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MONEY ISN'T EVERYTHING. RESPONSE TO EDWARD E. COHEN

I find myself in an awkward position: I have been asked to respond to a paper that I suspect will be controversial, but with which I myself am largely in agreement. In a series of papers¹ and now a recent book,² Cohen has made a major contribution to our understanding of Athenian prostitution by examining this practice “as a business”—that is, by studying the economic aspects of both male and female prostitution, and by placing prostitution in the broader context of Athenian commercial activity. Cohen’s current paper similarly seeks to treat prostitution—or rather homoerotic activity that might be characterized as *hetairiosis*—as a business like any other in the eyes of the Athenians. When applied to the laws limiting male prostitutes’ political rights, Cohen’s economic lens highlights an underappreciated but important motivation for these laws. But in doing so he may also underemphasize other cultural factors specific to the practice of *hetairiosis*.

Cohen’s paper advances two specific arguments: (1) the practice of prostitution was not limited to foreigners and slaves, but was also routinely practiced by Athenian citizens, and even political leaders; and (2) the laws limiting the political rights of those who had engaged in prostitution should not be understood as uniquely antagonistic toward prostitution, but as part of a more general aversion to commercial activity and monetized relationships. I will discuss each in turn, suggesting some refinements to the argument.

¹ Cohen 2007; 2003; 2000.

² Cohen 2015.

Cohen builds an impressive case for the proposition that prostitution was practiced by male and female Athenian citizens as well as by foreigners and slaves. But the evidence for the further claim that Athenian political leaders committed prostitution is quite a bit thinner. Cohen argues that the laws limiting political rights of former prostitutes were enacted in “response to actual acts of prostitution by Athenian political leaders.” It may be worth emphasizing that the passage from Aeschines 1.13 (“Our predecessors made laws to deal with improper behavior that people actually do engage in”) refers to the laws prohibiting hiring out boys as escorts, not the laws excluding prostitutes from political leadership, and thereby suggests prostitution by citizens, but not necessarily by politicians. Moreover, our sources include only a handful of accusations of prostitution against politicians. As Cohen discusses, the line between the gift-giving of noble pederasty and *hetairisis* was a blurry one, making it possible to plausibly accuse political enemies of prostitution even where there was no evidence of money changing hands.³ Most famously, Aeschines had no evidence that Timarchus ever took cash payment from his lovers.⁴ Lawcourt speakers at times slander their opponent as a prostitute based only on evidence that he had been an *eromenos*.⁵ Given this context, the accusations against elite litigants we meet in the sources may indicate that some elite *eromenoi* stretched the norms of noble pederasty by becoming promiscuous or overly dependent on their lovers’ attention or gifts, not necessarily that they engaged in actual acts of prostitution. Once the laws limiting political rights for former prostitutes were enacted, likely sometime in the late fifth century, it would be reckless for anyone contemplating a future political career to take money payment or to accept gifts in a manner that might give the appearance of a simple *quid pro quo*. That is not to say that some elite *eromenoi* were not heavily influenced by gifts: modern politicians who avoid *quid pro quo* corruption charges while being effectively bought by campaign contributions may offer a parallel.

Cohen’s second argument is that the laws limiting political rights for prostitutes were motivated by an attempt “to discourage the transformation of traditional elite homoerotic sexual courtship into a culture of sexual purchase, and as an attempt to combat corruption... by denying political leadership to persons—not only or even principally ‘prostitutes’—who had exhibited an excessive lust for money.” In other words, the laws were not concerned with prostitution *per se*, but with the lust for money that it suggested. If it is true, as Fisher has argued,⁶ that pederastic behavior spread beyond the elite, it may well be that some citizens from ordinary families offered and accepted money as courtship gifts, particularly as the economy became

³ For discussion of how the gifts, entertainment, and mentoring of homosexual pederasty could easily be construed as evidence of a mercenary relationship, see Dover 1989:107; Fisher 2001: 49-50; Lanni 2010.

⁴ Aesch. 1.40, 41, 52-55, 70.

⁵ Lys. 14.25-27; Dem. 22.21-22, 58.

⁶ Fisher 2001: 60-62.

more monetized. This may explain what appear to be money bags in courtship scenes on some Athenian vases. Cohen's paper may point to an important and largely-overlooked motivation for these laws: anxiety about the introduction of more explicitly mercenary homosexual courtship patterns. While Cohen seems to suggest that the monetization of sex extended even to the elite political leaders, I would argue that these developments were limited to non-elites. Having provided sex for money or something else of value was deemed evidence of excessive concern for personal financial advantage inappropriate for a political leader. The rise of mercenary sex, even if largely limited to non-elites, may well have contributed to the desire to insure that former prostitutes could not become political leaders, especially as increased social mobility expanded the pool from which leaders were drawn.

As Cohen argues, concern about excessive lust for money must have been a factor in the exclusion of prostitutes from political leadership, just it was in the case some of the other grounds for exclusion such as wasting ancestral assets and failing to support one's elderly parent. But by focusing on the economic aspects of prostitution, Cohen may overlook features of this practice that made prostitution uniquely objectionable for potential politicians and set it apart from the common antagonism directed against other forms of commercial activity. The precise rationale for prohibiting those who had prostituted themselves from active political life eludes us, but it seems clear that concerns over such a man's independence, moral status, and self-control all played a part, in addition to worry about a lust for money emphasized by Cohen. A man who agreed to surrender himself to another man's sexual desires, particularly if those desires included anal intercourse, had adopted a position of submission more suited to a woman or slave than to citizen capable of leading others.⁷ The notion that engaging in prostitution evinced an insatiable appetite for sex incompatible with the self-control required of a self-governing citizenry may also have played a role.⁸ It has been pointed out, for example, that Aeschines insinuates throughout his speech that Timarchus' lifestyle is disgusting and feminine, quite apart from its mercenary character.⁹

In sum, Cohen's economic focus sheds new light on our understanding of Athenian prostitution, but we must add this perspective to other cultural interpretations of this practice rather than subsume it within the larger category of commercial activity.

⁷ Xen. *Symp.* 8.34ff; Fisher 2001:44-53; D.Cohen 1991:181-201; Dover 1989:103-109; Halperin 1990: 95-97; Golden 1984:317-318; Davidson 1998:159-182.

⁸ Davidson 1998:159-182; Winkler 1990:56-57.

⁹ Aesch 1.110-111; Sissa 2002:156-157; Hubbard 1998:64-67.

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