33]

The Athenians, not inclined toward rigid legal definitions, interpreted the right to bring a *graphe asebeias* extremely broadly. The jurors were laymen, completely inexperienced in law, and all evidence was presented by the parties involved, including references to laws that might support their case. This gave considerable freedom to the parties, the logographers, and the orators to interpret the law as they found fit, and their rhetorical skills often overshadowed strict application of law.

[33] Some authors think that the trial took place in front of the Aeropagus, which seems unlikely; by the 4th century BC this once-important judicial body from the time of the aristocratic republic retained only certain religious powers, certainly not as significant as this trial.

Jurors decided based on their own sense of justice and their sympathies for the party whose speech most moved them (Avramović 2005, 81-103).

The lawsuit arose for multiple reasons, almost all stemming from misogyny. It is unsurprising that, after Socrates' death, such cases primarily concerned women, and Eidinow is correct to call them "witch-hunts" (Eidonow 2016, 167-263). Euthias accused Phryne of impiety because, according to an anonymous rhetorical text from the 2nd century BC, she worshiped a new god, participated in ritual processions accompanied by drunkenness, frenzied dancing, music, and torches (*komos*), and led an unlawful cult of the god Dionysus (*thiasoi*).

The truth appears to be different. Phryne was a powerful *hetaira* and, consequently, a priestess of the goddess Aphrodite, which naturally aroused suspicion and fear. The Knidian Aphrodite had been sculpted after her naked body. Polybius mentions an Athenian who fell in love with the statue of Aphrodite and engaged in sexual acts with it, to which the goddess herself, seeing the masterpiece, allegedly asked: "Where did Praxiteles see me naked?" (Plb. 16.160; Fantham *et al* 1994, 174).

When the citizens of Croton hired Zeuxis to paint Helen of Troy, he asked them to bring their most beautiful young women and selected five, each representing a specific aspect of Helen's beauty, as no single woman could embody her perfection. Cicero cited this as a metaphor for the rhetorical skill of speechwriting (Morales 2011, 74-75). Phryne, with her beauty and form, even deceived Aphrodite herself. But would the judges see this as the shamelessness and audacity of a courtesan, refusing to be fooled? The Knidian Aphrodite towered over the Heliaia, though she is not explicitly mentioned in the charges. Proud, she was inaccessible to most men. In the eyes of moralists, she was a prostitute, and Primorac is correct in observing that historically, condemnation of prostitution was tied to a double standard: the moral code condemns the prostitute but not the client, although both equally and necessarily participate in the practice (Primorac 2007, 121).

On the other hand, the stigma attached to prostitution in most patriarchal societies (including Athens) also depended on who engaged in the profession: the higher the price, the lesser the censure (Bullough and Bullough 1987, 313). Highly paid *hetairai,* however, attracted the envy of the vast majority of men who could not afford them. McClure rightly points out that all *asebeia* cases against women were fueled by gossip, envy, or fear (McClure 2024, 134). Euthias, a former lover of Phryne, was a man with a bruised ego, quarrelsome by nature, prone to

shady dealings, a punished sycophant, who sought revenge on the lost *hetaira* through this prosecution. Among the jurors were the envious who could not approach Phryne, those swayed by gossip, and the moralists who condemned the philosophy of pleasure (Đurić 1990, 324).

Although Hyperides' speech has not survived beyond the early Byzantine period, it was praised by those who have seen it for its exceptional rhetorical skill. The passion with which he defended Phryne is summarized in his alleged statement against his opponent: *"It is not the same when one man goes to all lengths to save her, while the other to kill her"* (McClure 2024, 142). Hyperides was an Athenian and knew his fellow citizens better than we do today. He probably anticipated everything that could work against Phryne in a patriarchal environment hostile to foreigners, and especially to successful women who had escaped their constraints. Seeing that the case was slipping from his hands, he took desperate measures. He tore off her clothing, leaving her breasts – or even her entire body – exposed before the jurors (McClure 2024, 144-145). Some authors suggest that Hyperides may have pleaded and implored at this moment to elicit the jurors' sympathy (Morales 2011, 76-78).

