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The Way She Moves: Configuring the Greek Hetaira

Readings of the courtesan's body in ancient Greece have proliferated in recent years. Classical scholars have considered its representation in sympotic art, its status as a commodity traded in the marketplace, and its relation to the democratic polis (Peschel 1987; Reinsberg 1989; Halperin 1990; Davidson 1998; Kurke 1999). This paper deals with yet another aspect of the courtesan's body, its movement. Focusing on Hellenistic epigrams and second sophistic literature, it elucidates the types of movement associated with the Greek hetaira. It then examines a quite different account of the female body, that of the Hippocratic corpus, to show how movement, as a cultural construct, delineates the respectable woman from the prostitute.

The epigrams and second sophistic genre devoted to chronicling the exploits of classical Athenian courtesans depict them as engaged in a variety of vulgar motions. In the epigram quoted above, the courtesan rotates her hips as she walks, a motion already attributed to prostitutes in the archaic period with the adjective *saulos* (Anac. fr. 138 Gentili = 458 PMG; cf. A. P. 175.6). According to Clement of Alexandria, such motions connoted luxury, effeminacy and indecency (*habrodiaiton*, Clem. Al. Paed. 3.294). Courtesans also engage in seductive dances that normally involve the vigorous gyration of the hips. In one epigram, a courtesan moves like a Bacchant, shaking her body promiscuously (*tên pote bakcheusan . . . seiomenên spatâlên*, A.P. 5.271; cf. A. P. 9.139). In his *Letters of Courtesans*, Alciphron provides descriptions of an erotic dance, possibly the *igdis*, a figure that involved the lascivious swaying of the hips in imitation of a pestle in a mortar (Lawler, 1950: 70-71). Another dance that involved the wild gyration of the pelvis, the *makter*, was also associated with courtesans (Poll. 4.101; Lawler 1950: 71; 1964: 133). In addition to cosmetics and clothing, artful control over the body's movements represented yet another weapon in the courtesan's arsenal of seduction (cf. *o katatechnotatou kinêmatos*, Philodemus, A.P. 5.132; cf. A.P. 5.129).

Although the medical treatises of the classical period served a purpose very different from the "pornographic" genres discussed above, they nonetheless provide some interesting comparative material for views on the motions of the female body. The Hippocratic corpus frequently attributes to women greater physical inactivity than men. Violent physical movements, including dancing, were thought to induce gynecological disease, and even abortion (Dean-Jones 1994: 116). This idea may underlie the famous Hippocratic story of the pregnant dancer, also very likely a prostitute, who aborted a fetus by jumping up and down, touching her heels to her buttocks (Hippoc. Nat. puer, 13). To the Greek mind, female stillness encouraged conception and successful pregnancies (Hippoc. Mul. viii. 46. 22-4); thus some texts advise physical immobility or quiet rest after intercourse to ensure conception (*hêsuchazetô*, Hippoc. Steril. viii. 424. 16-21). But the violent, suggestive movements of professional dancers and courtesans marked them out as bodies for pleasure, not reproduction.