

The Rhetoric of Slavery in Demosthenes 36 and the Characterization of Apollodorus and Phormion

This analysis will examine how the characterization of Phormion and Apollodorus can inform our understanding of slavery as a rhetorical device in Demosthenes 36. The speaker in Demosthenes 36 argues that if Apollodorus thinks that he has a claim on Phormion's property simply because Phormion was owned by Apollodorus' father Pasion, he is mistaken. The speaker goes on to say that the kin of Pasion's former owners have more of a claim to Phormion's property than Apollodorus (Demosthenes 36.46). So much so that following this line of argumentation, both Apollodorus and Phormion would belong to Antimachus (the son of Pasion's former owner). However, both Phormion and Apollodorus were Athenian citizens at the time this trial would have been conducted. The fact that the speaker uses Apollodorus' status as a son of a freedman against him sheds light on the stigma of being a former slave. In the context of Demosthenes 36, however, it is weaponized as a rhetorical device to characterize Apollodorus and prove the inadequacy of his argument.

The speaker continues the attack on Apollodorus by stating that "when you claim that Phormion should never be on equal terms with you, you are arguing against yourself. Whatever claims you make for yourself against him, the very same claims can be made against you by your father's original owners" (Demosthenes 36.48). In other words, Apollodorus had no business attacking Phormion's status because Apollodorus himself is the son of a former slave. This sheds light on the fact that even though Athenians such as Phormion and Apollodorus became prominent, they still carried with them "the stain of servility" (Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005). Even

though the speaker is clearly arguing on behalf of Phormion, he shows that slavery could be used as a formidable rhetoric.

While scholars such as Zelnick-Abramovitz and Kamen (2013) have analyzed Demosthenes 36 to illustrate the status of freedmen such as Pasion, Phormion, and Apollodorus, this paper examines the speech from a different angle. Likewise, while Kamen has shown how the rhetorical use of former slave status could function as invective against status climbers such as Phormion, I argue that the characterization of Phormion and Apollodorus as former slaves is multifaceted. For the purposes of the speaker, characterizing Phormion as a former slave benefits his case. To be clear, the reality of Phormion's status as a former slave meant that he endured the brutality of this cruel institution. However, for the purposes of the speech, the speaker is able to use Phormion's former servile status to boast about Phormion's character and his eventual acquisition of freedom and Athenian citizenship. He attempts to show how someone of servile origin was able to benefit both himself and his former masters, and eventually the city of Athens. On the other hand, the characterization of Apollodorus as a former slave was meant to remind him that he was no better than his opponent since he himself came from slaves. What becomes clear from a thorough reading of the speech is that in both cases the stigma of slavery remained relevant and served as an effective tool to judge each man's character. Demosthenes 36 is useful for thinking about the complexities of slave status in Athens.

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