

***RESPECTABLE WIFE OR DECEITFUL SEDUCTRESS? FEMALE STEREOTYPES  
IN ATHENIAN INHERITANCE DISPUTES***

**Dem. 39 and [Dem.] 40 *Against Boeotus* (respectable wife vs deceitful seductress and shameless *hetaira*)**

1. My mother, judges, was the daughter of Polyaratus of the deme Cholargus; she was the sister of Menexenus, Bathyllus, and Periander. Her father gave her in marriage to Cleomedon the son of Cleon with a talent as her dowry. This was her first marriage. After the birth of three daughters and a son named Cleon, her husband died, and she left that household, taking her dowry with her. Her brothers ... then gave her away in marriage once again and dowered her with the same talent. And so she was married to my father. I am their son and so, too, was a younger brother who died in childhood. ... My father, then, married my mother in this way, and he maintained her as his wife in his house, and he brought me up and loved me just as you, too, love your own children. As for Plangon, the mother of these men, well, my father did have some sort of relationship with her, but it's none of my business to discuss that. Nevertheless, he wasn't so completely ruled by passion as to think it right, after my mother died, to welcome Plangon into his house, or to be persuaded that these men were his sons. [Dem.] 40.6-8 (trans. Scafuro 2011, adapted).

2. My father was afraid to go to court in case he was confronted there by someone with a grievance against him from another context, as happens in politics. He had also been tricked by Boeotus's mother [Plangon], who had of her own accord promised that if he offered her an oath on the matter, she would decline it, and that would be the end of it. She had him deposit some money with a third party, and on these conditions he offered her the oath. But then she accepted the challenge, and swore that my father was the father of Boeotus, and of his brother as well, her other son. Once she had done this, the boys *had* to be introduced to the phratry and there was nothing he could say or do about it. Dem. 39.3-4 (trans. Waterfield 2014, adapted).

**Isaeus 6 *On the Estate of Philoctemon* (deceitful seductress)**

3. [Euctemon] had a freedwoman, gentlemen, who managed his tenement house in Piraeus and kept prostitutes. One of those she acquired was called Alce, and I think many of you know her. This Alce, after she was purchased, worked as a prostitute for many years, but retired when she became too old. While she was living in the brothel she had a relationship with a freedman, a fellow called Dion, who she said was the father of these boys; and he did, in fact, bring them up as his children. Some time later, Dion fled to Sicyon, fearing the consequences of an offence he had committed, and Euctemon installed this woman, Alce, as the manager of his tenement house in Cerameicus, near the postern gate where wine is sold. Once established there, gentlemen, she became the cause of many evils. Euctemon went there frequently to collect the rent, spending most of his time in the tenement house, and he sometimes had meals with the woman, leaving behind his wife and children and the house where he lived. His wife and sons took this badly, but he didn't stop going there. In the end he was living there all the time, and so ruined by drugs or disease, or something else, that he was persuaded by the woman to introduce her older son to his phratry under his own name. Isae. 6. 19-21 (trans. Griffith-Williams 2022).

**Isaeus 3 *On the Estate of Pyrrhus (shameless hetaira)***

4. You've heard the testimony of Pyrrhus' other friends and neighbours that the woman whom [Nicodemus] has testified that he betrothed to our uncle was a *hetaira* who was available to anybody who wanted her and was not his wife. They have testified that the [Nicodemus's] sister was the subject of fights, revelry and frequent disorder whenever she was at Pyrrhus' house. But I don't suppose that anybody would dare to sing songs about a married woman, and married women do not go with their husbands to dinner parties or see fit to dine with strangers, especially chance visitors. Isae. 3.13-14 (trans. Edwards 2007).

**[Dem.] 59 *Against Neaira***

5. When [Phrynion] came here with [Neaera] he treated her in an outrageous and reckless way; he took her to dinner with him everywhere wherever he was drinking, she joined in all his carousals, and he had intercourse with her in public anywhere whenever he pleased, making a display of his privilege in front of onlookers. The many people to whom he took her carousing included Chabrias of Aixone ... . There were many there who had intercourse with her when she was drunk, while Phrynion was asleep. ([Dem.] 59.33 (trans. Carey 1992).

