

A girl of not too good a reputation, one of such as sit in the middle of the Subura, the auctioneer Gellianus was lately selling. As for some time she was going for small biddings, wishing to prove to all that she was clean, he drew the unwilling girl to him, and twice, thrice, four times he kissed her. Do you ask what he achieved by the kiss? A bidder of six hundred sesterces withdrew his bid. (Mart. 6.66)

A female barber sits just at the entrance of the Subura, where the blood-stained scourges of the executioners hang, and many a cobbler faces the Potter's Field. But that female barber, Ammianus, does not crop you; she does not crop you, I say. What, then, does she do? She skins you. (Mart. 2.17)

(Both from Martial *Epigrams*, 2nd C CE)

Digest 23.2.43 pr. 6 onw.

We hold that a woman openly practises prostitution, not only where she does so in a brothel, but also if she is accustomed to do this in a tavern or inn or anywhere else where she manifests no regard for her modesty.

We understand the word 'openly' to mean indiscriminately, that is to say, without choice, and not if she commits adultery or unlawful intercourse, but where she sustains the role of a prostitute. More over, where a woman, having accepted money, has intercourse in return for payment with only one or two persons, she is not considered to have openly prostituted herself. Octavenus, however, says very properly that where a woman publicly prostitutes herself without doing so for money, she should be included in this category.

The name and calling of pimp was so odious both to the ancient laws and to those of the Empire that many legal enactments have been published against persons committing offences of this description. We, ourselves, have already promulgated a constitution increasing the penalties against those who are guilty of such wicked deeds, and we have, in addition, supplied by other laws what our predecessors omitted, and have by no means lost sight of this matter, for we have very recently been informed of the evil consequences which such traffic has caused in this great city.

We are aware that certain people live illicitly, that they find opportunity for themselves for dishonourable wealth by cruel and hateful means. They travel around the provinces and many other places, and they deceive wretched girls promising them shoes and clothing. With these they buy them and lead them back to this most blessed city. They keep them in their homes, and give them wretched food and clothes and then hand them over to those desiring them for their pleasure. They themselves receive the shameful income earned from the bodies of the girls. They draw up agreements so that the girls will maintain this wicked and criminal occupation so long as their keepers wish. Some of the women also take sureties.

They pursue this criminal activity so much that in almost all of this regal city, as well as in the countries beyond seas; and (what is worse) houses of this kind exist in close proximity to holy places and religious establishments; and at the present time this wickedness is so prevalent that any persons who wish to withdraw these unhappy girls from the life that they are leading, and legally marry them, are not permitted to do so.

Some of these wretches are so unprincipled as to deliver over to corruption girls who have not yet reached their tenth year, and in order to ransom these unhappy beings for the purpose of contracting lawful marriage, great sums of money are exacted. Ten thousand means of effecting their ruin exist which are not susceptible of being described in words; and the resulting evil is so great, and the cruelty so widespread that, while it first was confined to the most remote parts of the capital, it now not only extends over the city itself but also over all its suburbs. (Justinian *Novellae* 14: 6th C CE)

“Recently, as I recall, you would hang around Isis’ temple, and Peace’s Ganymede, and the Palatine shrine of the immigrant mother and Ceres too (for women there are in every temple).” (Juvenal *Satires* 9.22-24: 1st/2nd C CE)

Petronius *Satyricon* 7-8

At last I went up to an old woman who was selling country vegetables and said, "Please, mother, do you happen to know where I live?" She was charmed with such a polite fool. "Of course I do," she said, and got up and began to lead the way. I thought her a prophetess . . . , and when we had got into an obscure quarter the obliging old lady pushed back a patchwork curtain and said, "This should be your house." I was saying that I did not remember it, when I noticed some men and naked women walking cautiously about among placards of price. Too late, too late I realized that I had been taken into a bawdy-house. I cursed the cunning old woman, and covered my head, and began to run through the brothel to another part, when just at the entrance Ascyrtos met me, as tired as I was, and half-dead. It looked as though the same old lady had brought him there. I hailed him with a laugh, and asked him what he was doing in such an unpleasant spot.

