

Gobbet piece

“But when she persisted and, woman-like, went about among her acquaintances with complaints of his conduct, he seized her with his own hands and dragged her off to the auction-room at the aliens’ registry, and if her tax had not happened to be duly paid, she would have been put up for sale”¹

This text is from the mid-4th century BC and was written by Demosthenes, a famous Athenian orator. The extract is from Orations 25. Against Aristogeiton 1. The work is a speech given to the jury in a legal case against Aristogeiton, a controversial citizen who makes trouble in the assembly and is in debt to the state. Demosthenes describes him as a blackmailer and as someone who is not to be trusted, to add to this he had even sold his own sister.

The broader context of the extract is that it is a section of Demosthenes’ speech in which he is describing the character of Aristogeiton, he speaks of the time after he broke out of prison and whilst on the run received shelter and aid from a woman named Zobia, a metic and his concubine at some time. After she helped him and gave to him in total, 8 drachmas, a tunic and a cloak so he could make his way to the polis of Megara, she complained to him and asked for some compensation; he then binded her and threw her out of his house.

It is after this that the extract I have selected comes into play, Zobia went to her acquaintances and complained to them about the way Aristogeiton behaved, when he heard about this he personally “dragged” her to the alien’s registry at the slave market to check if her *metoikion* had been paid and if this was not paid he would be able to sell her.

Now to understand certain parts of the text we need to ask some questions, what is a metic and what does that mean? What is an alien’s registry? And what is the *metoikion*?

Firstly, a metic is a resident foreigner living in Athens, either temporarily or permanently; this means that they would not be eligible for citizenship unless the state decided to grant them with such, they would also need to pay the *metoikion*, a tax on metics that if not paid the metic would become a slave, this would be paid at the local registry in the polis. A metic would also require what is known as a *prostates* meaning "one who stands on behalf of", this person would act as a kind of sponsor for the metic and this person had to be a citizen.²

This source highlights how unstable and dangerous the life of a metic concubine would be, as she did not have citizen’s rights, she was vulnerable to being ejected from her residence at the owner’s will. Zobia was diligent enough to keep up with her payments of the *metoikion* which means she would not be eligible for slavery, however it is unknown who her *prostates* was, if Aristogeiton was her *prostates* then she would potentially be in danger as he could revoke this and make her eligible for slavery, however the case may well be her *prostates* was someone else entirely, making her safer.

¹ Dem. Or 25. 56, 57.

² Roberts. J. (2007), P.471.

Bibliography

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