

The Disrobing of Phryne and her Artistic Receptions

The fourth-century Athenian hetaera, Phryne of Thespieae, has attracted a flurry of interest in recent years, thanks in part to the growing body of research on the ways women, citizen and metic alike, intersected with the Athenian legal system (Morales 2013; Eidinow 2016; Kapparis 2019; 2021). Most of this discussion has centered on her famous trial at which the orator Hyperides defended her against a public charge of impiety or *graphe asebeias*, at which he tore off her garments to expose her breasts, thereby winning acquittal. Most modern scholars have accepted the authenticity of the trial but believe the disrobing is a later invention. Building on the work of Cooper (1995), this paper argues first that it is not implausible that the orator presented the hetaera in rent garments at her trial, deploying traditional forensic tropes like the display of female kin and the use of entreaties and tears to sway the jurors, but that later authors, influenced by Phryne's receptions in art, interpolated and eroticized her forensic nudity. Indeed, the earliest account, a fragment of the comic poet, Posidippus, makes no reference to the disrobing, while the use of the participle *δεξιουμένη* indicates a gesture involving the right hand in a ritual act of supplication (Ath. 591e=Posidippus, *Ephesia* fr. 13 K-A). Even the baring of the breasts, which has largely been understood as erotic rather than pathetic, has literary parallels, as when Hecuba supplicates Hector in Homer's *Iliad* (Hom. *Il.* 22.80-83) and Clytemnestra begs Orestes not to kill her (A. *Cho.* 896-8). Phryne's entreaties and physical display, therefore, are not maternal or erotic but rather represent an extreme form of supplication intended to ward off imminent death. Lastly, the image of the disrobed hetaera as a priestess (*ὑποφῆτιν*) and temple attendant of Aphrodite (*ζάκορον*), who now inspires dread (*δαισιδαμονῆσαι*, Ath. 590e), further situates her within the context of religious viewing with parallels in art. The tradition of Phryne's scandalous,

eroticized nudity had no place in the original litigation, but was a later innovation that conflated her trial with major artworks, such as Praxiteles' Cnidian Aphrodite and his Thespian triad, and Apelles' Anadyomene, that became associated with the hetaera beginning around the first century CE.

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