Lefkowitz explains that revealing one's breasts was not intended to arouse but to elicit pity from a male audience by reminding them of the mothers who nurtured them; by using this gesture in the courtroom, the courtesan Phryne managed to avoid a death sentence (Lefkowitz 2007, 89; Morales 2011, 79; McClure 2024, 147-148). In line with this, a fragment of Posidippus does not mention her being undressed, but rather that Phryne humbly took each juror by the hand, begging for her life (*Ath*. 591e = fr. 13 K–A).

This act by Hyperides can also be interpreted differently. Athenaios notes that, by removing Phryne's tunic, Hyperides reminded the jurors that she was a priestess of Aphrodite, hinting at possible divine wrath if they issued a death sentence. Alciphron, in *Letters of Hetairai*, in the fifth letter sent by Bakhida to Phryne, remarks that Hyperides' removal of her clothing was a calculated part of his defense. In this way, Phryne, as a woman condemned to silence in the courtroom, found a mode of communication that surpassed rhetoric and male persuasion (Morales 2011, 78).

Greek orators had developed the powerful rhetorical device of *ekphrasis*—the vivid verbal description of a scene or artwork. Hyperides, with his gesture, did the opposite: he allowed the masterpiece of nature

– Phryne in all her beauty – to overshadow rhetoric, to refute every argument against her, and to remind Athenians, refined in upbringing and aesthetic sense, that their endless discussions at the Agora and symposiums about the divine nature of the Knidian Aphrodite were not in vain. The hyperrealism of this moment ultimately led to her acquittal. The woman who had found her place in the Temple of Apollo at Delphi, the woman Praxiteles equated with Aphrodite, had the courage to triumph over Athenian misogyny. Who else, if not she?

3.2. Aspasia

Another influential woman who marks the history of Athens is the famous Milesian, Aspasia. She is usually recognized in sources and scholarship first as Pericles's concubine, then as a *hetaira*, and sometimes even as a madam. The fact that literature introduces this remarkable woman in this way is already telling of the treatment she faced from her contemporaries. Our most important sources here are Plutarch's *Pericles*[34] and Plato's *Menexenus.35*

There is little evidence regarding her personal life. It is assumed that she moved to Athens around 450 BC as a fatherless refugee, fleeing her war-stricken city. Plutarch reveals that she allegedly drew inspiration from Thargelia, a famous Ionian *hetaira* renowned for her beauty and intelligence. Word reached Pericles that a woman of rare political wisdom had arrived in Athens; he immediately sought her out and was apparently so smitten that he soon divorced his Athenian wife, with whom he had two sons. This episode already paints a less flattering image of Aspasia: a foreign woman who mimicked a scheming *hetaira*, meddled in men's affairs, seduced an influential Athenian statesman, and removed him from his lawful family. If anything, this reinforced the idea of the "evil foreign woman" as a bringer of destruction to family and state.

For the next twenty years, the couple was one of the most influential tandems in Athens. Since Aspasia was a metic woman and therefore could not legally marry an Athenian citizen, she most likely held the status of Pericles's concubine. Whether or not she was a *hetaira* remains highly debatable. It is important to remember that all information about

[34] All information come from chapters: 24, 25, 30, and 32.

[35] A very atypical work of Plato, since it was not philosophical, but dealt with a funeral oration and topics of rhetoric, Athenian identity and politics. It is written in a form of dialogue between Socrates and a young man named Menexenus.

her comes from male authors, some of whom admired her, while others despised her. If we adopt Kennedy's criteria and define a *hetaira* of mid-5th century BC Athens as an elite, free-spirited, and educated woman, then Aspasia could indeed be considered a *hetaira.*

One of her most frequently mentioned attributes was her intelligence. She was said to have been at the center of Pericles's inner circle of sophist thinkers, with whom she regularly debated and conversed: Xenophon, Alcibiades, Phidias, Anaxagoras, Socrates, and others. Allegedly, some of these men even brought their own wives to join in the discussions. Both Plutarch and Plato assert that Aspasia was an exceptionally skilled rhetorician, who taught Pericles, Socrates, and many other Athenians the art of oration. Socrates also claimed that she instructed him in the intricacies of basic household management. It appears that one point on which ancient authors largely agreed was that Aspasia served as the ghostwriter for Pericles's speeches, the most notable of which was the *Funerary Oration,* often considered as greatest speech of all times (Carlson 1994, 29).

