

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

CHAPTER I

*Introduction: slaves and slavery in ancient
Greek comedy**Rob Tordoff*

How did the audiences of ancient Greek comedy react to the spectacle of masters and slaves? If they were expected to laugh *at* a slave threatened with a beating at one moment and *with* him when he exchanged jocular banter with his master at the next, what does this tell us about Greek slavery? The essays in this volume were presented at an interdisciplinary conference held at the University of Toronto in December 2008. The participants' brief was to put the slaves of ancient Greek comedy under the microscope to achieve a better understanding of the poetics of representing slavery in comic drama, the changing ways in which ancient Greek society projected the image of the comic slave and responded to it, and the function of the comic in negotiating the structural tensions and the struggles – both practical and ideological – inherent in a slave-owning society.

When we try to understand the representations of slaves and slavery in Greek comedy, we face a number of interconnected obstacles. Ideally, we would know the socio-economic composition of the audience, particularly in regard to slave ownership: what proportion of the audience owned slaves and how many slaves of what kinds did they have? We would also like to have before us a general picture of slave ownership in classical Athens. How many slaves were there in total? Who owned them and in what numbers? Were slaves typically Greeks or foreigners? At what tasks were they employed? How many of them were beaten or sexually assaulted, and with what frequency? How many were allowed to have families, or to buy or otherwise gain their freedom? And, finally, we would know what being a slave in classical Athens was *really* like – from the perspective of slaves and in their own words. If we possessed such information, we could make educated guesses about how an Athenian audience reacted to the spectacle of the slave

I would like to thank a number of friends and colleagues for their great generosity in reading this chapter and giving me immeasurable help and encouragement and judicious criticism: Ben Akrigg, Robin Osborne, David Konstan, Adele Scafuro and especially S. Douglas Olson.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

on the comic stage and could gauge the extent to which the literature of the comic stage misrepresents its slave characters and perhaps account for why it does so.

Unfortunately, evidence of this range and quality is lacking, and, although many of the questions in the foregoing paragraph can be answered with some confidence, the crucial three cannot: these are the questions of the socio-economic composition of audiences of comic drama, the nature and extent of slaveholding in classical Athens and the lived experience of the men, women and children enslaved there. Although numerous texts offer tantalizing hints that the social composition of the audience was highly varied, sufficient detail to establish the proportions of slave owners and non-slave-owners, not to mention slaves themselves, is lacking. This is unsurprising, given that the question of the scale and socio-economic distribution of slave ownership in Athens as a whole in the fifth and fourth centuries is the subject of the greatest debate and is itself but one interlocking piece in the larger puzzle of the socio-economic structure of the classical polis and the nature of production, especially in its agrarian economy. (Further discussion on these questions will follow.) Finally, since writing drama was the exclusive business of free men, servile voices on the comic stage can never be more than the hollow ventriloquism of an elite exploiting the slave in literature as in life. No documents like the well-known autobiography of the escaped former slave and abolitionist Frederick Douglass survive from classical Athens.¹

Despite these very great difficulties, the exploration of comic representations of slavery is not without promise. Even if we cannot know with any precision how many slaves there were in classical Attica, how widespread slave-ownership was or what proportion of the labour force slaves formed, we can assemble the scattered and fragmentary evidence and attempt a

¹ Closest, perhaps, to a document such as Douglass (1892) is the *Life of Aesop*, a fictional biography of the legendary slave fabulist who reportedly lived in the late seventh and early sixth centuries. For insightful analysis of the text as a rich document of social history, see Hopkins (1993). For a similar approach to studying Roman slavery through literature, see Fitzgerald (2000). The grave *stelai* of Athenian slaves provide much of what little help there is with finding genuine slave voices in the historical record, though masters probably made the majority of funerary dedications on behalf of their slaves: see, for example, *IG* I³ 1361; *IG* II² 10051. For the identification of slaves in funerary inscriptions, see Bäbler (1998), 203–4, and for general discussion, see Nielsen (1989). One probably genuine document (a letter) written by (or to the dictation of) a fourth-century Athenian slave has recently come to light (Agora Inv. IL 1702). See Harris (2004), criticizing the original publication by Jordan (2000), who argues that the author is a free ‘apprentice’. The letter is from a slave to his mother and a man called Xenokles, asking them to beg his unnamed masters to remove him from employment in a foundry under another unnamed man who is subjecting him to brutal treatment. The slave ends his letter with the words ‘I’m dying of being scourged. I’m tied up. I’m being abused worse and worse.’

