

Resident aliens (metics) in the Athenian society: gender, politics, and democratic ideology

The *legal status* of metics has attracted some attention in recent years (cf. Kamen 2013, Lape 2010), while metic ideology was the subject of a seminal study by Whitehead (1977), which still remains the ‘standard’ work of reference on metic ideology. Yet Greek oratory and particularly the Demosthenic orations have received only limited consideration in modern scholarship. In contrast, this study (part of a larger project on metics in Athens), focusing on key Demosthenic orations (e.g. 22, 25, 34, 35, 56, and [59]), explores the ambivalent and complex Athenian ideology on metics, informed by modern discussions of gender and citizen identity, as well as latest research on foreign women in Athenian society (cf. Kennedy 2014, Kapparis 2021). Metic identity and ideology were variously constructed and could be positive, comparable to *citizen’s* morality and ideology, both for metic men and women (cf. Zobia). Simultaneously, the ad hoc socio-economic position of metics in Athens and their diverse experiences in manufacturing, commerce, or the sex industry could result in negative representations of individuals or ‘ethnic’ groups. For instance, the notorious prostitute Neaira, a metic cohabiting with an Athenian citizen, is presented as an existential threat to citizen women, to the Athenian family, and the institutions of the city. Similarly, Lakritos’ personal attributes, ‘ethnicity’ and undemocratic conduct shape the identity of a ‘typical’ Phasilites: ‘ethnic identity’ constructs the worst type of an ‘outsider’.

To conclude, this analysis of core source materials challenges modern conceptualisations of non-permeable social, political, and cultural divides between citizens and metics in Athenian society. Ideological considerations emerging from this study are especially timely and relevant to contemporary debates on immigration and comparable with the ambivalent citizen ideology

towards non-citizens in modern democracies, partly arising from prejudice or fears of the alien, the 'outsider', the 'other'.

Bibliography

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