While we have no difficulty in thus identifying the protagonists, it is far from easy to specify the exact character and significance of what each of these brought to the enterprise. The history of the critical reception of the book that concerns us here itself conveys a sense of the true polyvalence of this publication. When the cultural and art-historical study of “Vienna around 1900” got underway in earnest in the decade following the end of the Second World War, the 1907 edition of the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* initially attracted very little attention. It first began to do so, albeit gradually, in the context of scholarship focused on the multi-faceted “reform” movement in book publishing, for which Europe in the 1890s and 1900s was especially notable. Georg Karr Schauer, in his study of 1961, *Deutsche Buchkunst 1800 bis 1900*, was the first to put the 1907 publication on the scholarly map, characterizing the volume as a “daring edition.”5 Schauer was shortly followed in his admiration by Hans H. Hofstätter, who discussed the 1907 volume in his magisterial publication of 1969.6 When, in the same year, Christian M. Nebehay published his detailed account of the life and work of Gustav Klimt, a recognized expert on the artist was able to bring his own insights to bear on the item in question. Nebehay, however, proved still to be under the misapprehension that the Klimt drawings reproduced in the 1907 volume were assembled there merely so to realize “a publisher’s brain wave.”7 It is to Alice Strobl that we owe the heretofore most detailed account of the fifteen images incorporated within the 1907 publication, to be found in the second of the four volumes of her catalogue raisonné of the Klimt drawings. Strobl’s argument—that Klimt’s drawings are not intended as “illustrations” in the strict sense of the term—is now the generally accepted view.8

On the whole, interest from scholars was relatively restrained. A lively awareness of the 1907 edition of the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* was, however, evinced by antiquarian book collectors and by collectors of erotica. The enthusiasms of the latter could, moreover, be more openly articulated and more readily satisfied as attitudes towards both sexuality and morality began to shift in societies in the West during the 1960s. The growth in interest was most clearly reflected in the arrival of several new editions of the 1907 publication. In 1976 the most sumptuous of these appeared under the imprint of Gala Verlag in Hamburg.9 Particularly notable from a scholarly point of view was the edition of 1989 published by Rudolf Schottlaender (and, moreover, in East Berlin with the Cold War just about to end), which reworked Franz Blei’s adaption and supplied a postscript and a list of textual corrections.10

Through the medium of international exhibiting, the 1907 edition of the *Dialogues of the Courtesans* had already been brought to the attention of a North American public, in 1970, featuring in an exhibition staged by Harvard University on the subject of art in the context of book publishing between 1885 and 1911. Notably, however, its presentation there may have been somewhat out of step with the aforementioned relaxation of attitudes in the 1960s and beyond. An entry in the accompanying catalogue observes: “the drawings for the Lucian of thin, emaciated nudes are invested with a perverse eroticism.”11

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Fig. 2: Lucian’s *Dialogues of the Courtesans*, Edition A, 1907

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Fig. 3: MAX OPPENHEIMER, *Portrait of Franz Blei*, 1910/11

Mumok, Museum moderner Kunst Stiftung Ludwig Wien (Museum of Modern Art Foundation Ludwig Vienna)

Fig. 4: AUBREY BEARDSLEY, *Study for Lysistrata*, 1896

From: Franz Blei (ed.), *Der Amethyst*, Vienna, 1906/07
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Klimt’s contribution to the 1907 volume, as an instance of the charged confrontation between the notion of “morality” and the notion of “taboo,” was central to the theme of the exhibition presented, in 2005, at the Schirn Kunsthalle in Frankfurt am Main: The Naked Truth. Klimt, Schiele, Kokoschka, and other Scandals. This show, which subsequently toured to the Leopold Museum, Vienna, included a total of nine examples of the 1907 publication, thereby drawing particular attention to the notion of early-twentieth-century Vienna “in which the former sense of social orientation was lost and the traditional social role models had been discarded.”

Two years later the present author addressed the issue of the discrepancy between public adulation and scholarly restraint, in order to throw light on the essential ambiguity of the 1907 publication. As I argued on that occasion, it appeared that the Dialogues of the Courtesans functioned rather as had the Priapeia in Classical Antiquity, that celebrated compilation of Latin inscriptions and literary texts that were “very immoral, albeit written for an educated public.” The fact that this text, in its 1907 edition, continues to be “questionable,” in the best sense of that term, is revealed by Stefan Kutzenberger’s very well researched essay of 2012, which takes issue, above all, with the failure of literary historians to attend to this publication, and by Alfred Weidinger’s observations of 2015 on the representation of female sexuality in the work of Gustav Klimt.

