**CLST 320 (Greek and Roman Slavery) Handout**

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**Theatre and entertainment**

**Although entertainers could gain great celebrity in the ancient world, entertainers were themselves low-status and usually began their lives as slaves. Even after they were freed they were still *infamis* and subject to further limitations on their rights. Below are a number of sources about entertainers from Greece and Rome, some of which describe the sexual violence that slaves could be subject to by drunken clients.**

**I *Hetaira* were courtesans, who were extremely cultivated and highly trained in various musical arts. In the following Athenaeus (2-3rd century CE) discusses a number of courtesans from Classical Greece.**

[37] Was there not also [Agathocleia](http://www.attalus.org/names/a/agathocleia.html#1) the courtesan, who had great power over king [Ptolemaeus](http://www.attalus.org/names/p/ptolemaeus.html#4) [Philopator](http://www.attalus.org/names/p/ptolemaeus.html#4)? in fact, was it not she who was the ruin of his whole kingdom? And Eumachus of [Neapolis](http://www.attalus.org/names/n/neapolis.html#1), in the second book of his *History of* [*Hannibal*](http://www.attalus.org/names/h/hannibal.html#5), says that [Hieronymus](http://www.attalus.org/names/h/hieronymus.html#3), the tyrant of [Syracuse](http://www.attalus.org/names/s/syracuse.html#1), fell in love with one of the common prostitutes who followed her trade in a brothel, whose name was [Peitho](http://www.attalus.org/names/p/peitho.html#2), and married her, and made her queen of Syracuse. [38] And Timotheus, who was general of the Athenians, with a very high reputation, was the son of a courtesan, a Thracian by birth, but, except that she was a courtesan, of very excellent character; for when women of this class do behave modestly, they are superior to those who give themselves airs on account of their virtue. But Timotheus being on one occasion reproached as being the son of a mother of that character, said,- "But I am much obliged to her, because it is owing to her that I am the son of [Conon](http://www.attalus.org/names/c/conon.html#1)." And Carystius, in his *Historical Commentaries*, says that Philetaerus the king of [Pergamum](http://www.attalus.org/names/p/pergamum.html#1), and of all that country which is now called the New Province, was the son of a woman named Boa, who was a flute-player and a courtesan, a [Paphlagonian](http://www.attalus.org/names/p/paphlagonia.html#1) by birth. And Arisophon the orator, who in the archonship of Eucleides[[1]](#footnote-1) proposed a law, that every one who was not born of a woman who was a citizen should be accounted a bastard, was himself convicted, by Calliades the comic poet, of having children by a courtesan named Choregis, as the same Carystius relates in the third book of his Commentaries.

Besides all these men, was not [Demetrius](http://www.attalus.org/names/d/demetrius.html#1) Poliorcetes evidently in love with Lamia the flute-player, by whom he had a daughter named Phila? And [Polemon](http://www.attalus.org/names/p/polemon.html#4), in his treatise *On the Painted* [*Stoa*](http://www.attalus.org/names/s/stoa.html#1) at [Sicyon](http://www.attalus.org/names/s/sicyon.html#1), says that Lamia was the daughter of Cleanor an Athenian, and that she built the before-mentioned colonnade for the people of Sicyon. Demetrius was also in love with [Leaena](http://www.attalus.org/names/l/leaena.html#2), and she was also an Athenian courtesan; and with a great many other women besides.

*Lives of the Sophists,* 37-39

**In the 2nd century CE, Lucian, a Syrian Greek, wrote a number of dialogues called the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* (along with a range of other works including *The True History,* a classical prototype of science fiction)*.* In the following dialogue a flute player talks of how she was attacked and then raped at a party by some drunken soldiers.** **(The dialogues are set more or less in Classical Greece (and, more specifically, Athens) even though they were written under the Roman Empire.**)

COCHLIS: Why the tears, Parthenis? Where do you come from with your flutes completely broken?

