

PREFACE

We seem to be as far from a general history of brothels as we undoubtedly are from a history of prostitution. Attempts at accomplishing such projects run a certain risk of appearing to validate the status of venal sex as “the oldest profession,” an idea that has not only been repudiated but successfully refuted.¹ Nearly three decades of feminist scholarship have turned the tide, which is not turning back at any time soon, to judge from all appearances.² Yet, it seems obvious that the task of understanding the business of prostitution, above all the form and function of brothels in different cultures, as well as their place on the map, remains a fundamental prerequisite to understanding the place of prostitution in historical experience.³ As an intellectual enterprise, however, this task barely seems to have begun.

For many of the cultures that have been examined by the avatars of New

1. For a sense of the world we have lost (and do not miss) consult Murphy, *Great Bordellos of the World* (1983), a book representative of a larger genre that might be described as “coffee-table titillation.” As for Pompeian brothels, before the 1970s, and especially the 1990s, the reader found little to consult, aside from widely scattered references in various publications. An exception is found in two chapters devoted to this subject in D’Avino, *Women of Pompeii* (1964), 39–59, a work of a popular nature, at best.

2. Many would regard Walkowitz, *Prostitution in Victorian Society* (1980), as the breakthrough book in this field. There are important antecedents, among which Rubin, “The Traffic in Women” (1975), merits mention. In any case, the 1980s and 1990s have been a true golden age for feminist work on prostitution.

3. I note here that a working title of this study was *Brothels in the Roman World*. Understanding brothels in any culture requires a high degree of contextualization, which this book seeks to provide.

Prostitution Studies, information on the profession's economic aspects, including such issues as location, ownership, management, and price, is still sometimes surprisingly difficult to come by. *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World* has a fair claim to inaugurate a new genre in this field.⁴ Too often the subject is left embedded in a broader discourse, with key questions left unasked, let alone unanswered. Other studies have proven that it is possible to write a fairly effective study of venal sex without raising the problem of venue at all. One might draw the conclusion that the problem of brothels is quite incidental to the study of prostitution. This book will, I hope, serve as a corrective to that mistaken impression. It is original in its extensive reliance on comparative evidence drawn from a variety of cultures. I defend the use of this material for reasons of method in chapter 1; at the same time, I recognize the limitations of this use. The material is of intrinsic interest all the same, and I am hopeful that students of brothels and the business of prostitution in other cultures will be able to learn from it.

It is my modest intention that *The Economy of Prostitution in the Roman World* succeeds in helping to place prostitution in its proper historical context. I seek to achieve this in large part by focusing chiefly on the single major source for our knowledge, in its material aspect, of brothels and other venues for the sale of sex in Roman antiquity, namely the city of Pompeii. Part of the book's purpose is to raise questions of method, mainly concerning the problems of identification and definition, which might be of use to historians interested in studying brothels in other historical periods. The question of "fit" between different types of evidence, here archaeological, literary, documentary, and legal, is fundamental.

To attempt such a project without the benefit of solid and significant advances in the study of Pompeian brothels would be impossible. I am privileged here to thank the leader of that welcome trend in scholarship, Andrew Wallace-Hadrill. But my debt goes well beyond what has already appeared in print. This book owes countless improvements to the great good kindness of

4. For works that come close in some respects to what this book is attempting to do, see Heyl, *Madam* (1979); Prus and Irini, *Hookers* (1980); Schuster, *Frauenhaus*; and Best, *Controlling Vice* (1998). The difference in emphasis between these books and mine is explained partly by the gap in the quality and sheer amount of the evidence. Thus the first two deal with modern, that is, twentieth-century brothel prostitution, the third with the brothel in medieval Germany, and the fourth with the brothel in late nineteenth century St. Paul, Minn. They are able to treat the lives of prostitutes and other brothel personnel in as much detail as the brothels themselves, which this book could never do. Reynolds, *Economics of Prostitution* (1986), and Edlund and Korn, "A Theory of Prostitution (2002)" merit mention here, despite my differences with them, as pioneers in scholarship.

Wallace-Hadrill, whose knowledge of Pompeii sustains no easy challenge.⁵ I also thank Professors J. Patout Burns, John R. Clarke (whose published work is also of great importance for this study), Steven Dyson, Pedar Foss, Bruce W. Frier, Linda Jones Hall, John Humphrey, Dennis P. Kehoe, Marco Pagano, Jack Sasson, Ms. Sara Kidd, Dottorresse Doretta Mazzeschi and Gabriella Prisco, as well as Mr. Raymond Porfilio, for their varied and valued assistance. Professors John R. Clarke, Pietro Giovanni Guzzo, and Vincenzo Scarano Ussani, as well as Drs. Edward Cohen, Nicholas Horsfall, and Dr. Antonio Varone merit a particular expression of gratitude for allowing me to see their work prior to publication.

With great pleasure, I also thank the editors, readers, and assistants of the University of Michigan Press for the immense value they have contributed to this book. I should mention in particular Ellen Bauerle, Jillian Downey, Chris Collins, Mary Hashman, Sarah Mann, Erin Snoddy, and, above all, Collin Ganio.

I am once again indebted to Mr. James Toplon and his excellent staff at Vanderbilt University's interlibrary loan office for their usual heroic efforts on my behalf. In this regard I want to thank especially Rachel Adams and Marilyn Pilley. Janice Adlington, the acquisitions specialist for Classical Studies at Vanderbilt, also merits a hearty expression of gratitude. The Vanderbilt University Research Council provided much appreciated financial support.

Since much of the evidence for Roman brothels derives from the city of Pompeii, a brief caveat is in order. Those unfamiliar with the convention of Pompeian addresses need to know that this system was invented in the nineteenth century by Giuseppe Fiorelli, who divided the city into nine *Regiones*, each containing a number of blocks (*Insulae*) bordered by streets, with entryways to the buildings found in each block, numbered in a counterclockwise direction. Each address contains the number for the *Regio*, *Insula*, and entryway, in that order. (It is important to note that many locations have more than one entryway.) Revisions by various persons over time have produced slightly different addresses for a few locations. To avoid confusion, I generally give the version of the address adopted by the author in question, with the exception of the discussion of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century literature given in the first section of chapter 7, "Eminent Victorians."

5. I attempt to notice as many of Wallace-Hadrill's suggestions as I can by referring to his personal communication (p.c.), though the reader should be warned that the result is not exhaustive and agreement should not be assumed, except where expressly indicated.

The reader should refer to the catalog in appendix 1 for a corrective, when necessary.

References are provided in abbreviated form in the notes; full citations are found in the bibliography. In the notes I provide references to the editions of patristic works I have used on the theory that these are not always as accessible as the texts of classical authors. The nature and scope of this work has prevented me from expanding the bibliography after the book went to press in October 2002, apart from rare exceptions.⁶

6. The photographs are my own. Sara Kidd drew the maps on a template that Prof. Peder Foss provided to me in electronic form, and that derives from Eschebach, *Entwicklung* (1970), foldout 1.