Pioneers in an extraordinary publishing project

As already observed, there were four protagonists in the creation of the 1907 edition of Lucian’s Dialogues of the Courtesans: these were Gustav Klimt, Franz Blei, Julius Zeitler, and Josef Hoffmann. I shall here adopt a new approach and inquire in more detail into which of this group could be understood as taking the lead, who should be counted as the true pace-setter of this high-caliber network, and what were the chief difficulties to be overcome on the way to a successful outcome.

Franz Blei: translator and spiritus rector

The dealings between the most important of the four protagonists, Franz Blei and Gustav Klimt, are all the more difficult to untangle because documents relating to Klimt’s part in this collaboration offer little that is of substance. Nor, in the far more extensive surviving archival documentation on Franz Blei, is there much to be found. The episode that, in this respect, is of greatest significance relates to a Klimt drawing that Blei is said to have received as a gift from the artist, to be used as an illustration (although this did not initially happen). Even in Blei’s essay of 1930 on the subject of courtesans in literature no further light is thrown on any (working) relationship with Klimt. And Blei even “forgets” to mention there his own adaptation from Lucian, surprisingly commenting not at all on any related collaboration. Nor does he speak of this in his autobiography, itself published in the same year. Virtually all that we have in the way of Blei’s observations on Klimt is his emphasis, in a short literary sketch of 1940, that this artist rarely ever painted portraits of men: “His nature was such that he had no real ‘feeling’ for male subjects. But he took enormous delight in recording the image of any woman, and one could even say those thousands of naked, or half-dressed, female bodies, captured in drawings that seized the fleeting moment, were his private life, the diary of the best that he had achieved in every sense.”

In all probability, it was Franz Blei (fig. 3) who, as the project’s spiritus rector, first sought out Gustav Klimt. The painter was, after all, more of a public figure; he was also by far the more successful; and, furthermore, he was nine years Blei’s senior. Blei himself, born in Vienna in 1871, was not, however, at the age of thirty-six, altogether devoid of relevant experience. Following university studies in Vienna, Zurich, Geneva, and Bern, where he had received a doctorate in economics, he had settled in Munich in 1900. He liked to be seen as “a gray eminence in matters of literature and erotica.” And he was soon established as “a forceful presence in every literary by-way, always on the prowl, a dandy who brought stupendous energy to founding one journal after another, getting through women just as fast as he got through the money inherited from his father, writing, translating, penning polemics, and striking poses.”

If paying a visit to Klimt, Blei might well have been able to bring along a freshly printed issue of Der Amethyst, one of the journals he edited and published. Devoted to literature and art (and idiosyncratically subtitled so as to refer to “Litteratur,” spelled incorrectly with double “t”), this was intended as a home for texts of an adventurously and playfully erotic character, be they from Asian Antiquity or contemporary Europe. Der Amethyst was especially valued for its often sumptuous illustrated supplements, among which were those devoted to the work of Féliçien Rops (1833–1898) and of Aubrey Beardsley (1872–1898); both artists whom Klimt admired and to whose work he responded in his own (fig. 4).
The “trump card” with which the bustling Blei would have been able to impress Klimt and his Viennese circle was, however, the adaptation he had made from the original Greek of Lucian’s text. From the philosophical point of view, two aspects of this are especially striking, and it seems highly probable that Blei would have discussed these in any meeting with Klimt. As already indicated, Blei’s text (at least in the form in which it was printed in 1907) is not an exact “translation” in the usual sense. It is an adaptation at times so free as to qualify as a “rendition.” In this respect it was far removed from the first ever German edition, published in 1788 by the Weimar Classicist Christoph Martin Wieland (1733–1813), and notable for its author’s striving for the greatest possible fidelity to the original.26 Wieland, however, who valued the Lucian of Antiquity as “a writer no less wise than he was witty,”26 had not translated all of the dialogues. Lest he offend the moral standards of his era, he had omitted the fifth, which largely turns on a lesbian encounter described by one courtesan to her two surprised but intrigued friends. In Wieland’s view, “no translation into any living language [appeared] suited to accommodate such a discussion.” This textual lacuna was, in due course, filled in by other translators.27 But, for Blei, it was precisely the risqué nature of the material that had occasioned such an omission that was itself of particular interest.28 Blei also extensively altered the original order in which the fifteen dialogues are presented to the reader (Lucian’s fifth, for example, becomes Blei’s sixth), with the result that his adaptation has a rhythm of its own.

