**Conference Report for the Society for the Promotion of Hellenic Studies (SPHS)**

**Event:** *Who’s That Girl? Portraits of* Hetairai *between the Hellenistic and Imperial Ages.*

**Organisers**: Roberto Di Tuccio (Durham University) -Effrosyni Tsakou (Lille University)

The *Who’s That Girl? Portraits of* Hetairai *between Hellenistic and Imperial Ages* is an international academic conference which took place on the 20th and 21st of June 2024. The venue of the event was the Ritson Room of the Department of Classics and Ancient History of Durham University. The conference was organised by Roberto Di Tuccio (Durham University) and Effrosyni Tsakou (Lille University), who are both PhD candidates in Classics. The aim of the conference was to gather excellent academics, young researchers, and promising Postgraduate students to investigate how Greek literature and society between the 3rd century BCE and the 3rd century CE received and refashioned sex workers between fiction and reality. The conference also welcomed some insights into the tradition of Greek and Roman sex workers in Restoration Theatre and Modern and Contemporary society. Thus, the conference showed how ancient literary and social practices still influence modern ideas about sex workers and women.

The conference explored the Greek-Roman Imperial interpretation of female sex workers. The twelve papers focussed on the reception and literary construction of sex workers between the Hellenistic and Imperial ages and the interrelations between politics, law, and literature. Prof Edith Hall (Durham University), Dr Peggy Lecaudé (Lille University), and Prof Ioannis Ziogas (Durham University) delivered the keynote lectures of the event. Prof Hall illustrated how a considerable number of plays written during the English Renaissance are in debt with Roman comedies, a parentage which still deserves scholars’ attention, while Dr Lecaudé analysed the semantic and linguistic use of the word *hetaira*. Finally, Prof Ziogas showed how law and literature define each other, with the latter challenging social bans on sex workers. The specific goal of the event was to explore how male authors while negotiating literary tradition and actual historical models, conceptualised and constructed sex workers between Greek and Roman traditions. This process involved observing how society reinterpreted models from the past within an increasingly Rome-dominated world and how the Roman conception of sex workers influenced the construction of fictional Hellenistic and Imperial *hetairai*.

The speakers were divided into four panels. Each paper lasted 20 minutes with further 10 minutes for a Q&A session. The first panel was called *Fictional and Historical Identities*. Dr Melissa Funke (University of Winnipeg) delivered a paper on the reuse of the *hetaira* Phryne anecdotes in modern and contemporary arts. Anne Lanckriet (Trinity College Dublin) applied social studies interpretative models to the sex workers featuring in Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans*. Effrosyni Tsakou (Lille University) focussed on the literary and historical portraits of the *hetaira* Lais. The second panel, named *Hetairai in Literature, Arts, and Performance* was dedicated to the relationship between sex workers and performative concerns. Prof Emma Stafford and Dr Owen Hodkinson (Leeds University) presented a four-hand paper on the interrelation between art and literature in Alciphron’s Letters book 4 and, specifically, the construction of *hetairai*. Then, Oriana Giannini (University of Pisa) concentrated on the rhetorical and literary tools which Flavius Philostratus used to characterise sex workers in his letters. The third panel, *Hetairai between Medical and Social Humanities* was composed of Dr Wim Nijs (KU Leuven) and Florence Felsheim (University of St Andrews). Dr Nijs investigated how Plutarch distinguishes viced and respectable *hetairai*, while Florence Felsheim offered an analysis of Greek *hetairai*’s and Roman *meretrices*’s comedic characterisation through the lens of cognitive studies. The last panel was named *Law & Order (and Love)*. Ryan Shayne (Cape Town University) offered an analysis of the power dynamics defining the literary, legal, and rhetorical setting of Ovid’s *Amores* (2.7 and 2.8). Finally, Roberto Di Tuccio (Durham University) demonstrated how the Roman legal characterisation of sex workers is fundamental to Alciphron’s literary construction of sex workers in *Letters* Book 4. A conclusive round-table discussion individuated the most debated and thorny open questions which will be addressed in the planned publication of the conference papers.

The organisers learnt how to prepare and lead an academic international conference. First, they enhanced their organisational, management and public relationship skills: the organisers had to contact speakers and decide how to divide panels and the criteria for selecting papers and topics. Also, it was essential to distribute in-person and online speakers with attention to panel coherence. Then, it was helpful to sharpen the skills related to public speaking, moderating Q&A sessions, and opening and closing the event. Time management was essential, and the results were excellent. Ordering food and drinks for the breaks after each session, as well as the breakfast and lunch of the second day presented potential challenges, as some participants had specific dietary requirements. Yet, the organisers managed to meet everyone’s needs.

All attendees, both speakers and the attendees- mostly PhD students, but also academics from Durham and other universities around the world, expressed their gratitude to the organisers for the conference and stay in Durham. They could learn innovative and engaging approaches to shed light on sex workers from the 3rd century BCE to the Contemporary Era. The *Who’s That Girl*? Conference resulted in cultural enrichment, discussion, and learning to deal with sex workers’ characterisation through different perspectives. The audience raised many engaging questions. All the discussions were accurate, polite and respectful, even though opinions on some questions often diverged.

The next step is the editing and publication of the conference papers. The collection of the papers, divided into thematic areas, will provide the academic community with a cutting-edge analysis of how literary, power, and gender dynamics influence the characterisation of marginalised figures as sex workers. This initiative will shed new light on an undeservedly unexplored chronological frame between ancient and contemporary times. The multidisciplinary approach of the conference will be pivotal to delving into the construction of sex workers. Characterisation, legal, cognitive, gender, medical, and queer studies will be helpful in offering novel interpretations of how different cultures conceive and represent sex workers and their identities between the realms of fictional literature and reality.

In conclusion, the organisers want to address their deep gratitude to the SPHS’ generosity. The society’s support in gathering scholars and Postgraduate students from six different countries and offering them a pleasant stay in Durham was indispensable.