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

3

general description of the roles played by slaves in the polis. On that basis we can make tentative inferences about the relationships and attitudes to slaves and slavery likely to have been found among the Athenian audience. Most significantly, we can learn a great deal about how a refined literary elite represented slaves in comic dramas performed before a large and diverse audience.

Although the literature on slavery is vast and that on comedy very considerable, there has been little work at the intersection of the two subjects. The roles and functions of slaves on the comic stage have been catalogued and typologically analysed by I. E. Stephanis in a study of Aristophanes and by Martha Krieter-Spiro in her work on servants in Menander;² Victor Ehrenberg has collected the detailed evidence of comedy for the role of slaves in everyday life;³ David Wiles has examined the role of drama in creating and maintaining an ideology of slaveholding;⁴ and more recently an essay by Alan Sommerstein has set the terms of a new research agenda examining the ways in which the comic depiction of slaves challenges and undermines the dominant citizen ideology.⁵ But on the literary side, the brief discussion of slaves in comedy in a new reference work on the history of world slavery shows the central question concerning the comic representation of slaves has yet to be fully explored:⁶ how to account for the ‘surprising’⁷ combination of sadistic physical and verbal abuse directed at slaves *and* the sympathetic and high-profile roles played by, for example, clever or loyal slaves.⁸ Conversely, on the historical side, we still lack an account of how and why the portrayal of slaves in comedy changes from the early dramas of Aristophanes to the plays of Menander, and a thorough-going investigation of which elements of comedy can be used as evidence for real historical practices and what is distorted, exaggerated or invented for humorous purposes.

The subject is as much of an academic minefield as anything in the study of the classical world. First, there are the extraordinary challenges presented by the interpretation of *comic* texts: principally, the difficulty of deciding

² Stephanis (1980); Krieter-Spiro (1997). On slaves and their roles in Aristophanes, see also Bourriot (1974); Dover (1972), 204–8; (1993), 43–50; Lévy (1974); Mactoux (1999). On slave roles in Menander, see also Alliand (1988); Aloni (1976–7); MacCary (1969).

³ Ehrenberg (1962), 123–41. ⁴ Wiles (1988).

⁵ Sommerstein (2009), 136–54. See also Walin (2009), who shows how preconceived notions of how slaves in comedy ought to behave has influenced the textual criticism and literary interpretation of Aristophanes.

⁶ Hunt (2011), 30–2. ⁷ *Ibid.*, 30.

⁸ McCarthy (2000) on Roman comedy directly attacks this question. On this dynamic in Roman comedy see also Parker (1989); Segal (1987), 15–41.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

what (if anything) may be taken at face value and what is ‘part of the joke’ – and therefore subject to distortion, exaggeration, inversion or even outright absurdist transformation.⁹ Even if those difficulties can be circumvented, research into slavery and comedy runs the risk of stumbling incautiously into impassioned modern debates over the character of ancient Greek slavery, of which the bitter clash between Moses Finley and Joseph Vogt is illustrative. The institution of slavery is offensive to the very idea of shared humanity, and Vogt’s use of the word *Humanität* did much to sow confusion and incite prejudice.¹⁰ Most scholars today would wholeheartedly echo Finley’s words ‘[a] mitigated evil remains an evil’.¹¹ Nevertheless, to treat every instance and every aspect of ancient Greek slavery as *equally* violent, exploitative and cruel would be either intellectually lazy or cowardly: surely there is some difference worth discussing between the situation of a manumitted wet nurse, who in her old age returned to live with her ex-master’s family, and that of the countless thousands of slaves worked to death in chains in the mines at Laureion. Treating all instances of ‘ancient Greek slavery’ as equivalent would also be profoundly ideological, and thus run the risk of misrepresenting or ignoring some of what our sources tell us about the complexity of the historical human relationships subsumed by the term. All these dangers are most acute when we are forced to try to reconstruct what was once in the gaps in the surviving evidence.¹² I hope that the emphasis below on the importance of fear and anxiety about slave resistance and revolt for understanding the dynamics of Greek comedy is not ideologically misguided, but the recent work of Niall McKeown gives disquieting pause for thought.¹³