6. Nikarete came with her too, and they stayed with Ktesippos the son of Glaukonides of Kydantidae; and Neaira here drank and dined with them in the presence of a number of men, as if she were a *hetaira*. ([Dem.] 59.24 (trans. Carey 1992 adapted).

**Isaeus 10 *On the Estate of Aristarchus (defrauded heiress)***

7. My father received my mother with a dowry when he married her, but while my opponents were enjoying the estate, he had no way of claiming it back, because when he raised the question at my mother's instigation, they threatened him, saying they would themselves claim her by adjudication and marry her, if he was not willing to keep her with only a dowry. My father would have allowed them to enjoy an estate of even double the value so as not to lose my mother. That is the reason why my father did not pursue a claim for the estate. Isae. 10.19-20 (trans. Edwards 2007).

8. Since I conduct myself in a law-abiding manner, perform my prescribed duties, and serve in the army, I think I should not be deprived of my mother's patrimony. Isae. 10.25 (trans. Edwards 2007).

**Isaeus 8 *On the Estate of Ciron (respectable wife and model female citizen vs deceitful seductress)***

9. Now it's clear ... that our mother was Ciron's legitimate daughter ... from the actions of our father and from the attitude of the wives of his demesmen towards her. When our father married her, he gave a wedding breakfast and invited three of his friends as well as his relatives, and he gave a wedding feast to the members of his phratry in accordance with their rules. The wives of his demesmen afterwards selected her, together with the wife of Diocles of Pithus, to preside at the Thesmophoria and perform the customary rites with her. Our father also introduced us at birth to the members of his phratry, swearing on oath in accordance with the established laws that he was introducing the children of an Athenian mother and lawfully wedded wife. None of the phratry members objected or claimed this was not true, even though a large number were present and they consider such matters carefully. And you cannot think that if our mother had been the kind of woman our opponents allege, our father would have given a wedding breakfast

and wedding feast, rather than hushing all this up; or that the wives of the other demesmen would have chosen her to be the joint overseer of the festival with the wife of Diocles ... ; or that the members of the phratry would have admitted us, ... if it had not been universally agreed that our mother was Ciron's legitimate daughter. Isae. 8.18-20 (trans. Edwards 2007).

**10.** Altogether [Ciron's] visible property was worth more than 90 minas, and apart from this, he had large sums on loan on which he received interest. Diocles began plotting with his sister for this property a long time ago, as soon as Ciron's sons died. He did not try to find her another husband, even though she was still capable of bearing children to one, in case, if she were separated from Ciron, he should plan to dispose of his property in the proper way; but he kept urging her to stay with him by claiming she thought she was pregnant by him and then pretending she'd accidentally miscarried, so that he was continually hoping he would have children and would not adopt either of us as his son. Isae. 8. 35-36 (trans. Edwards 2007).

**11.** I came with one of my relatives, my father's cousin, to remove [Ciron's] body for burial from my own house. ... But when my grandfather's widow asked me to bury him from that house, and with supplications and tears said that she herself would like to help us lay out and adorn his body, I was persuaded, gentlemen. Isae. 8.21-22 (trans. Edwards 2007).

**Isaeus 2 *On the Estate of Menecles (respectable wife)***

**12.** And after a month or two Menecles spoke to us, praising our sister highly but saying that he was worried about his own advancing age and childlessness: she must not be rewarded for her goodness by growing old alongside him without children – his own misfortune was enough. So he begged us to do him the favour of giving her to another husband, with his blessing. And we told him to persuade her about this; we would do whatever she agreed. She, at first, resisted his suggestion, but with the passage of time she was with difficulty persuaded. Isae. 2.7-9 (trans. Griffith-Williams 2022).

**Isaeus 7 *On the Estate of Apollodorus (self-centred materialist)***

**13.** Now it was quite clear to Apollodorus that if he left his estate in the control of these people, he would make his family extinct (ἐρημιον ποιήσει τὸν οἶκον: literally, 'he would make his house empty'). For what did he see before him? That these sisters of Apollodorus [the younger] inherited their brother's estate but did not give him a son for adoption, even though they had children, that their husbands sold the land he left and his possessions for five talents and split the money, and that his house was thus left shamefully and disgracefully without heirs (τὸν δὲ οἶκον αἰσχρῶς οὕτω καὶ δεινῶς ἐξηρημωμένον). Since Apollodorus knew their brother had been treated in this way, how could he himself have expected, even if he was on friendly terms, to receive the customary rites from them, when he was only their cousin, not their brother? Isae. 7. 31-32 (trans. Edwards 2007, adapted).