PARTHENIS: The soldier, the Aitolian, the big fellow, he beat me because he found me playing in the house of that Crocale woman. I was paid by Gorgos. Gorgos is his rival. And he broke my flutes and beat me and did all kinds of nasty things. And he turned over the table and threw himself on the *krater[[2]](#footnote-2)* and emptied it. And then he seized Gorgos, the farmer, by his hair and dragged him out of the banquet hall. And the soldier--I think Deinomachos is his name--and some of his comrades surrounded the farmer and beat him so hard. I don't know, Cochlis, if he'll ever recover. Blood flowed from his nostrils and his face was swollen and blue.

COCHLIS: Was the man insane or drunk? It sounds like the work of a drunkard.

PARTHENIS: I think it was jealousy, Cochlis, jealousy and too much love. Crocale asked the soldier for twelve hundred drachmas if he wanted to have her exclusively for himself. Deinomachos refused to give the sum, and she shut the door in his face and received instead Gorgos of Oinoe, a rich farmer who had been in love with her for some time. They drank together and I came to play the flute. The banquet was going along fine. I had just finished a Lydian melody and the farmer had got up and danced, while the Crocale beat time with her palms, and everything was joyful, when all of a sudden there was a noise and a shout and the front door burst off its hinges and eight young men rushed into the hall, the Megarian among them. Without stopping to explain, they overturned the table; and Gorgos, as I have said, was knocked down, kicked and beaten on his head. The Crocale woman succeeded in saving herself by running away to the house of her neighbor, the courtesan Thespias.

As for me, Deinomachos slapped me good and hard and called me "Ball of Smut" and threw my flutes in my face. Then two of his soldier friends tore my robe and tunic off my body and played with me. They slapped and beat me about my thighs till my nether part was burning red. Then they lifted their own tunics and made me sink down in their laps so that I felt very much ashamed. Then they obliged me to take . . . . . . between my lips, saying: "Try a new melody, genial little flute player!" Now I am bound for my master's house. I am going to tell him everything that happened. The farmer went to find friends in the city to help him bring the Megarian to justice.

COCHLIS: That is what you get out of those resplendent military love affairs--blows and lawsuits. To hear them talk they are all chiliarchs or hegemons. But when it comes to paying for services rendered--"Wait," they say, "Wait till I get paid. As soon as I receive my salary, you will surely be made happy." Let those boasters carry themselves off to their wars! May they all be killed off! I believe I do best by not receiving any of that herd. All others are welcome: fishermen, sailors, farmers, they are all welcome. They don't know how to flatter, but they pay. Anyhow, those flaunters of plumes and tellers of martial tales are never serious lovers. What do they know about love!

*Dialogues of the Courtesans,* *The Little Flute Player*

**Many Roman aristocrats also liked to hang out with entertainers. In the following text, also written in the second century CE, the Greek biographer Plutarch tells us of Mark Antony’s fondness for hanging out with mime actors and an unfortunate accident that happened as a result. He also mentions Cytheris, a famous mime-actress and also Mark Antony mistress.**

We are told, at any rate, that Mark Antony once feasted at the nuptials of Hippias the mime, drank all night, and then, early in the morning, when the people summoned him to the forum, came before them still surfeited with food and vomited into his toga, which one of his friends held at his service. Sergius the mime also was one of those who had the greatest influence with him, and Cytheris, a woman from the same school of acting, a great favourite, whom he took about with him in a litter on his visits to the cities, and her litter was followed by as many attendants as that of his mother. 5 Moreover, people were vexed at the sight of golden beakers borne about on his excursions from the city as in sacred processions, at the pitching of tents when he travelled, at the laying out of costly repasts near groves and rivers, at chariots drawn by lions, and at the use of honest men and women's houses as quarters for harlots and psaltery-players. 6 For it was thought a monstrous thing that, while Caesar himself was lodging under the skies outside of Italy and clearing away the remnants of the war at great toil and peril, his adherents, by virtue of his efforts, should revel in luxury and mock at their fellow citizens.

