

PALLAKAI, PROSTITUTES, AND PROPHETESSES

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THIS ESSAY is a reevaluation of two inscriptions from Tralles, Caria, Turkey dated to the second–third centuries C.E. While both have been the subject of frequent study from the late 1800s until the modern day, their analysis has been consistently obfuscated by an ambiguous sexuality present in both of the texts. Remarkably, neither inscription is even remotely sexual in nature, both being simple *anathemata* dedicated by women to the local deity. Both, however, use repeatedly a term which has traditionally been translated as “concubine.” Since the first publication in 1883, scholars have created elaborate theories concerning the status of the women portrayed in these inscriptions, theories that then went on to influence not only the lexica and the study of the Greek language itself, but the study of various aspects of Classical religion. What follows is a reconsideration of these ancient texts, a close inspection of the various hypotheses that have evolved around their interpretation, and a new interpretation of their content. It is my hope that this will not only open a pathway for future research into women’s lives in the Roman east, but will also shed new light on contested aspects of Classical religion in the Greek and Roman worlds.

The two inscriptions under discussion were most recently published by Fjodor Poljakov (1989, nos. 6 and 7, with full bibliography). The first of the two (no. 6 in Poljakov), was inscribed on a small marble basis with a circular depression at the top for the *anathema*.¹ Sir William Ramsay recorded that the item, then in the possession of one Mr. Purser, was from Aidin, probably originally from the sanctuary of Zeus Larasios.² The text reads as follows:

Ἀγαθῇ Τύχῃ	Good Fortune
Λ.Αὐρελία Αἰ- μιλία, ἐκ προ- γόνων παλλα- κίδων καὶ ἀνι- πτοπόδων, θυ- γάτηρ Λ.Αὐρ. Σε-	L. Aurelia Aimilia from an ancestry of concubines ³ and those with unwashed feet, daughter of L. Aur. Secundus Se[i]jus ⁴

1. Ramsay 1883, 276.

2. Ibid.; Robert [1937] 1970, 406.

3. The appropriateness of translating *pallake* as “concubine” will be discussed below.

4. Robert [1937] 1970, 406 has [i] (?)-. The family name Seius is attested in the Roman prosopography, possibly of Etruscan origin; see Schulze 1904, 93.

κούνδου Ση[-?]	having been a
ου, παλλακεύσα-	concubine and
σα καὶ ⁵ κατὰ χρη-	according to an oracle
σμὸν	
Δί.	to Zeus. ⁶

The second inscription (no. 7 in Poljakov), also from Aidin, was discovered in a house on the slope of the plateau of Tralles, and, according to Louis Robert, must have been dedicated at the same sanctuary.⁷ The text is:

Μελτίνε Μοσχᾶ,	Meltine Moskha,
παλλακή, μητρός	concubine, of the mother
δὲ Παυλείνης τῆς	Paulina, of
Οὐαλεριανοῦ Φιλ-	Valerianus Philtate,
τάτης, παλλακευ-	who was a concubine
σάσης ἐπὶ τὸ ἐξῆς	consecutively during two
πενταετηρίσι β',	five-year periods,
ἀπὸ γένους τῶν	from an ancestry of
παλλακίδων, Δί.	concubines. To Zeus.

The critical word in both inscriptions is *παλλακή*. Meltine Moskha clearly states that she herself was a *pallake*—*pallake* in line 2—and that her mother was also a *pallake*—*pallakeusases* (aor. part. gen. fem.) in lines 5–6. L. Aurelia Aimilia claims to have set up her *anathema* after a period of *pallake*-ship—*pallakeusasa* (aor. part. nom. fem.) in lines 9–10. Both claim to come from an ancestry of *pallakai*, either *ek progenon* or *apo genous*. The critical issue, then, is the appropriate definition of the term *pallake*.