All these intellectual activities surely placed Aspasia into the category of "harlots" (Carlson 1994, 27-28). It was unimaginable that a woman would engage in political matters, philosophy, and oration. Even more scandalous was the strong connection she had with Pericles, whom malicious ancient authors often depicted as inferior and sexually dominated by Aspasia, and therefore emasculated. Plutarch notes that "twice a day, as they say, on going out and on coming in from the market-place, he [Pericles] would salute her [Aspasia] with a loving kiss." The couple had one son, Pericles Jr, who was considered illegitimate because his mother was a foreigner. Later, Pericles managed to secure his naturalization and introduced him into the citizen body.

Since both were public figures, the ruthlessness with which ancient authors attacked them was severe. While Pericles was mocked and criticized on various grounds, such as his appearance, oratory, and political skills, Aspasia was unsurprisingly targeted primarily for her sexuality. The insults and metaphors used in Old Comedy (for more details see: Henry 1995, 19-28) to degrade her are raw and vulgar. She was compared to problematic mythological women, such as Omphale, Deianira, and Hera; accused of being a prostitute and a madam; blamed for being the cause of the Samian War; called a dog-eyed prostitute, a *pallake* brought to Pericles by shameless lust, a fellatrix and procuress; and mocked for having a "bastard" son. Insults became even harsher

after Aspasia partnered with another man not long after Pericles had passed. Many saw it as evidence of her being a ingenuine, calculated "man-eater", and no one has taken into account that she might have done so out of a necessity – being a metic women without a *kyrios,* especially when notorious like she was, presented an exceptional risk. Some of her most vocal detractors were Cratinus, who set the tone for subsequent comic and abusive representations of Pericles and Aspasia, Aristophanes, Eupolis, and Antisthenes, who was a bastard (*nothoi*) like Pericles Jr. and was driven by jealousy and resentment since Pericles Jr. eventually gained citizenship. Plato, meanwhile, presented her as a dangerously skilled rhetorician who used philosophy and logic to manipulate and deceive the public regarding the history of Greece.

Plutarch reveals one more detail of her life. Apparently, Aspasia was also prosecuted at one point for *asebeia* and *"*for receiving free-born women into a place of assignation for Pericles*"*. Not much else is known about this trial, and it is not even certain whether it was real or fictional, since no other source mentions it. However, this episode certainly reinforces the notion of an "unsuitable" woman being prosecuted in an attempt to degrade her and publicly dispose of her.

All of these negative representations unfortunately overshadowed Aspasia's significant achievements and contributions to Athens. Not only were her accomplishments obscured by ancient authors, but modern ones as well. Some scholars interpret Plato's *Menexenus*, in which he begrudgingly acknowledges Aspasia as an excellent rhetorician, as a satirical work mocking her; yet at the same time, they take *Menexenus* seriously when seeking arguments in support of other topics (Waithe 1987, 76-79; Carlson 1994, 39-41). Her name is often omitted from lists of the greatest orators in ancient history, thus perpetuating the erasure of successful and productive women. In Alciphron's *Letters of Courtesans* (*Thais to Euthydemus,* letter 34)*,* Thais is peeved because her lover has stopped visiting her and has instead developed an obsession with sophist philosophy. She proceeds to argue that sophists and women are alike in many respects: "Again, we educate young men quite as well as they do. Compare, if you like, Aspasia the courtesan and the famous sophist Socrates; and consider which of them produced the best citizens. You will find that Pericles was the pupil of the former, Critias of the latter."[36]

[36] Critias was the leader of the Thirty Tyrants, a Spartan-imposed oligarchic regime that ruled Athens briefly after its defeat in the Peloponnesian War (404–403 BC)

Taking into account all the achievements attributed to Aspasia, we believe she certainly deserves to be recognized as more than just Pericles' lover and a *hetaira*; if ancient authors reduced the arguments against her to her sexuality, modern scholars need not follow that trend.

4. THE MYTH OF FREEDOM

We have highlighted some of the most influential *hetairai* of their age and demonstrated that even their lives were often difficult, despite being affluent and well-connected. If this was the treatment endured by those who "made it," we must consider how life was for the hundreds of other nameless and faceless *hetairai* who attempted to make a name for themselves but never achieved fame, constantly struggling not only with prejudice but also with poverty. Some of them were not as independent as the others, also having a panderer, a *pornoboskos*, who often brutally exploited their bodies. In comedies, he is usually portrayed as an evil and manipulative character who constantly threatened to send his women to brothels (Davidson 1998, 94).[37]

An epigraph tells of three *hetairai* who allegedly seduced three sailors and robbed them blind; the author warns readers to beware of Aphrodite's pirates and their ships,[38] as they are more dangerous than the Sirens. Surely, if these women had been living lives of luxury and comfort, they would not have resorted to sneaking around the harbors, where *pornai* dwelled, and robbing their clients. This serves as a reminder not to assume that every *hetaira* was successful, wealthy, autonomous, and comfortable; much like Hollywood, ancient Athens was a land where dreams were made… and sometimes shattered.