**Gustav Klimt and his own image of the courtesan**

It is probable that Klimt came to know of Lucian’s text only when introduced to it through Blei’s adaptation. Born into a relatively humble family, he left school at the age of fourteen, and his education there would certainly not have embraced instruction in Ancient Greek. As an artist, however, Klimt soon became very well aware of the enormous cultural wealth of Greek Antiquity. And he indeed repeatedly and keenly engaged, both as a draftsman and as a painter, with the notion of Greek Art that prevailed during much of the nineteenth century. His early work is particularly rich in evidence of this, for example in the decorative painting he provided for the Viennese Burgtheater, which includes scenes such as *The Altar of Dionysos* and *The Theater at Taormina*. Implicit in such scenes was the positivist approach of Historicism. Throughout the 1890s Antiquity remained an important source of inspiration for him, as evinced by works such as his *Portrait of Joseph Pembaur* (see p. 107); and it had lost little of its relevance even after the founding, in 1897, of the Viennese Secession and the “Sacred Spring” (“Ver Sacrum”) in the arts that
were entirely blocked out. Only in recent cultural history has a paradigm shift taken place in this respect, with particular attention now being paid to communicative processes and the meaning they imply.10

In this sense it is imperative to look more closely at the social context in which hetaerae met their lovers in the heyday of the hetaera profession. Even if there have been similar phenomena in other times and cultures (the Japanese geishas spring to mind, as do the cortigiane of the Italian Renaissance, the mistresses of European rulers and popes, the courtesans of the nineteenth-century Parisian art world, and escort services today) what was special about the role of the hetaerae in Archaic and Classical Greece only comes to light when seen in the context of the everyday lives of the aristocracy of that time.

The aristocratic symposium

In the Archaic era (seventh/sixth century BCE), the Greek aristocracy was not a cohesive class that could be distinguished from other social groups by means of objective and generally accepted criteria. The individuals seen as superior distinguished themselves “through a broad spectrum of superior personal characteristics,”11 which included not only wealth, but also physical strength, athletic ability, and glory acquired on the battlefield, as well as finally also exquisite manners and success in terms of the ritualized advances made towards highly desired male youths and young ladies (the previously cited “female companions”) on the occasion of traditional social gatherings held in the context of drinking sessions/symposia. The symposium served to maintain friendships and powerful alliances, to nurture group identity for a social segment that felt exceptional owing to its shared values and exclusive lifestyle, and not least also to negotiate internal hierarchies within a highly competitive elite.12 At these social gatherings homage was paid to the wine god Dionysus according to predefined rules; the drinkers became intoxicated within a tension-filled atmosphere between community and rivalry. The protagonists of these gatherings were the adult men of the elite, but adolescents also took part in the binges, as did those women we now identify as hetaerae. These were not the female family members of the aristocratic males present, but strangers, sometimes also slaves. The erotic interaction with such women during symposia was addressed in the lyric verse recited specifically at these events. Amorous courtship is a central theme of many of these songs, marked by a to and fro of approach, coquettish rejection, and subtle eroticism.13 Only a few texts touch upon sexual acts—both with young men and with women. One of these is a fragment by the poet Mimnermus from the second half of the seventh century BCE.14 In it, the poet praises a life of aphrodisiacal lust from the perspective of an aging lover, while at the same time bewailing the inevitable decline of erotic attractiveness in old age.15 He counts among the greatest things in life the “secret intrigues [kryptadie philotes], persuasive gifts [dora], and the bed [eune],” all of which delight men and women in their youth. He saw old age bringing these joys to an abrupt end, making the old man ugly, and as a consequence he was hated by youths and scorned by women. The erotic liaisons granted by Aphrodite are here described using the term philotes, a word Homer had previously made use of in the epics in defining interpersonal relationships that existed not as a matter of birth or convention, but were founded through rituals (and this included sexual union).16 The presents mentioned (“persuasive gifts”) play a fixed role in the ritual of wooing the desired person: They have symbolic and material value, as well as demonstrating the committed interest the admirer has in the coveted person. This practice of exchanging gifts was also to remain important in the interaction with hetaerae in later times.

