

Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World. Edited by CHRISTOPHER A. FARAONE and LAURA K. MCCLURE. Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006. Pp. 496. \$65.00 (cloth); \$24.95 (paper).

Prostitutes and Courtesans in the Ancient World consists of fourteen essays with a summarizing introduction by Laura McClure.

The first essay, "Marriage, Divorce, and the Prostitute in Ancient Mesopotamia," by Martha Roth (21–39), begins with a discussion of "sacred prostitution" in Babylon, which Herodotus famously cited as fact. Roth dismisses Herodotus, quoting Tikva Frymer-Kensky ("there is no evidence that any [temple-associated women] performed sexual acts as part of their sacred duties"), with, however, two exceptions: the *entu*, whose role was not specified but who "played a role in the sacred marriage ritual between the king and the goddess Inanna" in the late third millennium BCE, and the *qadistu*, a prostitute and "temple dedicatee."¹ But Roth prefers to discuss those independent women who were not under the control of a husband or father. Many of these women were discussed in wisdom literature, moral saws, and law codes.

In her essay, "Prostitution in the Social World and Religious Rhetoric of Ancient Israel" (40–58), Phyllis Bird analyzes the *gedesah*, "consecrated woman," and the *zonah*, "professional 'fornicator.'" The *zonah* is another "independent woman" with "no husband or sexual obligation to another male. . . . Strictly speaking her activity is not illicit—and neither is her role" (42). The prostitute in literature, however, stands for corruption: priests were not permitted to marry prostitutes, prostitutes were accused of stealing one's life, and both Jerusalem and Israel were likened to prostitutes, where everything was for sale. Bird also addresses the issue of male prostitution. She quotes Deuteronomy 23:18: "You [masculine singular] shall not bring the hire of a prostitute [*etnan zonah*] or the wages of a dog [*mechir keleb*] into the house of the LORD [in payment] for any vow." Scholarly consensus holds that "dog" meant the male prostitute. But Bird interprets the passage to imply that it is not prostitution that is forbidden but the use of income from prostitution as payment for a religious vow. Here we skirt again the issue of sacred prostitution.

The primary aim of Catherine Keesling's essay, "Heavenly Bodies: Monuments to Prostitutes in Greek Sanctuaries" (59–76), "is to reconsider the issue of deviation from the norms governing votive dedications within a specific context in which prostitutes' monuments were said to have appeared" (60). She mentions monuments like the bronze lioness dedicated to Leaina at the

¹ Tikva Frymer-Kensky, *In the Wake of the Goddesses: Women, Culture and the Biblical Transformation by Pagan Myth* (New York: Macmillan, 1992), 201–2.

entrance of the Acropolis next to a statue of Aphrodite (64); Leaina was the mistress of Aristogeiton and was tortured and killed by Hippias after the assassination of Hipparchus in 514 BCE. According to Pliny and Plutarch, the lioness “lacked a tongue because Leaina had refused to name her co-conspirators.” Keesling rightly attributes this story to myth. Keesling also discusses a plaque set up in a temple of Aphrodite at Corinth that carried the names of *hetairai* who prayed to the goddess on the eve of the Persian invasion in 480 BCE; it may have been a bronze statue group or a group painting. Keesling notes “the fame in the Roman imperial period of both the temple prostitutes of Aphrodite and of legendary Corinthian courtesans” and locates the plaque “in the temple of Aphrodite on Acrocorinth.” I doubt that the plaque was there. The hike to the summit of Acrocorinth (at an elevation of 574 meters/1,886 feet) would likely have deterred anyone from having sex there, and, in any case, the temple at the top was too small to have accommodated prostitutes, clients, and a statue group. More likely the plaque was in a temple to Aphrodite down in the city.