When Ramsay published the first text in 1883, he took the term *pallake* to mean “sacred prostitute,” suggesting that Aurelia “belonged to a family in which the ancient custom was retained that the women should in their youth be *hetairai* in the service of the temple . . . : she acted as a hierodoule like her ancestors in obedience to an order from the oracle.”⁸ Robert, in his 1937 publication of *Études anatoliennes*, accepted this interpretation, referring to the dedication as “émanant d’une prostituée sacrée.”⁹

Based on the proposed definition of *pallake* in the Aurelia inscription, Robert imposed a similar meaning on the second inscription: “La mère et la fille ont rempli les mêmes fonctions sacrées . . . J’entends que la prostitution s’exerçait seulement au moment de la fête pentaétérique de Zeus Larasios, quand la panégyrie faisait affluer les pèlerins au sanctuaire.”¹⁰ In this instance, the sacred prostitution of Meltine and her mother (and, presumably, Aurelia?) is likened to a specific style of sacred prostitution practiced in Byblos as recounted by Lucian (*Syr. D.*, 6):

5. Poljakov forgets to include the word καὶ here, but it is clearly visible on the inscription, and is present in the publications of Ramsay and Robert.

6. Once again, probably Zeus Larasios specifically, to whom the city of Tralles was sacred; see Laumonier 1958, 505.

7. Robert [1937] 1970, 407.

8. Ramsay 1883, 276–77.

9. Robert [1937] 1970, 406.

10. Ibid., 407.

γυναικῶν δὲ ὁκόσαι οὐκ ἐθέλουσι ξυρῆεσθαι τοιήνδε ζημίην ἐκτελέουσιν—ἐν μὴ ἡμέρῃ ἐπὶ πρῆσι τῆς ὥρης ἴστανται, ἡ δὲ ἀγορὴ μούνοις ξεινοῖσι παρακέεται καὶ ὁ μισθὸς ἐς τὴν Ἀφροδίτην θυσίῃ γίγνεται.

Those of the women who refuse to cut their hair pay the following penalty: For one day they set their beauty out for sale, at a market open only to foreigners, and the price is brought as a sacrifice to Aphrodite.

The implication would be that Meltine, Paulina, and Aurelia (?) were not long-term or quotidian sacred prostitutes, but that they merely prostituted themselves during an individual religious festival, perhaps only occurring once every four or five years (πενταετηρίσι).

By 1940 there was a change in the assessments of these two inscriptions, especially in that which concerns the definition of *pallake*. Kurt Latte (1940 and 1968) argued that the term *pallake* does not refer to sacred prostitution, but to a form of divination incorporating perceived sexual relations with a deity.¹¹ In this instance, Latte compares the supposed role of the concubines in the inscriptions to that of a *promantis* described in a passage of Herodotos 1.181–82. While discussing the general topography and history of Babylon, the historian mentions:

ἐν δὲ τῷ τελευταίῳ πύργῳ νηὸς ἔπεστι μέγας, ἐν δὲ τῷ νηῷ κλίνη μεγάλη κεῖται εὖ ἐστρωμένη καὶ οἱ τράπεζα παράκειται χρυσῆ. ἄγαλμα δὲ οὐκ ἐνὶ οὐδὲν αὐτόθι ἐνιδρυμένον—οὐδὲ νύκτα οὐδεὶς ἐναυλίζεται ἀνθρώπων ὅτι μὴ γυνὴ μούνη τῶν ἐπιχωρίων, τὴν ἂν ὁ θεὸς ἔλῃται ἐκ πασέων, ὥς λέγουσι οἱ Χαλδαῖοι, ἔδοντες ἱρέες τούτου τοῦ θεοῦ. φασὶ δὲ οἱ αὐτοὶ οὗτοι, ἐμοὶ μὲν οὐ πιστὰ λέγοντες, τὸν θεὸν αὐτὸν φοιτᾶν τε ἐς τὸν νηὸν καὶ ἀναπαύεσθαι ἐπὶ τῆς κλίνης, κατὰ περ ἐν Θήβῃσι τῇσι Αἰγυπτίῃσι κατὰ τὸν αὐτὸν τρόπον, ὥς λέγουσι οἱ Αἰγύπτιοι (καὶ γὰρ δὴ ἐκεῖθι κοιμάται ἐν τῷ τοῦ Διὸς τοῦ Θηβαίου γυνή, ἀμφοτέρω δὲ αὐταὶ λέγονται ἀνδρῶν οὐδαμῶν ἐς ὁμιλίην φοιτᾶν), καὶ κατὰ περ ἐν Πατάροις τῆς Λυκίας ἡ πρόμαντις τοῦ θεοῦ, ἐπεὰν γέννηται—οὐ γὰρ ὧν αἰεὶ ἐστὶ χρηστήριον αὐτόθι—ἐπεὰν δὲ γέννηται, τότε ὧν συγκατακληῖται τὰς νύκτας ἔσω ἐν τῷ νηῷ.