Images of the carousel

Corinthian and Attic ceramic vessels used in the drinking sessions, so-called vases, also feature reclining men at the symposium with their female companions from the sixth century BCE onwards. The depictions focus on the beauty of the hetaerae, showing the men sometimes as courting the women’s affection and sometimes as their lovers. Even though the hetaera and her benefactor are often shown as a couple, it is always made clear that the other guests also participate in their encounter, be it as onlookers or as rivals who are themselves pursuing the women.17 The observer of the scenes on the crockery is ultimately another onlooker following the approaches. How can hetaerae be discerned in the images? Sometimes the depictions include attributes which, according to later literary sources, were typical for hetaerae, for example small amulets worn on the upper arms.
and thighs, which were used as lucky charms and talismans intended to avert evil. Hetaerae tried to win over and retain their lovers with magical practices. The vase paintings illustrate these practices, while the amulets also visualize the enchanting effect that hetaerae made. Depictions of elaborate clothing and luxurious furniture illustrate the elite aristocratic lifestyle, placing the emphasis on the shared experience of sensual pleasures. There were a variety of ways in which this was done. Some paintings highlight the exchange of sensuality between hetaera and lover. One vase now in Brussels shows the men intensively engaged with their respective partners, and the gaze between the individuals in the respective couples is particularly central to this image (fig. 2). Other vase paintings explicitly feature sexual intercourse. Depictions of copulating couples in various positions were especially popular in images decorating the insides of drinking bowls (fig. 3). It is possible that this was done in order to achieve a whimsical surprise effect, as the image would only become visible when the drinker had all but emptied his cup. Tipping or turning the bowl, in combination with the last gulp of wine splashing around in it, may also have created the illusion of the couple in the inside image moving. Other images of drinking sessions show dramatic scenes of forced intercourse, such as the exterior image of a drinking bowl in the Louvre (around 500 BCE), which shows an old and a young man forcing a woman to perform fellatio and anal intercourse (fig. 4). This rather brutal-looking scene stands in stark contrast with the depiction of subtle eroticism in the painting on the inside of the same bowl (fig. 5). It is conceivable that paintings of this kind were intended as pornographic illustrations specifically aiming to contrast grace with roughness, moderate eroticism with violent sexuality.

Rivalry between lovers
Alongside the wooing of a desired woman, the theme of rivalry is already of great importance in archaic lyric poetry. Indeed, a song by Anacreon revolves around the woes of an older man who is no longer successful in his advances towards a young woman, as she instead turns her attention towards a younger suitor. “Stealing away” another man’s hetaera was evidently a popular game in high society, in particular among young men who became contenders in their conduct with hetaerae and even fought one another, as literary documents from the fourth century BCE reveal. These quarrels took place at night following a symposium, when groups of youths undertook processions (komoi) through the city in order to continue drinking at another carousal or to reach the house of a sought-after hetaera, where they would proclaim their desire to be received by loudly reciting serenades. In cases where rivals happened upon each other in such a situation this often resulted in violent disputes, over the course of which the young men established a “pecking order” amongst
themselves: Those who were successful with the most coveted ladies were seen as erotically skilled and well endowed; the goal was to outdo one another. Such competitive battles could be continued on a different level, namely in court. Some cases have been documented in which spurious accusations were brought against famous hetaerae, with the main goal of harming their suitors. In this context Aspasia, the hetaera of the famous politician Pericles, was charged with impiousness and procuration in the fifth century BCE, and the hetaera Phryne’s alleged religious sacrilege was used as a pretense to dishonor her lover in court by the latter’s political opponents. Her intimate took it upon himself to defend Phryne in court and openly admitted to her being his hetaera as the case was heard, stating that she had long since shunned the claimant, who was now bringing charges against her solely on the basis of his disappointment. The outcome of the lawsuit is the subject of a famous anecdote, according to which the swain obtained Phryne’s acquittal by disrobing her in front of the judges’ eyes and presenting them with her beauty. Seeing this “priestess of Aphrodite” naked is said to have moved the judges to acquit her of all charges (fig. 6). Hetaerae were of enormous importance in the context of male competition for honor and standing. Those who had an especially beautiful and widely desired woman as their companion would have been seen as being especially moneyed, cultivated, and powerful by their respective rivals. In this way hetaerae also marked their lover’s rank.

