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Assignment 4

Gobbert Exercise: Find a piece of evidence from the ANCIENT SOURCES (no more than 4 lines) and discuss it.

In this Gobbert exercise I will use a short excerpt of text to show how it relates to what I have recently been researching, namely that of, extra marital relations in Ancient Athenian society.

‘the Court of the Areopagus itself, to which has been assigned, in our own as in our fathers’ time, the trial of suits for murder, has expressly stated that whoever takes this vengeance on an adulterer caught in the act with his spouse shall not be convicted of murder’¹

Lysias was the son of Cephalus, ‘a wealthy shield-maker of Syracuse who, on the invitation of Pericles, had settled as a resident alien in the Peiraeus’². The date of Lysias’ birth is speculative, and said to have been around 457 B.C.E.³. Forced into exile from Athens during the reign of the Thirty Tyrants, Lysias, being a democrat, ‘supported the democratic opposition that was forming in Boeotian exile’⁴. Upon his return to Athens, after the fall of the tyrannical rule of the Thirty, Lysias, ‘was active as a speechwriter and also appeared as an orator’⁵. He is remembered as being part of a group of men known as the ‘Ten Orators’.

The short excerpt of text is taken from a collection of Lysias’ orations, and in this particular case been translated into English by W.R.M. Lamb. The title of this oration is ‘On the murder of Eratoshenes’⁶ and is the speech produced by Euphiletus before the Law Courts of Athens as his defence, after having killed Eratosthenes, whom he found in bed with his wife. The oration presented by Euphiletus was written by Lysias⁷.

Ancient Greek society was a highly monetised society and wealth orientated, the rightful ownership of property, land, and/or someone, was key to both class and status. The requirements of Athenian citizenship are also relevant, ‘The legislation of Perikles in 451/0 decreed that a man’s parents both had to be citizens for him to be a citizen’⁸. It was required by law for Athenians to be able to prove the ancestry of both the mother and the father of the child, going back to the grandparents of both parents, and their respective demes. This is important to note, with regards to the effects of extra-marital affairs because,

¹ Lys.1.30 (translation Lamb)

² Lamb, 1960, p. ix

³ Lamb, 1960, p. ix

⁴ Weißenberger, Brill’s New Pauly, online

⁵ Weißenberger, Brill’s New Pauly, online

⁶ Lamb, 1960

⁷ Lamb, 1960

⁸ Dillon and Garland, 1994, p.373

‘adultery on the part of a wife could threaten the legitimacy and standing of all her children’⁹, and therefore, their citizenship to the polis of Athens.

It should be noted, that within the law and in the courts, and in Athenian society generally there is a male bias, for example, ‘common forms of hubristic acts are sexual assaults (rape, seduction, or deviant practices), where emphasis is thereby placed on the dishonour inflicted on the victims or on the male householders responsible for them.’¹⁰. So, it would seem, that even if the victim of the crime was female, in the case of adultery, it was seen as an affront to the patriarch of the family. That said, in conclusion, we can discern that the act of adultery could have grave consequences for all those whose families were involved.

Word Count: 504

⁹ Dillon and Garland, 1994, p.374

¹⁰ ed. Roberts, 2007, online

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