On the farthest tower is a large temple, within which lies a large couch, well decked-out, and a golden table beside it. There is no statue erected therein, nor does anyone of mankind pass the night there save one woman alone from the region, whomever the god chooses from all others, as the Chaldeans say, being priests of this god. These ones also say, although I do not think they speak credibly, that the god himself goes regularly to the temple and rests upon the couch, just as in Egyptian Thebes, where they have the same custom, as the Egyptians say (for indeed a woman lies there in the temple of Theban Zeus, and they say that neither of these women has intercourse with any man), and likewise in Lycian Patara for the prophetess of the god, when there is one—for there is not always an oracle present—when she is there, then she is shut up at night in the temple.

The question remains: What is the appropriate definition of *pallake* in these inscriptions? Liddell and Scott clearly accepted the sacred prostitute concept, and put “concubine for ritual purposes” as the first possible definition of *pallakis/pallake* in the *Greek-English Lexicon*, and “of ritual prostitution” at the end, referring specifically to the first Tralles inscription. As recently as 1992, Bonnie MacLachlan maintains this definition, claiming

11. Latte 1940, 14–15; 1968, 164.

that Aurelia “boasts that she became a temple-prostitute at the command of an oracle, and that her female ancestors had done the same.”¹² By contrast, Francis Walton (1970) took the side of Latte, seeing the *pallakai* of these inscriptions as prophetesses,¹³ and both Alfred Laumonier and Poljakov have done the same.¹⁴ The following is an examination of four possible hypotheses concerning the usage of this term—that it might refer to a sacred prostitute, to a prophetess, to a secular concubine, or to a cult functionary.

SACRED PROSTITUTION

That the word *pallake/pallakis* might denote a sacred prostitute in these two inscriptions is the least likely probability. It appears that Ramsay originally based his interpretation on two passages of Strabo (17.1.46 and 12.3.36). In the first the word *pallake* is used of an Egyptian girl of high birth who is dedicated to Zeus until the “natural cleansing of her body”:

τῷ δὲ Δί, ὃν μάλιστα τιμῶσιν, εὐεϊδεστάτῃ καὶ γένους λαμπροτάτου παρθένος ἱερᾶται, ἧς καλοῦσιν οἱ “Ἕλληνες παλλάδας—αὕτη δὲ καὶ παλλακεύει καὶ σύνεστιν οἷς βούλεται, μέχρις ἂν ἡ φυσικὴ γένηται κάθαρσις τοῦ σώματος—μετὰ δὲ τὴν κάθαρσιν δίδεται πρὸς ἄνδρα—πρὶν δὲ δοθῆναι, πένθος αὐτῆς ἄγεται μετὰ τὸν τῆς παλλακείας καιρόν.

But for Zeus, whom they [the Egyptians] honor most, a most beautiful maiden of most illustrious family serves as priestess, [girls] whom the Greeks call *pallades*; and she “concubines” herself, and has sex with whomever she wishes until the natural cleansing of her body; and after her cleansing she is given to a man; but before she is given, a rite of mourning is celebrated for her after the time of her concubinage.

The word *pallas/pallades* is not *pallake/pallakai*, although Strabo certainly tries to make it appear so through use of alternate forms of the word *pallakeuo/pallakeia* in this section, especially combining the verbs *pallakeuo* and *syneimi*. But the word *pallas* itself refers to a “maiden-priestess” according to Liddell and Scott, or at least to a younger cult functionary (*pallax* = young man, thus *pallas* = young female?). As such, it would be eminently plausible to offer a “nonsexualized” translation of the passage as follows:

But for Zeus, whom they [the Egyptians] honor most, a most beautiful maiden of most illustrious family serves as priestess, [girls] whom the Greeks call *pallades*; and she serves as a handmaiden and accompanies whomever/attends whatever [rites?] she wishes until the natural cleansing of her body; and after her cleansing she is given to a man/husband; but before she is given, a rite of mourning is celebrated for her after the time of her handmaiden service.