The invention of the hetaerae

Although the banquet culture of archaic times went hand in hand with an aristocratic lifestyle, it did not lose importance in the democratic era of the fifth century BCE. Yet despite the fact that the social group of men striving to emulate an aristocratic lifestyle became broader, it is unlikely that an ancient connoisseur of hetaerae would have declared all of the women appearing at any-old symposium worthy of the venerable description of “companion.” It is for good reason that the term hetaera first appeared in the mid-fifth century BCE. For it only became necessary at that time to underline the special qualities of a “hetaera” in order to distinguish her from other women who offered a range of in-part similar services. Hetaerae were called “companions” in order to highlight the sentimental value of these relationships and to mark them out not only in contrast to venal prostitutes (pornai), but also to female entertainment artists of all kinds. In the Classical era, the latter could be hired for a fee to amuse symposium guests for an evening. These women joined proceedings when dinner
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had already been taken and the carousel amongst the group of men was about to begin. They played
the flute and the string cithara, they danced, juggled and performed pantomime or acrobatics. Their
task further lay in erotically stimulating the guests through kisses and intimate touching. As it was
common at the carousals of simple folk for each guest to bring some food or wine to the symposium,
these female artists could also be jointly paid by the group. A passage from a text handed down
under the name Aristotle attests to the hiring of such artists having been guaranteed by the city for
the less wealthy, too. It states that the city wardens' duties included the following: "[...] see to it that
auletrides, psaltriae, and kitharistriae shall not be hired out for more than 2 drachmas [each]; and if
more [than one customer] is eager to take the same [woman], then [the magistrates] assign [her] by
lot and let [her] out for hire to him who obtains [her] by lot." By fixing the maximum price for the
service and preventing extortion, the polis ensured this type of entertainment remained affordable
for broad social groups. The mention of lots being drawn in those cases where several competing
parties were interested in hiring the same artist shows just how democratic the hire of female enter-
tainment artists was. The services a hetaera provided may have been quite similar to those offered
by such entertainers, but hetaerae were regarded as being more exclusive, as they accompanied one
guest to the symposium, sometimes even taking place in the preceding meal and lounging on the
reclining sofa next to their partner during the festivities, thereby being seen as "his hetaera." Ancient
texts refer to a woman as a hetaira specifically in those cases where the connection between
her and a man is to be emphasized and has a dimension surpassing the mere gazing at or touching
of a dancer or intercourse with a prostitute in a brothel.

Graceful interaction
What was special about the interaction with a hetaera? The fact that hetaerae had sexual relations
with their suitors is uncontested in research circles. It is therefore all the more astonishing that sex
with hetaerae is—if we are to disregard some explicit vase paintings—only seldom addressed in
literary sources and even somewhat of a taboo subject. Those wanting to sleep with their hetaerae
presumably did so in her home and not directly at the symposium. Alongside the previously mentioned characteristic ability to entertain with music and dance, a hetaera’s work also included teasing the guests or flattering them, as well as contributing amusing observations to the conversation. In his Deipnosophistae, a text on dinner-table philosophers, the writer Athenaeus cites many examples of the quick-witted intelligence and literary education of hetaerae. This "education" consisted of spontaneous linguistic jokes, as well as reciting a repertoire of quotations from contemporary dramas and riddles, which were often posed in verse. Hetaerae purposefully acquired the ability of letting such spirited remarks slip into the conversation in order to be able to entertain and amuse their counterpart in a sophisticated way. The graceful interaction a hetaera was expected to cultivate with her lover further included her not being "easy," but rather needing to be conquered, i.e. seduced according to specific rules. This game was intended not only to heighten her allure, but the process of negotiation further resulted in the possibility of the wooing male being able to show off the full range of his finesse: through making precious gifts, classy gestures, and communicating according to etiquette. Wooing a hetaera is a common theme of vase paintings, as is wooing a desired young male. The courted hetaerae are often shown veiled here, tightly wrapped in a cloak that does not allow them to access the gifts they are being presented with (garlands, flowers, small animals, bags of money) in order to illustrate their idealized restraint towards these material favors (fig. 7). The courting men are themselves romanticized as admirers full of self-control, tempering their sexual desire. The desired woman’s value was increased by her being seldom available. The harder it was to win her favor, the greater the effort a lover was inclined to make—as was in turn his enthusiasm for seducing this hetaera in particular.

