

What was the economic position of freedmen in classical Athens?

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A freedman's economic position would have varied depending on his circumstances. 'Economic position' refers to income, employment and taxes. 'Freedman' refers to the ex-slave members of the metic class (MacDowell 1978:82).

The incomes of freedmen were varied depending on their occupation. There are several cases of bank-managers who rose from the rank of slave to citizenship after manumission (Shipton, 1997:403). The most famous of these is Pasion, who is described as the following:

'a slave working in a bank in Peiraieus owned by Antisthenes and Arkhestratos. Eventually he was given his freedom, took over the bank, became a wealthy man, and in return for benefactions to Athens was given Athenian citizenship.' (MacDowell 2010:99)

In a dispute over his will he is described as having 'For the real property of Pasion was about twenty talents, but in addition to this he had more than fifty talents in money of his own...' (Dem. Or. 36.5). As one talent was the equivalent of 6000 drachmae (Carradice 1995:49) this was a considerable amount of money. Hence it can be concluded that freedmen had the potential to become extremely wealthy.

On the other hand, not all freedmen held such illustrious positions as Pasion. There are examples of freedmen continuing to work for their former masters, for example as overseers in a workshop (Dem. Or. 27.19). As well, Akrigg (2015) discusses how hard it is to tell the percentage of metic foreigners and the percentage of freedmen metics. He also mentions that there were metics at all levels of industry, including as hired labour for agriculture (Akrigg, 2015:161-162). This would imply that there were freedmen being paid many different amounts of wages.

How they were freed would have had an impact on a freedman's economic position. Many slaves would have borrowed money from friends to pay for their freedom (MacDowell 1978:82). This would have been a financial burden in addition to the taxes that freedmen and metics had to pay.

The first of these taxes, the *metoikion*, was 'unique in Athens' as it was 'a poll-tax, levied on the person rather than his (or her) property or activities' (Whitehead 1977:75-76). Men paid 12 drachma each year, while women who had no son or husband paid six (Whitehead 1977:75). This was the equivalent of more than a day's wages each month for most metics (Whitehead 1977:76). Paying the *metoikion* would have been a severe financial drain on individuals with low incomes.

Another fee was the *xenikon telos*. This was paid by metics and foreigners who wished to set up a stall in the *agora* or marketplace (Akrigg, 2015:159). This would put a citizen stall selling the same things as a metic stall in a better financial position than the metic as the citizen wouldn't have to deal with the additional cost.

In conclusion, the income and employment of a freedman in classical Athens was variable depending on the individual's circumstances, but the taxes varied less often and were steeper for freedmen metics than they were for citizens.

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