It is my belief that the priestesshood Strabo is describing here is that of either the Divine Votaress, often held by the daughter of the High Priest of

12. MacLachlan 1992, 151.

13. P. 890: “The hereditary παλλακαί at Tralles were concubines, and perhaps prophetesses, of the god, not temple prostitutes.”

14. Laumonier 1958, 633; Poljakov 1989, 12.

Amun; or the *heneret*¹⁵—the female musicians of the temple; or the “Wife of Amun” whose importance as a cult functionary rose dramatically from the New Kingdom forward in Egyptian history. Traditionally, the “Wife of Amun” position belonged to either the sister or daughter of the Pharaoh himself, thus “most illustrious family.” The title “Wife of Amun” could easily be translated into the Greek language and cultural understanding as “Concubine of Zeus,” and several Classical authors make frequent reference to “concubines of the god,” which appear to refer to female members of the Egyptian royal family (such as a reference to their pyramids in Diod. Sic. 1.47.1). These priestesses certainly did not “concubine themselves and have sex with whomever they wished,” but were reserved for god and husband. If Strabo actually understood the function of the Wife of Amun, if not the age of the priestess, it may be preferable to consider the nonsexualized translation of this passage. In this case, there is no reason to associate the Egyptian *pallades* with sacred prostitutes.

Ramsay used a second passage from Strabo in his analysis of the inscription, where the geographer claimed that the city of Comana on the Black Sea, not far from Tralles, was also famous for its sacred prostitutes (12.3.36):

καὶ εἰσὶν ἀβροδίαται οἱ ἐνοικοῦντες, καὶ οἰνόφυτα τὰ κτήματα αὐτῶν ἐστὶ πάντα, καὶ πλῆθος γυναικῶν τῶν ἐργαζομένων ἀπὸ τοῦ σώματος, ὧν αἱ πλείους εἰσὶν ἱεραὶ. τρόπον γὰρ δὴ τινα μικρὰ Κόρινθος ἐστὶν ἡ πόλις.

The inhabitants are voluptuous in their mode of life. All their property is planted with vines, and there is a multitude of women who make profit from their bodies, most of whom are sacred. The city is almost a little Corinth.

There is no explicit reference to the term *pallake* here. In fact, the comparison with Corinth would suggest rather that the word for sacred prostitute would be *hetaira* or possibly *hierodoulos*, as per Strabo's own reference to the city in this regard (8.6.20):

τό τε τῆς Ἀφροδίτης ἱερὸν οὕτω πλούσιον ὑπῆρξεν, ὥστε πλείους ἢ χιλίας ἱεροδούλους ἐκέκτητο ἐταίρας, ἃς ἀνέτιθεσαν τῇ θεῷ καὶ ἄνδρες καὶ γυναῖκες. καὶ διὰ ταύτας οὖν πολυωχλεῖτο ἡ πόλις καὶ ἐπλουτίζετο· οἱ γὰρ ναύκληροι ῥαδίως ἐξανηλίσκοντο, καὶ διὰ τοῦτο ἡ παροιμία φησὶν·

οὐ παντὸς ἀνδρὸς ἐς Κόρινθον ἔσθ' ὁ πλοῦς.

The sanctuary of Aphrodite thus was so wealthy that it possessed more than a thousand hierodules, courtesans whom both men and women dedicated to the goddess. And because of these the city was populous and grew rich. For ship captains easily spent a lot of money, and on this account the saying: “It is not for every man to go to Corinth.”

15. According to Lesko 2002, “Egyptologists have collectively referred to these religious women mistakenly as ‘concubines of the god,’ perhaps because one of Amun’s forms was as a fertility god and when in this role he was portrayed as ithyphallic. The term ‘concubine’ apparently was deemed suitable for the female temple staff whose role, it was speculated, could have been one that ensured, through their music and dancing, the heightened state of sexuality (and thus fertility) in the resident god. However, there is no difference in the writing of the word *heneret*, whether it appears in the context of a funeral, a goddess cult, or a god’s cult. Thus it is the imagination of the scholar rather than the evidence of the ancient inscriptions that have [sic] led to this misleading translation.”

