

Classical Athens Essay 2: Concubines and Prostitutes.

Introduction

In this essay I will be discussing and engaging with a quoted piece text from Demosthenes orations 59, this oration is Apollodoros against Neaera which discuss the metic Neaera a hetaerae and her prosecution.

“If through the acquittal of this woman you drag the law through the mire and make it of no effect, then the trade of the harlot will absolutely make its way to the daughters of citizens, who through poverty are unable to marry, and the dignity of free-born women will descend to the courtesans.”¹

This is a small extract from Demosthenes oration 59, which discusses how release of Neaera would make a mockery of Athenian law and how it could lead to poor citizen women becoming hetaerae. Hetaerae in classical Athens would be treated as both teachers and women of the night, with hetaerae being either skilled in literature or musically inclined.²

Whilst reading though Demosthenes oration 59 I learnt more about the situation of Neaera and her life as a Hetaerae where multiple men claim to have had sex with her, returning to the extract within the first line it gives us a understanding to the seriousness of the crime that Neaera committed with Stephanus, her husband.

Another example that I found within the text that shows how serious the crime was when the speaker discussed something he said to Stephanus, “I proposed that he should deliver up for the torture the women-servants”³ this was proposed because the Apollodoros believe that if the women where to stay true to his words and insist that Stephanus child is with another Athenian women then all charges would be dropped.

In the last 3 lines within the extract it informs us that metic or slave women commonly take the on the job of a courtesan or a hetaerae and that it very rare for an Athenian citizen to be hetaerae, this information is important because it allows us a glance into the types of jobs that metic women would take.⁴

Continuing with the Demosthenes 59 after reading throughout the rest of the speech I learnt that Neaera and Stephanus married their metic daughters off to citizens claiming that they are citizen women, because of this we can glance into the point of view of Apollodoros and what looks to be his anger at the idea of an metic women being passed off as a citizen and how Neaera false play with her daughters endangers what he believes to be his culture.

¹ Demosthenes, Orations 59, Page 439

² Jones, P. V. (Peter V.) & JACT. 1984 Page 172

³ Demosthenes, Orations 59, Page 445

⁴ Demosthenes, Orations 59, Page 439

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In conclusion, I believe that this text is extremely relevant to the topic that I am researching as it helps grant me some insight to the average life of a prostitute in classical Athens.

Bibliography

Jones, P. V. (Peter V.) & Joint Association of Classical Teachers. Greek Course 1984, The World of Athens: an introduction to classical Athenian culture: background book, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge.

Demosthenes Orations 59