Stephanie Budin also tackles temple prostitution in her essay, “Sacred Prostitution in the First Person” (77–92). She begins emphatically: “Sacred prostitution never existed in the ancient world”; rather, it was “a literary motif used by one society to denigrate another” (72). Budin then discusses the many terms in the ancient texts that scholars have interpreted as referring to prostitutes but concludes that not one referred to the sexuality of cult personnel. Deuteronomy 23:18 is again quoted, but Budin thinks that “the terms may have at one time referred to Canaanite cult functionaries who later were condemned by the Yahwistic cults of Israel.” She concludes that most scholars of sacred prostitution in the Ancient Near East have indulged in circular reasoning: having been told by classical literature that there was sacred prostitution, these scholars have then looked for it (83). After several pages analyzing the Greek texts in this light (none a firsthand account), she summarizes: “What we are left with is a heap of quotes from classical authors telling us how distant societies . . . practiced sacred prostitution” (90). Thus, “the early [Christian] Church Fathers . . . seized the opportunity to use this so-called evidence to condemn the heathens” (91).

Edward Cohen’s “Free and Unfree Sexual Work: An Economic Analysis of Athenian Prostitution” (95–124) posits a sliding scale: the *porne* (common prostitute) sells herself frequently, the *hetaira* (companion) infrequently, the wife only once (97). Unlike Kurke, Cohen sees little distinction between cash (for the *porne*) and gifts (for the *hetaira*): “Prostitution involves payment for sex” (98).² Cohen then turns to differences in attitudes toward a worker’s

² Leslie Kurke, “Inventing the *Hetaira*: Sex, Politics, and Discursive Conflict in Archaic Greece,” *Classical Antiquity* 16 (1997): 106–150.

need for supervision (99–102). Ancient authors deplored workers who had a “job” (“repetitive service for a single employer on an ongoing basis over a continuing period”)—they are no better than slaves. Some work could be performed equally by the *metic* (resident alien), by the slave, and by the master, sometimes all three together. Cohen cites the evidence of the *phialai exeleutherikai* tablets (dated to the 320s BCE), which document the freeing of slaves (105–7). Of eighty-six female former slaves, fifty-two had occupations, and of these, twenty-nine were wool workers (*talasiourgoi*). Since all women were engaged in textile production in the household, we can imagine that those who had a job working wool were also employed doing something else, prostitution, for example. In fact, sixteen of those with jobs are called *pais* or *paidion*, “child” or “kid,” terms that commonly connote prostitutes. Finally, Cohen remarks how some men preferred to prostitute themselves under contract (*sungraphê*) to avoid the suggestion of dependence; such contracts stood up in court and were even valuable enough to be deposited with third parties. Unfortunately, he gives few specific examples.

In “The Bad Girls of Athens: The Image and Function of *Hetairai* in Judicial Oratory” (125–38), Allison Glazebrook examines the “orators’ use of a negative characterization of hetaira” and concludes that “their use of antithesis shows that orators manipulate images of women to their own advantage” (135).

Similarly, Susan Lape, in her study, “The Psychology of Prostitution in Aeschines’ Speech against Timarchus” (139–60), concludes that there is a “complete lack of evidence for the charge that Timarchus prostituted himself” (141); therefore, Aeschines’ prosecution of Timarchus was politically motivated. Lape also claims that, since Athenians did not keep birth records, “candidates for citizenship were paraded naked before members of their demes who visually inspected them” (141–42). She cites Aristotle’s *Constitution of the Athenians*, but that text mentions neither nudity nor a parade. Lape also posits that Aeschines could “present the supposed immorality of Timarchus and citizens like him as an alternative explanation for Philip of Macedon’s rise to power and Athens’ attendant decline in military stature”—an individual’s immorality had political consequences for the body politic (141). The immorality that Lape implies here is the practice of *paiderastia* (adult men socializing young males into male-dominated society). Plato assumed anal penetration in *paiderastia*, and to him this involved both gender inversion (a male penetrated like a woman) and a teleological transgression against the “natural” purpose of sex (procreation). Lape discusses this moral stance at length (147–51); she mentions laws that “safeguard children from the improper desires and advances of adults” and of “predatory parents, teachers, and authority figures” and claims that Aeschines was arguing for laws to “ensure that upon reaching the age of consent—which is also the age of citizenship—the new citizen will have