Furthermore, in contrast to the institution of sacred prostitution as it was understood to occur in Corinth (and Comana?), the Tralles dedications associate the *pallakai* with Zeus, not Aphrodite.¹⁶ As such, the second reference to Strabo does not make a good foil for the Tralles inscriptions, and there is nothing to substantiate Ramsay's claim, and later ones, that Aurelia (and the others) are sacred prostitutes.

A broader issue to consider is the historicity of sacred prostitution itself. The past sixteen years have seen remarkable strides in the study of sacred prostitution in its supposed homeland—the Near East. The works of Stephen Hooks (1985), Robert Oden (2000), and Mayer Gruber (1986), among others, have argued quite cogently that sacred prostitution in the Near East is a myth, a literary topos, rather than a reality. A similar case might now be offered for the Classical world as well. If the existence of sacred prostitution is itself thrown out, the slight possibility that Aurelia, Meltine, and Paulina were of this profession becomes moot.

The lack of any clear evidence relating the *pallakai* of these inscriptions with sacred prostitutes strongly argues against this possible reading of the word. The fact that sacred prostitution itself may be falling out of the realms of historical probability further weakens this tentative argument, and forces the reader to consider alternative interpretations of the inscriptions in question.

PROPHETESSES

The primary argument for Aurelia, Meltine, and Paulina having been prophetesses was given above in the quotation from Herodotus (1.181–82). In this instance, a prophetess, the *promantis*, appears to have sexual relations with the deity, either Zeus Larasios or Apollo Pythios, both of whom are eminent in Tralles.¹⁷ The oracular associations of both gods is evident throughout Greek literature and religion, specifically in the *Homeric Hymn to Hermes* 471–74:¹⁸

καὶ τιμάς σέ γέ φασι δαήμεναι ἐκ Διὸς ὀμφῆς
μαντείας θ' Ἐκάεργε, Διὸς παρὰ, θέσφατα πάντα—
τῶν νῦν αὐτὸς ἐγὼ σε μαλ' ἀφνειὸν δεδάηκα—
σοὶ δ' αὐτάγρετόν ἐστι δαήμεναι, ὅττι μενοινᾷς.

And they say, O Far-Darter, that from Zeus and his divine voice
You learn the honors, the prophet's skills, and all Zeus-given revelations.
I myself have learned that you have these in abundance.
You may choose to learn whatever you desire.

A second piece of evidence used in favor of the prophetess hypothesis is the use of the word *aniptopodon* (“with unwashed feet”) in the first inscription. This word first appears in the *Iliad* 16.233–35, where it describes the priests of Zeus at Dodona:

16. As Rouse notes ([1902] 1975, 263–66) such dedications are traditionally made to the deity whom the cult functionary served.

17. Robert [1937] 1970, 406–7; Latte 1940, 14–15.

18. Translation by H. G. Evelyn-White.

Ζεῦ, ἄνα Δωδωναῖε Πελασγικέ, τηλόθι ναίων,
 Δωδώνης μεδέων δυσχειμέρου—ἄμφι δὲ Σελλοὶ
 σοὶ ναίουσ' ὑποφῆται ἀνιπτόποδες χαμαιεῦναι.

Zeus above Pelasgian Dodona, dwelling far away,
 Lord of harsh-wintered Dodona—about you the Selloi
 dwell, who sleep on the ground with unwashed feet.

That the most famous use of this word in the Greek corpus refers to priests famous for their oracular powers has been used as support for the hypothesis that the *pallakai* here mentioned, specifically Aurelia, were descendants of prophets, thus, prophetesses themselves.

It must be remembered, however, that close to a full millennium separates the two uses of the word, and it is perhaps not overly wise to assume that the term retained an identical usage and association over the course of this time.¹⁹ Furthermore, if Wilhelm Schulze were correct in his assessment of the family name Seius as Etruscan, one would have to account for the fact that we have an Etruscan family of the second century C.E. claiming kin with early Archaic, northern Greek priests. Finally, the image of the Selloi sleeping barefoot on the ground contradicts the notion of the prophetess sleeping with the deity within the temple. At best, one might argue that the adjective *aniptopodon* suggests a “priestly” quality in her (male) ancestors, as this word refers almost exclusively to priests in the Greek corpus.