Plutarch, *Life of Antony* 9

**Sometimes mimes were thought to get above themselves in status because of their popularity. They could be speedily punished if the authorities heard about it:**

Augustus was so especially strict about curbing the lawlessness of actors, that when he learned that Stephanio, an actor of Roman plays, was waited on by a matron with hair cut short to look like a boy, he had him whipped with rods through the three theatres and then banished him. Hylas, a pantomimic actor, was publicly lashed in the atrium of his own house, on complaint of a praetor, and Pylades[[3]](#footnote-3) was expelled from the city and from Italy as well, because by pointing at a spectator who was hissing at him with his finger he turned all eyes upon him.

Suetonius, *Augustus* 14

**Charioteers and gladiators were another form of entertainer. These might be purchased as an investment by individuals or (if Charioteers) by the faction owner(s) for one of the four chariot factions in Rome. Gladiators seem to have frequently been bought as complete troops rather than as individuals. In the following letter from 56 BCE to his friend Atticus, Cicero talks about Atticus’ gladiatorial troop, which he bought in its entirety.**

My word! You have purchased a fine troop! Your gladiators, I am told, fight superbly. If you had chosen to hire them out you would have cleared your expenses by the last two spectacles. But we will talk about this later on.

**In another letter from 56 BCE Cicero refers to another troop owned by a politician, Gaius Cato, tribune of the plebs for that year (not to be confused to the more famous Cato the Younger, also a politician of the same period; this Cato was an ally of Clodius, one of Cicero’s enemies.)**

In this way the passing of most mischievous laws is prevented, especially that of Cato [the Younger], on whom, however, our friend Milo played a very funny trick. For that defender of the employment of gladiators and *venatores* had bought some *venatores,* Cosconius and Pomponius, and had never appeared in public without them in their full armour. He could not afford to maintain them, and accordingly had great difficulty in keeping them together. Milo found this out. He commissioned an individual, with whom he was not intimate, to buy this troop from Cato without exciting his suspicion. As soon as it had been removed, Racilius—at this time quite the only real tribune-revealed the truth, acknowledged that the men had been purchased for himself—for this is what they had agreed—and put up a notice that he intended to sell "Cato's troop." This notice caused much laughter.

Cicero, *Letters to his Brother Quintus* 2.4

**Some wealthy Romans invested instead in troops of slave actors in their house for private entertainment – and also rented them out for various ludi. One such was Numidia (sometimes called Ummidia) Quadratilla, a very wealthy lady of the late 1st century CE:**

Numidia Quadratilla has died, having almost reached the age of eighty. Up until her last illness she enjoyed uninterrupted good health, and was unusually strong and robust for a woman. She has left a very prudent will, having disposed of two-thirds of her estate to her grandson, and the rest to her grand-daughter. The young lady I know very slightly, but the grandson is one of my closest friends. He is a remarkable young man, and his merit entitles him to the affection of a relation, even where his blood does not. Notwithstanding his remarkable attractiveness he escaped all malicious gossip both as a boy and a youth: he was a husband at twenty-four, and would have been a father if fate had not disappointed his hopes. He lived in close quarters with his luxury-loving grandmother, but was very scrupulous about his own behaviour, although he respected her. She kept a company of pantomimes and was an encourager of this class of people to a degree not appropriate for one of her gender and social status. But Quadratus was never at these entertainments whether she gave them in the theatre or in her own house; nor, indeed, did she require him to be present. I once heard her say, when she was recommending to me the supervision of her grandson’s studies, that it was her custom, in order to pass away some of those unemployed hours with which female life abounds to amuse herself with playing at draughts or watching her pantomimes, but that whenever she engaged in either of those amusements she always sent away her grandson to his studies: she appeared to me to act in this way as much out of reverence for the youth as from affection. I was a good deal surprised, as I am sure you will be too, at what he told me the last time the priestly games were on.[[4]](#footnote-4) As we were coming out of the theatre together, where we had been entertained with a show of these pantomimes, “Do you know,” said he, “to-day is the first time I ever saw my grandmother’s freedman dance?” Such was the grandson’s speech! While a set of men of a far different stamp, in order to do honour to Quadratilla (I am ashamed to call it *honour*), were running up and down the theatre, pretending to be struck with the utmost admiration and rapture at the performances of those pantomimes and then imitating in musical chant the expression and manner of their lady patroness. But now all the reward they have got, in return for their theatrical performances, is just a few small legacies, which they have the mortification to receive from an heir who was never so much as present at these shows.