In this introductory essay I first set out a general description of slavery in Athens, focusing on the economic roles slaves played. This is the historical backdrop against which Aristophanes, Menander and other comic poets wrote their plays. The description leads inevitably to consideration of the most controversial question involving the employment of slaves in classical Attica: the presence or absence of slave labour on the small family farm that was home to the great majority of landowning Athenians. The evidence of

⁹ On these kinds of question, see now Ruffell (2011).

¹⁰ I do not, of course, mean to impute prejudice or confusion on the matter to Finley: see Finley (1988), esp. 93–122. For recent discussion of the Finley–Vogt controversy, see Hermann-Otto (2010); Deissler (2010).

¹¹ The quotation comes from Finley’s review of T. Wiedemann’s 1975 English translation of Joseph Vogt’s *Sklaverei und Humanität* (1972): *The Times Literary Supplement*, issue 3844, 14 November 1975, p. 1348.

¹² Compare, for example, the work of Johnstone (1998) and duBois (2003), 131–52, on slave women.

¹³ McKeown (2010). Cf. McKeown (2007), 161–2.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)*Introduction*

5

comedy, in particular Aristophanes, has played a large part in the debate, and I offer a reassessment of the view that Aristophanes' comic heroes are evidence for the historical existence of a class of poor slaveholder farmers who formed the backbone of the Athenian citizen body. This draws us into complex questions involving the use of comic texts as evidence for real social and economic conditions and the economics of non-elite slaveholding in the ancient Greek city-state. To anticipate, I argue that in certain crucial respects the 'evidence' of comedy presents a picture of slaves and slavery distorted by the influences and imperatives of literary genre, dramaturgy and ideology. Further, I show that the allegedly poor slaveholding heroes of Aristophanes would not have appeared quite as poor to most poor Athenians as they do to us, and that this is a deliberate comic strategy with its own peculiar payoffs. In the section that follows, I examine comedy's characteristic strategies of representing masters, slaves and their interrelationships in Greek comic drama. Since slavery is a relation of power, to study comic slaves is necessarily to study comic masters, and neither can be understood apart from the other. And if the freedom that slavery availed masters and the subjection of slaves are merely two sides of the same coin, it is also true that that relationship was 'good to think with' and was mapped in different ways onto other negotiations of domination and subordination, each with its own peculiar relation to the practice of slavery. Finally, I survey the essays on slaves and slavery in Greek comedy collected in this volume, drawing some general observations and conclusions.

CHattel SLAVERY IN CLASSICAL ATHENS

Athens' system of slave ownership was a mixture of private and public chattel slavery, with the former accounting for the vast majority of slaves.¹⁴ Chattel slavery was very different from the system of helotage practised by the Spartans.¹⁵ The Spartan and Messenian helots were conquered Greek peoples reduced to permanent serfdom on the land they had once held as free men and women.¹⁶ As serfs the helots laboured in the fields on the estates to which they were bound,¹⁷ providing their masters with their

¹⁴ For general surveys of Greek (and Athenian) slavery, see Fisher (1993); Garland (1988). For a survey focusing on Athenian slavery, see Rihll (2011).

¹⁵ For a survey, see Cartledge (2011). See, further, Ducat (1990) and the essays in Luraghi and Alcock (2003).

¹⁶ According to Thucydides (1.101.2) most helots were descendants of the conquered Messenians.