A second argument against the identification of the *pallakai* as prophetesses is linguistic; quite simply, there are no usages of the word *pallakel/pallakis* in an oracular context in the Greek literature. The standard term for a prophetess in Greek is *promantis*, the specific word used by Herodotus in the passage quoted above that Latte took as his prime argument on this issue. In another instance where a prophetess is claimed to have possible sexual relations with her god—the Delphian Sibyl—she calls herself the wedded wife of Apollo (γυνὴ γαμέτη), not his *pallake* (Pausanias 10.12.2).

A third argument against the identification of the *pallakai* of these two inscriptions as prophetesses comes from another inscription from Tralles, which begins:²⁰

χρησμὸς τοῦ Πυθίου
 δοθεὶς Κλειτοσθένει τῷ
 ἱερεῖ τοῦ Διὸς ὑπὲρ τῆς
 σωτηρίας τῆς πόλεως

Oracle of the Pythian
 given to Kleitosthenes the
 priest of Zeus for the
 salvation of the city.

19. *Aniptopous/aniptopodes* appears one other time between Homer and Aurelia, in fragment 137 (139) of Eubulus, where the comic poet uses the term to describe parasites. Since his vocabulary in this fragment is almost identical with Homer's description of the Selloi, it is evident that a parody is intended, especially as one could hardly imagine wormy parasites having “unwashed feet.” Thus, this later usage offers no further insight into the meaning or use of the word.

20. Poljakov 1989, 1.

The text does not state whether the oracle comes from the Pythian Apollo of Delphi or the more local cult of the Pythian. What is apparent, however, is that Tralles receives its oracles at least from Apollo, if not from both Apollo and Zeus, through the medium of a male priest, specifically referred to as a *hiereus*.

There is no clear evidence that suggests that the *pallakai* of the Tralles inscriptions are prophetesses. The citizens of Tralles appear to receive their oracles through the medium of a male priest (*hiereus*), not through a female *promantis*. The only remaining evidence, the use of the word *aniptopodon* in the first inscription, is weakened by its extreme distance in time and place from the main use of the term. The evidence suggests that the *pallakai* are not prophetesses.

CONCUBINES

The most direct interpretation for the word *pallake/pallakis* as it appears in its various forms in these two inscriptions is simply as "concubine," the Greek equivalent of the Latin *concubina*.

The Latin equivalent of the term is actually a significant issue. Until this point, all analyses of these inscriptions have relied on Greek comparanda, in spite of the fact that both inscriptions date to the Roman period. As a result, it would appear that the meaning of *pallake* as "concubine" was rejected by Ramsay and Robert on the basis that Classical Greek concubines were of a somewhat disreputable class, and thus, no woman would ever record such a status on a votive. In contrast, the status of the Roman *concubina* could be relatively high, only just below that of the "legitimate" *uxor*;²¹ she could bear the title of *matrona*,²² and actually had certain legal prerogatives denied the legal wife.²³ As such, while it is possible that a fifth-century Greek woman might have refrained from referring to herself as a concubine, there is no reason to make such an assumption concerning a Roman woman.

A number of elements both within and surrounding the inscriptions give weight to the notion that the *pallakai* are in fact *concubinae*. The first, and perhaps most significant, is the matronymic given in the second inscription. Meltine Moskha, rather than being "daughter of male name x . . .," presents herself as "of the mother Paulina. . . ." While uncommon, the use of matronymics in Latin epigraphy is well documented, and according to Beryl Rawson generally refers to a child born illegitimately, that is, outside of a recognized marriage of husband and *uxor*.²⁴ That Meltine refers to herself as a *pallake* and to her mother as a *pallake* easily suggests that she was the outcome of such a union, and thus illegitimate, taking her mother's name instead of her father's.

21. *concubina igitur ab uxore solo dilectu separatur* (Paulus *Sententiae* 2.20.1).

22. Treggiari 1981, 72, esp. n. 62.

23. See especially Treggiari 1981, 62, for the legality of economically substantial "gifts" to concubines but not to wives.