the capacity to distinguish between right and wrong, or between the noble and the base" (147). I have problems with this discussion. An Athenian began military training at the age of twelve, entered the army at eighteen, finished border patrol at twenty (by which time any paiderastic relationship had ended), got married in his late twenties or early thirties, and voted in the Assembly at thirty-five. Which of these stages was his "age of consent"? I also find her language not only vague (there is no specific mention of the term *paiderastia* or Plato's condemnation of gender inversion, for example) but also judgmental (since she uses terms such as "improper," "predatory," and "base" to describe it).

Thomas McGinn's essay, "Zoning Shame in the Roman City" (161–76), counts thirty-five brothels in Pompeii, implying some seventy men per prostitute. These brothels, from purpose-built to casual spots for sex, were located "all over town, near gates, upper-class houses, baths, hotels, and snack bars" (161). Was there, then, moral zoning? Clearly not, he concludes (162). McGinn then constructs a history of the "red-light" district, a deliberate zone for confining prostitution in a city. The emperor Constantine first established a brothel in Constantinople in the Zeugma district, clearly intending that prostitutes should remain there, but that was only in the fourth century CE. In fact, McGinn adds, "there is nothing about Christian moral teaching in antiquity that in any sense predestines it to favor a policy of zoning" (167). Yet St. Paul wanted to separate both prostitute and client from the church (1 Corinthians 6:15–16), and Augustine justified this separation: "Just as the human body segregates certain elements, so a well-ordered society isolates and renders as inconspicuous as possible the sale of sex" (quoted on 171).

Marsha McCoy's study, "The Politics of Prostitution: Clodia, Cicero, and Social Order in the Late Roman Republic" (177–85), deals mainly with Cicero's treatment of the high elite woman Clodia. Cicero's labeling of such a woman as a *meretrix* in his trial oration *Pro Caelio* (of 56 BCE) was unprecedented (177), and McCoy concludes that it condemned her to disappear from history. But after his daughter Tullia's death (in 45 BCE), Cicero "discusses with [his friend] Atticus the possibility of buying a property from Clodia" (185n18). I would think, therefore, that, while Cicero's treatment of Clodia during the trial was harsh, it was probably also normal; Roman orators and historians habitually accused every elite person of moral depravity, and after the trial it was "business as usual." Moreover, since almost all that we know about Clodia comes from Cicero, his silence about her after the trial says only that he had finished with her, not that she disappeared from Roman society.

In "*Matrona* and Whore: Clothing and Definition in Roman Antiquity" (186–204), Kelly Olson discusses how Roman prostitutes and adulteresses wore the citizen man's toga. There were, of course, other, more provocative

and exotic costumes for prostitutes, from standing scantily clad in doorways to sporting the saffron-colored *pallium* in comedy to the outrageous costume of Messalina in the brothel that Juvenal noted (192–97). In fact, prostitutes could probably wear anything they wanted. In the notes we learn that “the toga was in fact originally worn by both sexes, and it is unclear when and why the toga went from being the normal dress of a woman to the dress of a whore or adulteress” (202n20).

Christopher Faraone, in “Priestess and Courtesan: The Ambivalence of Female Leadership in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata*” (207–23), notes how the character Lysistrata was likened both to a proper matron and to a brothel madam. She was portrayed as “an aristocratic priestess of Athena” (208), but her “girls” act like sex-crazed whores who want to go home to attend to their “wool-work” (209–11; compare Cohen’s link between prostitution and wool working above). Faraone likens the Athenian acropolis to “a brothel run by Lysistrata and worked by the younger wives of Athens” (219). He does not mention the irony that the Athenian acropolis actually did function like a brothel at the end of the fourth century BCE, when Demetrius of Phaleron had sex with the *hetaira* Lamia in the Parthenon.