¹⁷ Helots employed in agriculture: Arist. *Pol.* 1271b40–1272a2.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

mandatory contributions to the public messes,¹⁸ where some helots also worked as servants at the communal meals.¹⁹ When required, helots accompanied the Spartan army on campaign as light-armed auxiliaries and attendants.²⁰ They were not the property of individual Spartiates, though they toiled as domestic servants in their homes;²¹ moreover, they could only be killed, freed or even transferred from the lands to which they were attached with the permission of the state.²² In theory helots belonged to all Spartiates in common.²³ For this reason, as Strabo puts it, the helots were, in a sense, slaves of the entire community.²⁴

Apart from a group of public slaves, Athenian slaves were privately owned. They were not as a rule born in Attica, though the practice of breeding and raising them in the household was not unknown among the wealthy.²⁵ Athens' system of chattel slavery was sustained by the purchase of slaves from slave-traders. In general, slaves obtained in this way were not Greek, unlike the Spartan and Messenian helots; the only Greek state to export large numbers of slaves was Thessaly.²⁶ Instead, slaves found at Athens typically came from the non-Greek peoples to the north and the east: from Thrace, the Black Sea, Asia Minor beyond the Greek coastal cities and Syria; occasionally they were imported from the west, from Sicily and Illyria.²⁷ The evidence of the Attic *stelai* (*IG* 1³ 421–30) which enumerate the property confiscated in 414 from a group of wealthy men convicted of profaning the mysteries of Demeter and Persephone suggests that the clear majority of slaves at Athens was of non-Greek origin: out of 45 slaves put up for auction at least 31 are non-Greeks, approximately 70 per cent.²⁸ So too, of 26 slaves of identifiable ethnic origins in the fourth-century inscriptions from the

¹⁸ The sum of a helot's *apophora* ('rent') paid in agricultural produce was strictly fixed and there was a curse on any Spartan who tried to extract more: Plut. *Mor.* 239d–e.

¹⁹ Critias D-K 88 B33.

²⁰ Auxiliaries: Hdt. 9.28–9, 9.80.1, 9.85. Attendants: Hdt. 6.80–1; Xen. *Hell.* 6.5.28–9.

²¹ Domestic service: Hdt. 6.52.5–7, 63.1; Xen. *Hell.* 5.4.28, *Lac.* 7.5; Plut. *Ages.* 3.1.

²² Ephorus, *FGrH* 70 F117. ²³ Xen. *Lac.* 6.3. ²⁴ Strabo 8.5.4.

²⁵ [Dem.] 53.19–20; Pl. *Meno* 82b. On the Attic *stelai*, three slaves are listed as born in the house: stele 2, col. 1, lines 72, 75 (*IG* 1³ 422.72, 75), and stele 6, fr. b, line 23 (*IG* 1³ 426.16). See Pritchett (1956), 280.

²⁶ Schol. Ar. *Plut.* 521; cf. Hermippus fr. 63.18–19 K-A, who also mentions Phrygia as a major exporter of slaves.

²⁷ Cf. Isager and Hansen (1975), 33.

²⁸ Ibid. Cf. Pritchett (1956), 281, who calculates that the ratio of non-Greek to Greek slaves found in *IG* 1³ 421–30 is at least 28 : 12, i.e. at least 70 per cent foreign. However, such calculations rest on the assumption that Greek names indicate Greek slaves, which given the propensity of Athenians to rename their slaves (cf. Pl. *Cra.* 384c10–d8) is far from secure. The true proportion of foreign slaves may well have been even higher. Slaves were quite often given ordinary Greek names: on slave onomastics, see below.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

mining district of Laureion, only 3 are Greeks.²⁹ If extrapolated, this suggests that almost 90 per cent of slaves in the silver mines were of foreign origin.

Slaves were found virtually everywhere in the economy, from banking to trade, retail, crafts and industries, prostitution, mining and agriculture. A large number of slaves were owned by the polis and employed in various offices and functions in what would today be referred to as the 'public sector'. Perversely, but unsurprisingly, we know far more about tiny minority groups of highly skilled, specialized or valuable slaves than we do about the vast majority of slaves at Athens. The slaves mining silver in the district of Laureion and working on the farms of Attica must have vastly outnumbered slave bankers such as Pasion. One effect of the elitist bias of our sources is that we know most about the very small number of slaves who became rich in the banking industry, who were high-class, high-fee prostitutes such as Neaira, or who were highly literate and numerate archivists and accountants for the polis. Slaves of this type appear in the Athenian law-court speeches, written for wealthy clients by men such as Lysias and Demosthenes, and in political documents ranging from inscriptions on stone to the Aristotelian *Athenaion Politeia*, the latter a description of the structure and function of the Athenian state clearly written for a highly educated social and intellectual elite. Even when we catch more than a glimpse of domestic and agricultural slavery, it is in the context of a household and estate belonging to a very rich man: the wealthy Iskhomakhos of Xenophon's treatise on household management, the *Oeconomicus*. Our evidence for the roles and functions of slaves and slavery at Athens thus appears in quantities almost inversely proportional to the numbers of slaves found in any given sector, and perhaps even in an inverse relationship to their real importance to the Athenian economy.