24. Rawson 1995, 8; 1974, p. 283, n. 15, p. 296.

However, the fact that Aurelia, also referring to herself and her ancestors as *pallakai*, takes the patronymic argues against the possibility that a matronymic is used when the father is unknown (as would most likely be the case with the child of a prostitute). Both Aurelia and Meltine use their family names (Seius, Valerianus), showing a connection to the paternal as well as maternal lines.

A second issue is the provincial location of the inscriptions. According to the laws as recorded by Paulus and later, Roman provincial administrators were permitted to have local women as formal concubines, but not as legal wives.²⁵ In such a case, then, recording one's status as a *pallake/concubina* could potentially indicate a formalized relationship with a Roman official, a high status to be sure.²⁶

Finally, one might consider the various legal ramifications of the concubine status in Roman society, although at this point we are more in the realm of speculation concerning the three *pallakai* mentioned above. One issue is that of manumission. According to the Italian data (there is little research as yet on concubinage in the regions outside of Italy), concubines were frequently either the freed slaves of their patrons or the concubines of their freed *conservi*.²⁷ It may be possible, then, to see a declaration of *pallake/concubina* status as a reference to freed status as well. Another possible ramification is that of economics. The *Codex Justinianus* (24, 1) makes it clear that, as mentioned above, a man might give substantial gifts to his *concubina*, while such gifts to an *uxor* were prohibited. A formal declaration of concubine or former-concubine status could have carried with it economic repercussions that would have been to the benefit of the woman declaring such status, either for herself or for her mother, as in the case of Meltine.

One thought must be kept in mind when comparing the Greek *pallake/pallakis* with the Latin *concubina*, however. We have considerable linguistic and juridical evidence for the role and status of the *concubina* in Roman society, as the above documentation makes clear.²⁸ In contrast, there is little evidence for the role or status of the *pallake* in the Greek corpus. According to Pseudo-Demosthenes in his work *Against Neaira*: "We have courtesans (*hetairai*) for pleasure, concubines (*pallakai*) to take care of our day-to-day bodily needs, and wives to bear us legitimate children and to be the loyal guardians of our households" ([Dem.] 59.122 [trans. Blundell]). In this instance at least, the word *pallake* has no sexual component. Likewise, many other uses and forms of the words *pallake/pallakeuo/pallas/pallax*, have no sexual components, referring to young males and females, "maiden-priestesses," or brandishers of weapons or other such items (from the verb *pallo*). In point of fact, the majority of the related words, including the cult title of Pallas Athena herself, suggest a nonsexual implication for this group of words. It is possible, then, that the original meaning of *pallake/pallakis*

25. Treggiari 1981, 71.

26. And could potentially explain why a Carian woman would bear an Etruscan (?) family name, in the case of Aurelia.

27. Rawson 1974, 288; Treggiari 1981, 64–67.

28. For full references, see especially Treggiari 1981, 1993; and McGinn 1991.

referred more to some manner of “hand-maiden,” and that the meaning of “concubine” is only a sub-section of the original meaning or group of meanings. It may be wise, then, not to overconflate the Greek *pallake* with the Roman *concubina* and to impose such a role onto the women of the inscriptions.

CULT FUNCTIONARIES

While there is good reason to propose that the *pallakai* of the inscriptions were secular *concubinae*, two aspects of the dedications suggest that a religious office may be at stake. One is the reference to the time Meltine’s mother spent as a *pallake*—“two consecutive five-year periods.” The second is the use of the aorist participle form of the verb *pallakeuo* in both inscriptions.

The expression ἐπὶ τὸ ἐξῆς πενταετηρίσι β’ denotes a ten-year period of activity, broken up into two units of five years each. This would be an awkward way to recount that Meltine’s mother was a concubine for ten years. If, however, a cultic function were held for four- or five-year intervals, such an expression would indicate how long, or how many times, Paulina held such a cultic function. Since several cultic functions are temporary (one thinks immediately of the Arrhephoroi in Athens), the reference to terms in office supports the argument that the *pallakai* were some manner of cult functionary.

