

Comparing Greek and Roman Manumission in New Comedy: Gender and Citizenship

Both Greek and Roman slave owners used manumission as a tactic by which to gain loyal service from their slaves. However, any comparison of how the Greeks and Romans used and conceptualized manumission is complicated by the different types of surviving evidence of the two types of manumission: on the one hand, Roman jurists such as Ulpian give detailed descriptions of the legal process, on the other hand, thousands of Greek inscriptions commemorate distinct manumissions in places ranging from Delphi to Thessaly (Dumont 1987, Mouritsen 2012, Perry 2015 and Zelnick-Amramovitz 2005). Since both the Greeks and Romans depict and describe manumission in the highly stylized genre of New Comedy, these comedic examples provide an opportunity to compare this practice in the two societies. While both the Greeks and Romans framed manumission as a reward for loyal service, the different Greek and Roman conceptions and practices of gender and citizenship make the anxieties and problems around manumission unique to each society.

Scholars have analyzed how Plautus both problematizes and undermines slaves' assumption that manumission is a result of loyal and dedicated service (McCarthy 2000, Spanger 1984 and Stewart 2012). However, these approaches primarily focus on manumissions that occur in the conclusion of the plays, leaving aside manumissions that are described as occurring offstage, such as Lemniselenis' manumission in *Persa* (Auhagen 2001). These types of manumissions in particular warrant analysis because none of the surviving fragments of Menander include manumissions in the final scenes, but there are discussions of manumission that occur offstage, such as Krateia's in *Misoumenos* (Lape 2010, Vester 2013).

Analyzing all manumissions in the plays, rather than just those at the conclusions, reveals how gender and manumission are closely intertwined in a variety of ways, such as how a slave

references his or her manumission and how a slave's new freedom is challenged and valued.

While the male *Advocati* emphasize their past manumission in order to demonstrate their fortitude and wit (*Poenulus* 519-523), in the *Adelphoe* a woman is prevented from enslavement only because the male citizen Aeschines testifies to her status as a freedwoman (193-6). These challenges arise primarily because the former slaves are taking up new roles in public spaces as part of their new status, such as the *Advocati* as legal experts. Menander's freed slaves do not experience similar transitions. Indeed, in the *Samia*, a freedwoman does the exact same work that she did while she was a slave (236-8).

Both the Greeks and Romans understood manumission as an activity that could express Greek and Roman identity and is therefore a locus of Greek and Roman anxieties about their identities. Menander's *Getas* describes a past manumission as being particularly Greek because it was done in front of a domestic altar to Apollo (*Misoumenos* 715-9) while Plautus' *Grumio* catalogues careless manumission as an inequity to be expected of Greeks (*Mostellaria* 20-4). Although the Roman comedies are set in Greece, because of the elasticity of this setting at times the characters express thoroughly Roman perspectives on manumission, such as *Grumio*'s invective against the Greeks. Other times the Roman comedies expressly thoroughly Roman anxieties about Roman manumission, such as when the pimp *Dordalus* frames a financially profitable manumission as a virtuous increase in the citizenry (*Persa* 474-5). Even though *Dordalus* claims to be helping the Athenian citizenry, since only Rome granted citizenship to manumitted slaves, his comments reflect Roman anxiety about the power of slave owners to shape Roman citizenry through manumission.

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