Quantifying slaves at Athens is an insoluble problem, as is the question of the total population of classical Attica. Here, historians must work with models, upper and lower boundaries and probabilities; estimates range from around 30,000 to over 150,000.³⁰ Ancient writers thought there were many more slaves in Attica than this, but the absence of reliable statistical data in antiquity and the general uncertainty about very large numbers betrayed by

²⁹ Isager and Hansen (1975), 33, drawing on Lauffer (1979 [1955–6]), 1.124–8, for the inscriptional evidence.

³⁰ Estimates of slave numbers are of course different for different periods of Athenian history. A. H. M. Jones (1957), 75–96, estimates 60,000 slaves in the late fourth century (c.330). Hansen (1991), 53–4, 90–4, estimates more than 150,000 as an average over the fourth century, while Sallares (1991), 60, suggests a much lower figure, in the range of 30,000–50,000, for the same period.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

ancient sources have led to these figures being almost universally rejected.³¹ Perhaps the most that can be legitimately inferred is that ancient Greeks thought that Athens, along with Corinth and Aegina, had an unusually high population of chattel slaves. A plausible reason for this judgement is the presence of large-scale commerce and industry in these cities.³²

Privately owned slaves were not an undifferentiated mass of domestics. The Aristotelian *Oeconomica* distinguishes between slaves acting in a managerial capacity and labourers.³³ A tiny minority of slaves in managerial positions became rich and powerful, for example the successful slave banker Pasion.³⁴ Slave bailiffs on large estates acted as managers,³⁵ as did the slave overseers of manufacturing businesses³⁶ and the slave foremen of mining gangs.³⁷ Sometimes slaves in trusted managerial roles dwelt apart from the men who owned them, as did slaves established by their owners in semi-independent businesses.³⁸ Athenians called these slaves the *khōris oikountes*: slaves ‘maintaining their own households’.³⁹ They might enjoy considerable freedom of movement and decision: the slave merchant Lampis, for example, who had his own household in Athens with a wife and children, made trading voyages to the Bosphorus (Dem. 34.36–7).

³¹ The Hellenistic historian Ctesicles reports that a census conducted by Demetrius of Phaleron in the late fourth century found that Athens was populated by 21,000 citizens, 10,000 metics and 400,000 slaves (Ath. 6.272c = *FGrH* 245 F1). The orator Hyperides (fr. 29), in a speech probably delivered soon after 338, proposed enrolling into the military 150,000 slaves from the mines and the countryside of Attica. Since slave women, children and unsuitable men cannot be included in this figure, Hyperides must have believed there were more than 150,000 slaves in Attica. Modern historians all but universally reject the ancient slave numbers on the grounds that Attica’s economy could not possibly have supported so many people. For a dissenting voice, see Taylor (2001). Estimates of the slave population of Attica must necessarily move beyond interrogating the ancient evidence to contemplate models of demographic structure, landholding patterns, labour supply and agricultural strategies, and the structure and potential of the classical Athenian economy. The slave population of Attica is but one interlocking piece in this puzzle. An enormous bibliography could be cited, but I restrict references here to the studies from which I have learned most: Akrigg (2007); Burford (1977, 1993); Burke (1992); Cartledge (1998); E. E. Cohen (1992, 2000); Davies (1998); de Ste. Croix (1966, 1981); Finley (1959, 1960, 1973); Foxhall (1992); Gallant (1982, 1991); Garnsey (1988, 1992, 1998); Gomme (1933); Halstead (1987); Hansen (1986, 1988, 1991, 2006); Hanson (1983, 1992, 1995); Jameson (1977–8, 1992); A. H. M. Jones (1957); Moreno (2007); Morris (1994); R. Osborne (1985, 1991, 1992, 1995); Rosivach (1993); Sallares (1991); Sargent (1923); Scheidel (2005, 2008); Sinclair (1988); Westermann (1955); Wood (1983, 1988).