In “A Courtesan’s Choreography: Female Liberty and Male Anxiety at the Roman Dinner Party” (224–51), Sharon James takes up the theme of a man’s frustrated desire for a prostitute: “The woman a citizen male actually wants (indeed, the woman he must pay for) but cannot marry is the one woman he cannot control” (225). James defines “the elegiac *puella* [girl] as unmarriageable, as a woman under the control of neither husband nor pimp (nor father) . . . a woman who can say both ‘no’ and ‘yes’ to sexual propositions without fear of legal or communal reprisal” (228)—very like the Mesopotamian independent woman (compare Roth above).

In her study, “Infamous Performers: Comic Actors and Female Prostitutes in Rome” (252–73), Anne Duncan notes that both prostitutes and actors were considered *infames* (persons with bad reputations). First, “both prostitutes and actors were thought to be people who ‘faked it’ for a living,” and second, “the stigmatization of both groups by the upper classes as ‘low-Other’ worked to construct both prostitutes and actors as objects of desire” (252). The essay includes a long discussion of every prostitute in the plays of Terence and Plautus (see the summary, 268–69). Like James, Duncan notes how the *adulescens* (youth) in the plays “wants to be able to buy an exclusive relationship, but he does not want to have to keep paying for it, and he does not want anyone else to be able to buy it” (258). Duncan then compares cross-dressing in the ancient theater (where men played women’s parts) to Elizabethan England and sixteenth-century Venice, when prostitutes wore men’s breeches. She concludes with an interesting observation, that prostitutes wore men’s costumes to connote that they had “unwomanly

sexual appetites . . . lust more like that of a man. So to the Romans, the cross-dressed female prostitute makes a statement about sexuality, whereas to us, she makes a statement about gender" (270).

The final essay is Kate Gilhuly's "The Phallic Lesbian: Philosophy, Comedy, and Social Inversion in Lucian's *Dialogues of the Courtesans*" (274–91). She discusses Lucian's well-known fifth dialogue, in which Klonarion inquires about Leaina (not the same as the one described by Keesling) and her relationship with Megilla from Lesbos. Megilla, her head shaved like an athlete's, is described as a *hetairistria*, a word found otherwise only in Aristophanes' myth in Plato's *Symposium*, and Gilhuly insists that Lucian's reference to this passage implies the way he "conjures the lesbian out of archaic Greek and classical Athenian literature . . . [and] thus problematizes the Athenian past of the Second Sophistic" (274). Surely Lucian is referring to Aristophanes' word, but I doubt that it was "a taboo word" whose "extreme coarseness Plato's audience would have understood," a word "not even fit for the comic stage" (285). I think it is simpler to imagine that Aristophanes made the word up and Lucian simply uses it as a joke. Gilhuly discusses the ménage à trois between Leaina, Megilla, and Demonassa. Megilla calls herself Megillus, the "husband" of Demonassa, but s/he does not have a penis, rather, something far more "pleasant." Gilhuly quotes David Halperin in claiming that in "the case of sex between women, one partner—the 'tribad'—is assumed to possess a phallus equivalent [an overdeveloped clitoris]" (quoted on 282). And accepting this odd interpretation (surely not all tribades had overdeveloped clitorises), Gilhuly then discusses the "lesbian phallus." I doubt that Lucian was implying that Megilla had an overdeveloped clitoris. Pressed for details by Klonarion, Leaina blurts out: "Don't question me too closely about these things, they're shameful; so by heavenly Aphrodite, I won't tell you"—and this line ends the poem. Surely Leaina won't tell because it is "unspeakable," a phrase that always alluded to oral sex (since it stopped one from talking). Lucian is making a joke: Megilla's penis-substitute is her tongue, and the sex was cunnilingus, which was always characterized in the ancient world as "shameful."

The book closes with a good bibliography and an index. There are few typographical errors, though they get more noticeable in the second half of the volume—and more irritating (for example, "alter" for "altar," 212). Aside from the repetitive and sometimes conflicting opinions on sacred prostitution, the essays here span the ancient Near East and classical Greece and Rome and provide a wealth of information on the ubiquitous prostitute—all in a paperback that is fairly reasonably priced.

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