Pliny the Younger, *Letters* 7.24

**We have a number of funerary inscriptions from various charioteers, some of them among the most detailed accounts of achievements that we have from the Roman world. The following inscription is from 35 CE and comes from Rome; given that his career was quite short, Fuscus was clearly quite successful, although he died without gaining his freedom.**

Fuscus, charioteer for the Greens, lived 24 years, he won 53 times at Rome, twice in the *ludi* for the goddess Dia,[[5]](#footnote-5) once in the *ludus* given at Bovillae. He won one palm, after he was called back twice.[[6]](#footnote-6) He was the first of all the drivers to win on the first day he raced. His fellow slave, Machao, set this up in the consulship of Gaius Cestius and Marcus Servilius to preserve his memory.

CIL6.33950

**The following inscription features a family of charioteers (a father and two sons); the inscriptions for the sons are translated below. In addition there is an inscription which says that both sons met their fate together and that the father had met a similar end.**

Marcus Aurelius Polynices, slave by origin, lived 29 years, 9 months, and 5 days and won the victory palm 739 times in the following ways: he won 655 times as a Red, 55 as a Green, 12 as a Blue, 17 as a White; he won the 40,000 sesterces prize 3 times, the 30,000 sesterces prize 26 times, and the basicprize 11 times.[[7]](#footnote-7) He won with an eight-horse chariot 8 times, with a ten-horse chariot 9, with a 6 horse chariot three times.

Marcus Aurelius Mollicus Tatianus, slave by origin, lived 20 years, 8 months, 7 days and won the victory palm 125 times. He won 89 as Red, 24 as a Green, 5 as Blue, 7 as a White; he won the 40,000 sesterces prize twice.

CIL 6.10049, found on the Via Praenestina, Rome.

**This is a tomb not for a young dancer, Eucharis, who was most likely freed on her deathbed so she could die free.**

[The tomb] of Eucharis, freedwoman of Licinia, an unmarried girl who was educated and learned in every skill. She lived 14 years.

Ah, as you look with wandering eye at the house of death, stay your foot and read what is inscribed here. This is what a father's love gave his daughter, where the remains of her body lie gathered. 'Just as my life with its young skills and growing years brought me fame, the sad hour of death rushed on me and forbade me to draw another breath in life. I was educated and taught as if by the Muses' hands. I adorned the nobility's festivals with my dancing, and first appeared before the common people in a Greek play.

'But now here in this tomb my enemies the Fates have placed my body's ashes. The patrons of learning-devotion, passion, praise, honour-are silenced by my burnt corpse and by my death.

'His child, I left lamentation to my father, though born after him, I preceded him in the day of my death. Now I observe my fourteenth birthday here among the shadows in Death's ageless home.

'I beg you when you leave, ask that the earth lie light upon me.'

**Rome, 1st century BCE (*ILLRP* 803=*ILS* 5213=*CIL* I2.1214. L)**

**This inscription from c.100 years before the one above records a slave clown, who died a slave.**

## Here is laid the jolly old clown Protogenes, slave of Clulius, who made many and many a delight for people by his fooling.

Found in a wall at Preturo, near Amiternum: c. 185-160 B.C.?. *CIL*\_12.1861

1. 403 BCE. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. A large pottery vessel for holding wine. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. He was a freedman of Augustus and one of those who introduced pantomime to the Romans; he focused on tragic pantomime. He attacked the audience on other occasions: one when he was acting out the madness of Hercules the audience hissed at him for not dancing properly; he threw off his mask and screamed “idiots! I am acting the role of a madman!” His exile was in 18 BCE – he was back within a year. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Games run and put on by members of the priestly colleges, rather than the magistrates. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Her sanctuary was around five miles south of Rome; Bovillae was 11 miles southeast of Rome on the Via Appia. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Charioteers were often called back for false starts. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Perhaps the 15,000 sesterces purse. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)