More important than reference to time is the form of the word *pallakeuo* in the two inscriptions. In both inscriptions the verb appears in the aorist participle, nominative in the case of Aurelia, genitive in the case of Paulina (the mother of Meltine). In the Meltine inscription, Meltine refers to herself with the nominative *pallake*, which might be understood as the equivalent of the present participle.

Use of the aorist participle of a verb referring to a sacred function is common in Greek-language inscriptions dating at least as far back as the late Classical period, and, according to W. H. D. Rouse, “Later, the number of these dedications increases so enormously, that it appears to become the regular thing that an official should make an offering on taking or leaving office.”²⁹ In this instance, the use of the aorist participle implies that the functionary is leaving office.³⁰

Parallels come from all over the Greek world, even in Roman times. Rouse alone records the following references: ἀρχιεροθύτας (*IGS* 1.788); δαμιουργήσας (*IGS* 1.704); ἱεραρχήσας (Thebes *IGS* 1.2480); ἱερατεύσασα (Athens *CIA* 3.94); ἱερητεύσας (Boiotia *IGS* 1.3097); ἱεροθυτήσας (Rhodes *IGS* 1.836); θευκολήσασαι (Aetolia *IGS* 3.1.421); μολπαρχήσας (Amorgos, *BCH* 15.597); ἀνγεῖον ὃ ὑδροφορήσασα ὑπόμνημα ἀνέθηκε (*CIG* 2855); and Ἀπόλλωνι Πυττίῳ ὑατατεύσας . . . (Itanos, *Mus. Ital.* 3.588).³¹

29. Rouse 1975, 260.

30. *Ibid.*, 265; also, “It is fair to assume that where the aorist participle is used, the offering has a direct reference to the office.”

31. *Ibid.*, 264–65, 272.

The reference to a defined period of “service” and the parallels of post-official dedications suggest that the *pallakai* of the Tralles inscriptions are some manner of cult functionaries, although cult functionaries not to be defined as either sacred prostitutes or prophetesses, as argued above. The fact that both Aurelia and Meltine make a point of noting their descent from *pallakidon* makes clear that the position was both honorable and, possibly, maintained within individual families, as were many Greek priesthoods.

What these functionaries may have done, however, remains entirely speculative without further data. It is only the title that may provide a slight clue about the role these women played. In light of the quotation from Pseudo-Demosthenes cited above, it is possible that the *pallakai* were responsible for the daily maintenance of Zeus, his statue, or the day-to-day affairs of his sanctuary. Another possibility is that the term *pallake* in this instance may refer to the feminine equivalent of *pallax* = male youth. In such a way, the *pallakai* may be viewed as the maidens of Zeus, or possibly even the temporary “daughters” of the god. A final consideration is that the title may refer back to the verb *pallo* = to brandish, and the *pallakai* of Zeus were some manner of spear-brandishers. This would correlate nicely with the more standard definition of *pallas/Pallas* as an epithet of Athena, referring back once again to the notion of the *pallakai* as “maidens of Zeus.”

CONCLUSIONS

What is to come of such conclusions? The possibilities are twofold. On the one hand, by removing the possibility of identifying Aurelia and the others as sacred prostitutes, we are left with even less evidence for this practice in the ancient world. It becomes increasingly likely that in the next several years classicists will come to hold a similar opinion of sacred prostitution to that currently being explored in the fields of Assyriology and Biblical research—that the practice is not an historical fact, but a literary motif. As Aurelia and Meltine provided two of the extremely rare cases where an individual appears to refer to herself as a sacred prostitute, as opposed to women and men of some far off, long dead, or otherwise foreign culture, firsthand accounts of sacred prostitution in the Classical world dwindle to virtually nothing.

On the other hand, the reevaluation of these inscriptions offers new food for thought on the meaning of the word *pallake* in its various forms in the Greek language. The term *pallake/pallakis* does often refer to a woman in a long-term, often sexual, nonmarital relationship with a man, to wit, concubinage, with references to Aspasia’s relationship with Perikles being a fine example. However, there do appear to be several instances where forms of this word and related words are nonsexual in meaning. In this instance, it may be worth considering the nonsexual roles of Zeus’ female cult functionaries in the Roman east, and the nonsexual, nonmarital roles of women in the ancient Greek world.

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