He mopped himself with his hands and said, "If you only knew what has happened to me." "What is it?" I said. "Well," he said, on the point of fainting, "I was wandering all over the town without finding where I had left my lodgings, when a respectable person came up to me and very kindly offered to direct me. He took me round a number of dark turnings and brought me out here, and then began to offer me money and solicit me. A woman got threepence out of me for a room, and he had already seized me. The worst would have happened if I had not been stronger than he." . . .

Every one in the place seemed to be drunk on aphrodisiacs . . . but our united forces defied our assailant. . . . (Petronius *Satyricon* late 1st C CE)

...and the first pages of my Art, composed for courtesans only, warns free-born ladies to drop it on the spot. Yet it's no crime in itself to turn out wanton verses: the chaste can read much they mustn't do. Very often your eyebrow-arching matron sees street-girls, undressed, game for every kind of sex – the very Vestal's eye observes prostitutes' bodies, and yet incurs no penalty as a result. (Ovid *Tristia* 2.303-312: early 1st C CE)

When you see those highborn ladies, the married women of the upper classes, how they perform friendship and network with each other socially...these women flatter people of our walk of life to their faces, but in secret, if there's ever an opportunity, they pour cold water over us on the sly. They say that we have affairs with their husbands, they claim that we're their mistresses, and they try to put us down. Because we're freedwomen, I and your mother, we were both prostitutes." (Plautus *Cistellaria* 23-37: 2nd C BCE)

Randy Inn and all you 'Inn-Attendants', ninth pillar from the Brothers with Felt* Hats, do you reckon you're the only ones with tools, they only ones allowed to fuck the girls and the rest of us are stinking goats? Or, since you clots are sitting in a queue one or two hundred strong, do you think I wouldn't dare stuff two hundred sitting tenants at once? Well, think again. For I shall scrawl the Inn's whole frontage for you with phallic graffiti – because a girl who ran from my embrace, loved by me as no other will be loved, for whom a great war has been fought by me, has settled here. With her the good and great are all in love and what's more (shame upon her!) all the shoddy backstreet adulterers. You above all, ace of the longhaired mob, a son of rabbit-ridden Celtiberia, Egnatius, whom a shady beard upgrades and teeth rubbed down with Iberian urine. (Catullus 37: 1st C BCE)

“Behind the temple of Castor are those whom you should not trust too soon. On the Vicus Tuscus are people who sell themselves.” (Plautus *Curculio* 480-481: 2nd C BCE)

*Refers to the temple of Castor and Pollux in the Forum Romanum.

We beg you, meaning no offence, to show us where your hide-out is. We've sought you in the lesser Campus, in the circus, in all the bookshops, in the hallowed shrine of Jove Most High. At the same time in Magnus' Walk [portico of Pompey] I seized on all the girlies, friend, although I saw they looked quite cool. 'Hand him over!' I kept demanding; 'I want Camerinus, naughty girls.' 'Look,' said one, drawing back her dress, 'he's hiding here – on rosy nipples.' But enduring you now is a labour of Hercules; your absence, friend, is so arrogant. Tell us where you'll be, speak out boldly, share it, trust the light. Are milk-white girls now holding you? If you shut your mouth and hold your tongue you'll throw away all the fruits of love. Venus loves volubility. Or if you like you may seal your lips provided I can share your love. (Catullus 55: 1st C BCE)

He was the first of the Romans, it is said, who wore clothing wholly of silk, although garments partly of silk were in use before his time. Linen that had been washed he would never touch, saying that washed linen was worn only by beggars. [...]

He gathered together in a public building all the harlots from the Circus, the theatre, the Stadium and all other places of amusement, and from the public baths, and then delivered a speech to them, as one might to soldiers, calling them "comrades" and discoursing upon various kinds of postures and debaucheries. Afterward he invited to a similar gathering procurers, catamites collected together from all sides, and lascivious boys and young men. And whereas he had appeared before the harlots in a woman's costume and with protruding bosom, he met the catamites in the garb of a boy who is exposed for prostitution. After his speech he announced a largess of three aurei each, just as if they were soldiers, and asked them to pray the gods that they might find others to recommend to him. (*Historia Augusta* Elagabalus 26.3-5: late 4th C CE)