³² Sparta was recognized as the largest slaveholding state in classical Greece. Thucydides (8.40.2) says that Chios had more slaves than any Greek state apart from Sparta.

³³ [Arist.] *Oec.* 1344a26–7 refers to them as *epitropoi* and *ergatai* respectively.

³⁴ See, for example, Dem. 36.13–14. ³⁵ Xen. *Oec.* 12.2–3; cf. *Mem.* 2.8.1–4.

³⁶ Aeschin. 1.97; Hyp. 3.4–11. ³⁷ Xen. *Mem.* 2.5.2.

³⁸ Aeschin. 1.97; Dem. 4.36–7. For discussion, see E. E. Cohen (2000), 145–54; Perotti (1974). For the legal status of such slaves, see Harrison (1968), 167–8.

³⁹ For this translation of the term, see E. E. Cohen (2000), 148 n. 94.

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

Introduction

9

Independent slaves running their own businesses might make considerable profits or amass considerable debts.⁴⁰

In all cases the *khōris oikountes* maintained commitments to their owners, in particular payment of the *apophora* or *ergasia* (a fixed sum of money due their master).⁴¹ But these independent slaves could dispose of whatever extra they made as they wished, including saving to buy their freedom.⁴² Not all slaves who maintained their own households were bankers, merchants or the owners of valuable businesses. But even the less prosperous among them had an advantage over other slaves: by living apart from their masters they could, at least in practice if not in law, own moveable property. Even a humble craftsman such as Aristarkhos the leatherworker, listed on the Attic *stelai* among the chattels of Adeimantos of Skambonidai, owned two beds and a table, which were sold along with him.⁴³

Privately owned chattel slaves were employed in a huge array of specialized tasks and occupations. Edward Harris has identified over 170 discrete 'labour functions' in classical and Hellenistic Athens, and slaves were no doubt found in all of them.⁴⁴ Highly skilled manufacturers and craft-workers produced goods in workshops or at their masters' sides, like the slave stonemasons employed on the construction of the Erechtheum.⁴⁵ The latter were clearly highly trained, like many slaves employed in metalworking, the plastic arts, textiles, pottery, finance, education and the performing arts. One slave freed in the manumission lists from the late fourth century was apparently a doctor;⁴⁶ another was a secretary.⁴⁷

Sex workers met their clients in large brothels, in special small cubicles opening into the road or on the streets. The vast majority of prostitutes were

⁴⁰ The slave *parfumier* Midas (in Hyp. 3) probably represents an extreme case of the amount of debt it was credible for a master to allow his slave to accrue, around 5 talents (Hyp. 3.9); he was sold fraudulently with vast, hidden liabilities that his former master Athenogenes hoped to escape paying off (Hyp. 3.4–11).

⁴¹ *Apophora*: [Xen.] *Ath. Pol.* 1.11; Xen. *Ways and Means* 4.14; Andoc. 1.38; Aeschin. 1.97; Men. *Epit.* 380; Theophr. *Char.* 30.15.

⁴² e.g. [Dem.] 59.31.

⁴³ Stele 6, fr. b, lines 21, 31–46 (*IG* 1³ 426.15, 24–39). See Pritchett (1956), 281.

⁴⁴ See E. M. Harris (2002), 98–9, for the overview of fourteen different sectors, and 88–97 for the different individual functions.

⁴⁵ For slaves working alongside masters on the Erechtheum, see for example the slaves of Laossos, whose names were Parmenon and Karion: *IG* 1³ 476.77–8. For discussion and analysis of the Erechtheum accounts, see Randall (1953). For workshops: Dem. 27.9; Aeschin. 1.97; cf. Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.4.

⁴⁶ *SEG* xxv.180.11: for discussion, see Lewis (1968), 372.