**Dem. 27 and 29 *Against Aphobus (devoted mother)***

**14.** Well, judges, I think you have all the information you need on this; you know how much each of them has stolen and you're aware of their criminal cunning. You'd have been even better informed if they had been prepared to give me the will my father left. My mother tells me that it itemized my father's entire estate, specified the funds these men were to draw on to receive their legacies, and gave instructions for leasing the estate. Whenever I ask for the will, however, they admit that my father left one, but don't produce it. The reason for this is that

they don't want anyone to know how much my father's estate was worth before their thievery, so as to make it seem as though they never received their legacies. Dem. 27.40-41 (trans. Waterfield 2014).

**15.** [Aphobus] ... even asserts that the man, Milyas, is in fact a slave. I wish in a very few words to prove that in this, too, he is lying. For I was willing, judges, to hand over to him to be examined by torture about this matter my female slaves, who remember that my father on his death-bed set this man free. Besides this, my mother was willing to give an assurance in the presence of me and my sister ... that my father when he was about to die had set Milyas free, and that we have subsequently considered him free. Let none of you think that she would have been willing to swear this, unless she had been sure that she would be swearing truly. Dem. 29.26-26.

**Lysias 32 *Against Diogeiton* (devoted mother)**

**16,** In the end, their mother begged and pleaded with me to gather together her father and his friends. She said that even if she had not previously been accustomed to speak in front of men, nevertheless the scale of the disaster would compel her to tell us the whole story of their sufferings. So I went and expressed my feelings to Hegemon, the husband of my opponent's daughter, and talked with the rest of his friends, and persuaded him to undergo an investigation into the money. (Diogeiton at first resisted but was eventually forced into it by his friends.) When the meeting took place, the woman asked him how he had the heart to treat the children in this way, 'given that you are their father's brother, and my own father, and their uncle and grandfather. Even if you were not ashamed of any man, you ought' she said, 'to have feared the gods. But you are the one who received five talents from the dead man when he sailed. I am willing to swear an oath about this in whatever location this man may name, surrounding myself with the children and swearing destruction both on them and on those I have borne subsequently. And yet I am not so wretched, and nor do I value money so highly, that I would depart this life after committing perjury in the names of my own children or would unjustly take away my father's estate.' She then demonstrated that he had received 7 talents and 4,000 drachmas in maritime loans, and she produced documentation of this: during the process of dividing up the household, when he was leaving Collytus for the house of Phaedrus, the boys came across an account book that had been thrown away and brought it to her. She showed that he had received 100 minas lent out at interest on land, and a further 2,000 drachmas, and household furniture of considerable value. Moreover, they were receiving grain every year from the Chersonese. 'And did you dare,' she said, 'when you had so much money, to say that the father of these boys left merely 2,000 drachmas and 30 staters – the the amount that was left with me and that I handed over after his death? You thought it right to throw out of their own house those who were your daughter's sons, wearing only threadbare garments, without shoes, without attendants, without bedding, without clothing, without the household furniture their father left them, and without the sums on deposit which he placed in your hands. You are at this moment bringing up my stepmother's children in prosperity, with plenty of money, and as far as that goes I do not blame you. But you are wronging my children, by throwing them out of the house in dishonour, and by daring to display them in public as beggars rather than rich men. Such behaviour shows that you do not fear the gods, that you are not ashamed of my knowing your guilt, and that you do not respect the memory of your brother. Instead, you rate us all as less important than money.' By now, judges, she had recounted terrible things, and all of us who were present had been reduced to such a state by this man's behaviour and by the

woman's speech – we saw the sufferings the boys had endured, we remembered the dead man and how he had left an unworthy guardian of his property, and we considered how hard it was to find somebody to trust with one's private affairs – we had been reduced to such a state, judges, that none of those present was able to say anything. Instead, weeping just as much as the victims, we went away in silence. First of all, then, let my witnesses come forward. Lys. 32.12-18 (trans. Todd 2000, adapted).

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