

Lust and Prostitution Discussion

How was prostitution regarded in the ancient world? What do these examples of Verres' lustful behaviour demonstrate about himself and sexual attitudes? Why would the prosecution have said nothing about Clodia's affair with Caelius?

"I say nothing of the rape of free-born persons and the forcing of married women, outrages not committed in these days when the city was taken, however much the passions of war-time, military licence, the custom of war and the right of the conqueror might provoke them. I say nothing, I repeat, of all these performances of Verres during those three years: let me tell you of such as are akin to those of which I have been speaking already." (*Verr.* 2.4.116: part of Cicero's contrast between Marcus Marcellus who captured Syracuse in the second Punic War and Verres)

"You must know that, among all the towns in Sicily where it is customary for governors to stay and to hold assizes, there is no single town in which some woman belonging to some respectable family was not selected for the gratification of his lust. Some of these were openly brought to his dinner-table: the less abandoned ones came later at an appointed hour, avoiding the daylight and the society of his guests. Nor were his dinner-parties the quiet gatherings proper for a Roman governor and commander, nor had they the decency normally maintained at the tables of our magistrates: they were celebrated with loud shouts and cries of abuse, and sometimes things would go as far as an actual hand-to-hand fight." (*Cic. Verr.* 2.5.28)

"[5] But to return to the chapel of Heius, there was this marble statue of Cupid that I speak of; and opposite to it stood an admirable bronze Hercules, said to be the work of Myron, I believe—yes, it was so. And in front of these divine figures were altars—unmistakable proof, surely, of the chapel's sanctity. There were two other bronze statues, not very large, but remarkably attractive, in the shape and attire of maidens,... But Verres, gentlemen, carried off all the statues I have mentioned from the chapel of Heius; ... It was not that the Cupid felt any yearning for the house of this profligate or for the society of his mistresses. He was content to remain within the walls of the family chapel; he knew himself bequeathed to Heius as part of a sacred inheritance from his forefathers, and had no wish to belong to the heir of a courtesan. [Chelidon who had died and left money to Verres]" (*Verr.* 2.4.5-7)

"The guardians, perceiving the difficulty of making any appeals to him, and finding every pathway of approach steep, not to say completely blocked,... decided that their best course ... was to ask the help of Chelidon, the woman who, so long as Verres was praetor, not only controlled the civil law and all the private controversies of the nation, but also lorded it in all these matters of maintenance contracts. LII. Yes, they went to see Chelidon: [137]To speak of nothing else, I bid you think simply of the feelings of shame and disgust with which such men must have entered the dwelling of a harlot. For no consideration would they have brought themselves to stoop so low, had not regard for duty and friendship compelled them. They went, as I have said, to see Chelidon. Her house was full: decisions, judgements, methods of procedure—none ever heard of before—were being applied for: "make him give me possession," "don't let him take it from me," "don't let him pronounce against me," "get him to award me the property." Some were paying her cash, others were signing promissory notes: the house was filled, not with a courtesan's visitors, but with the crowd that attends a praetor's court." (*Cic. Verr.* 2.1.136-7)

"If he were then to be told that no crime, no enormity, and no act of violence has been brought before the court, but that a brilliantly able, hard-working, and popular young man is

being accused by the son of someone he has prosecuted once and is now prosecuting again,* and that this attack on him is being financed by a prostitute,...” (Cic. *Pro Caelio* 1)

“But if there were some woman quite unlike her who made herself available to everyone, who always had some man that she had openly designated as her lover, whose pleasure-gardens, house, and place at Baiae were open as of right to every lecher, who even kept young men and made up for their fathers' stinginess by paying them herself; if there were a widowed woman living shamelessly, a wayward woman living wantonly, a wealthy woman living extravagantly, and a lustful woman living like a prostitute, then am I really to think of it as criminal if some man should happen to have greeted her a little too freely?” (Cic. *Pro Caelio* 38)