⁴⁷ *IG* 11² 1556.14. Highly literate slaves were also owned by the wealthy, as in the case of the unnamed slave of Eukleides who reads aloud for his master most of the dialogue of Plato's *Theaetetus* (see 142c–143c).

Cambridge University Press

978-1-107-00855-7 - Slaves and Slavery in Ancient Greek Comic Drama

Edited by Ben Akrigg and Rob Tordoff

Excerpt

[More information](#)

10

ROB TORDOFF

probably slaves working in brothels (*porneia*).⁴⁸ Male prostitutes, like the Elean war-captive and slave Phaidon,⁴⁹ seem in general to have worked alone, waiting in small cubicles beside the street.⁵⁰ Some female prostitutes practised the trade in the same way,⁵¹ but in general slave women in prostitution belonged to bordellos where they could be assembled naked in a large hall for paying customers to appraise and select (if the testimony of fourth-century comic fragments is to be believed).⁵² Many of these women were trained in music and dance, but it was apparently not unusual for them to be put to work spinning wool when they were not attending to clients.⁵³ Exceptionally successful prostitutes could command vertiginous fees and the financial clout to raise the necessary funds to buy their freedom, as Neaira reportedly did (for the sum of 2,000 drachmas, reduced by her owners from the 3,000 they had paid for her).⁵⁴ These professionals (some slave, some free) were generally referred to as *hetairai*, a euphemistic circumlocution meaning literally ‘companionesses’ – in contrast to the brothel prostitutes commonly known by the pejorative term *pornai*, ‘whores’.⁵⁵ *Hetairai* may have worked alone from a private residence, as Theodote does in Xenophon’s *Memorabilia*.⁵⁶

Other slaves were employed in businesses and industries from mining and agriculture to market selling and trading. Slaves appearing in the late fourth-century manumission lists include market retailers, such as Philon the salt-fish seller;⁵⁷ slaves working in transportation, such as Soterides the ass driver;⁵⁸ and others in domestic service, such as the wet nurse Lampris.⁵⁹ Undoubtedly the most wretched were the miners excavating silver ore in the district of Laureion. According to Xenophon, the fifth-century Athenian general Nicias owned a thousand slaves, each one leased to a mining

⁴⁸ Cf. Davidson (1997), 97. For the term *porneion*: Ar. *Vesp.* 1283, *Ran.* 113; Antiph. 1.14; Aeschin 1.124. Euphemisms for *porneion* included *synoikia*: Isae. 6.20. For discussion of the features of the *porneion*, see Glazebrook (2011).

⁴⁹ Diog. Laert. 2.105; Gell. 2.18; *Suda* s.v. *Phaidon*. ⁵⁰ Aeschin. 1.74; Ath. 220d. ⁵¹ Isae. 6.19.

⁵² See Xenarchus fr. 4.5–9 K-A; cf. Eubulus fr. 67, 82 K-A.

⁵³ Large numbers of drinking vessels and loom weights have been found in building Z3 in the Kerameikos that was almost certainly at one time a brothel: see Glazebrook (2011), 50, and the bibliography cited on pp. 58–9 n. 53.

⁵⁴ [Dem.] 59.29–32. For the vast range of fees (from a few obols to thousands of drachmas) demanded by prostitutes and their pimps for sexual services, see Loomis (1998), 166–85.

⁵⁵ The Greek *pornē* is pejorative and seems usually to denote a slave unless otherwise specified: E. E. Cohen (2006), 102–3. For a clear example of the significant juxtaposition of the euphemistic and pejorative uses, see Ar. *Plut.* 149–56. However, the terms *pornē* and *hetaira* seem to be used interchangeably in Anaxilas fr. 22.1, 22, 31 K-A. On slave *pornai* and *hetairai*, see Sells (this volume), 99–102; on the problematic vocabulary of *pornē* and *hetaira*, see Marshall (this volume), 174.

⁵⁶ [Dem.] 59.41; Xen. *Mem.* 3.11.2–4. On the latter, see Goldhill (1998). ⁵⁷ *IG* II² 1557.68.

⁵⁸ *IG* II² 1558.20–3. ⁵⁹ *IG* II² 1559.59–60.