When reading descriptions of *hetairai* in scholarship, one often encounters a vivid, almost coquettish image of an autonomous woman—public, loud, beautiful, and intelligent, sometimes significantly well-off—whose life is imbued with eroticism, exoticism, and luxury; a woman free from the typical social restraints imposed on Athenian women. However, very few authors address the darker aspects of *hetairai*'s lives. Occasionally, there is mention of the mistreatment and

[37] Neaira's former lovers raised large amounts of money to help her stay independent and not fall into the hands of a *pornoboscos* (Dem. 59.17-20).

[38] A symbolic way of calling the *hetairai* – they were considered to be the priestesses of Aphrodite, but here they are labelled as pillagers and robbers, therefore Aphrodite's pirates.

abuse they suffered due to a prevailing mentality that viewed them as public women, non-citizens, and therefore fair game for harassment. Interestingly, most of the authors who portray this idealized image of the hetaira are men, whereas the more critical accounts highlighting the hardships of her life are often written by women.

Only when we enter the sphere of law do we see the full extent of the *hetaira*'s insecurity. Indeed, she was beautiful, praised, and desired; she had the possibility of living a life of luxury and controlling her own money, could be educated, and engage in debates with men. She enjoyed freedoms that Athenian women could only dream of. She was the *femme fatale*, a representation of everything an Athenian man wanted but could not find at home, she was her own *kyrios*.

But this was precisely where the problem lay, as we have explained in the previous chapters. At the end of the day, she was still a woman whose existence was shaped by a severely patriarchal society whose laws were stacked against her. The sense of quasi-liberation came at a great cost. Someone stole from her? Hired her for her services and then refused to pay? Borrowed money from her and refused to repay? Broken into her residence? Assaulted or sexually violated her? Falsely accused her of a crime out of jealousy or spite? If no one was willing to represent her in court, she had no means of obtaining justice. Ultimately, her security and peace depended entirely on the mercy of the community—and, above all, on the men from whose control she desperately tried to escape.

Therefore, was she ever truly free?

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Војислав СТАНИМИРОВИЋ

Уна ДИВАЦ

ХЕТЕРЕ ИЛИ МИТ О СЛОБОДИ

Резиме

Патријархат доминира историјом родних односа већ хиљадама година, вешто трансформишући своје обрасце и *налазећи подршку* у *обичајима, религији* и *законима. Упркос савременим напорима, патријархат не само да је опстао, већ се данас суочавамо* с *снажним таласом репатријархализације. Да бисмо боље разумели разлоге за упорну издржљивост патријархалних образаца* и *научили како да их деконструишемо, неопходно је истражити њихове корене* у *далекој прошлости* и *покушати да утврдимо шта је допринело њиховом настанку* и *опстанку. Овај рад фокусираће се на свет античке Грчке – посебно на античку Атину. Позната као колевка демократије, драме* и *хуманистичких наука, Атина је показала своју мрачну страну кроз однос према женама. Оне су биле потпуно избрисане из јавног живота, ускраћене за образовање* и *ограничене на улоге домаћица* и *мајки унутар зидова својих домова.* С *друге стране, мушкарци су били снажно усмерени ка јавној сфери* и *стицању знања* и *политичких вештина, што је стварало огроман образовни* и *културни јаз између мужева* и *жена* и *доводило до међусобног удаљавања. На другом крају спектра налазиле су се проститутке* и *конкубине различитих класа: порне, паллаке* и *софистициране хетере, које су увек биле на располагању мушкарцима. Једине жене* у *атинском друштву које су будиле макар трунку поштовања* и *дивљења* у *мушкарацима, биле су хетере. Али, показаће се, то је имало високу цену.*

Кључне речи: - Хетере. – Куртизане. – Проститутке. – Античка Атина.