Beauty, favors and true friendship
Many sources praise the renowned hetaerae for their beauty above all else; this topos is very reveal-
ing in terms of understanding how hetaerae were perceived. Their beauty was more than just a
physical attribute. Rather, it shaped the way in which they interacted socially. According to the
ideal, charis—which can only be inadequately translated as grace—governed the interaction as a
constant alternation between giving and receiving. And particularly the favor granted by the het-
aerae, the act of love making, can also be understood as charis. This close connection between
beauty, grace, favor, and courtesy is the topic of a fictitious conversation between the philosopher Socrates and the hetaera Theodote in Xenophon’s Memorabilia. The episode of Socrates’ visit to the hetaera focuses on a delicate subject in the relationship between hetaerae and their lovers, namely the cherished veneer of friendship. In view of her evident wealth, the philosopher asks the hetaera about its origins. The hetaera’s answer draws on the traditional friendship terminology: “My friends [philos] are my life and fortune, when they care to be kind to me [eu poiein].” Despite there being no mention of payment, Socrates immediately understands that the hetaera sees it as a matter of course that for her “gifts,” her friends would present her with gifts in return. Socrates aims to embed the hetaera’s barely disguised material interests in an ethics of reciprocity. His ironic remarks show the enactment of “true friendship” to have been little more than a charade for hetaerae. Yet it was a matter of courtesy for the hetaera not to regard the presents she received as payments, but instead, according to the ethics of friendship, as favors corresponding in their worth with the honor of the person upon whom they were bestowed. Few specific clues are provided in the sources when it comes to the effort and expense involved in interacting with a free hetaera. Often the talk is simply and quite categorically of “very costly hetaerae” (megalomisthoi hetairai), without exact monetary values being given. Ultimately, it was a matter of satisfying the hetaera’s demands, the extent of which also provided a clue as to how popular she was. Gifts consisted of dresses, jewelry, luxury goods, property, or female slaves. Gifts had to be made for the duration of the relationship, which drove many Athenian citizens to ruin and their family members to despair. We can thus say in summary that the Athenians tended to characterize a relationship with a hetaera as being of a friendly nature, as it was distinguished—in accordance with the archaic ethics of friendship—by reciprocal give and take. Hetaerae were attentive to those men who offered them presents in return, while every semblance of a monetary transaction having taken place between the hetaerae and their lovers was suppressed. The hetaerae’s sphere of influence was limited to the world of the symposium, where these women could
be conquered and exchanged as though this were a parlor game. The designation of hetaerae con- 
formed to a conservative and elitist mindset that valued the aristocratic lifestyle of the archaic era 
and aimed to defend this against democratic assimilation. The hetaerae in turn could be proud to 
mark themselves out against the venal whores and female flute players, to take part in an elitist 
lifestyle and refined customs, and bestow a sense of glamour upon their respective partners. Yet this 
will often have been little more than a pretty veneer. When James Davidson elaborates “that a het-
aera (as opposed to a prostitute) was able to decide with whom she went to bed,” that she was not 
simply bought, but needed to be “convinced” and “seduced,” then he is correctly reflecting the an-
cient discourse on the topic, but in reality specific factual constraints would presumably have influ-
enced her supposedly free choice.38

Misery and magnificence of the Greek hetaerae
On a day-to-day basis hetaerae probably did not enjoy a great deal of freedom of choice. The selec-
tion of their lovers was often driven by hardship, dependence, and violence. Many hetaerae were in 
fact former slaves whose owners had forced them into sexualized interaction with men even during 
their youth and childhood. The owners acted as pimps and brokered the contact to clients.39 Other 
hetaerae were free women from birth—in Athens they tended to live alone or communally in rented 
housing as permanently resident foreigners, so-called Metics. They were not allowed to own land or 
property.40 Jewelry in particular thus served hetaerae as a provision for old age and financial secu-
rity in their short-lived careers. Growing older, some of them made a living as matchmakers, others 
were supported by their daughters, but many who were unable to bring any of their lovers to commit 
to them became destitute. A famous Roman copy of a Hellenistic statue showing an old, bedraggled 
hetaera—the so-called Old Drunkard—can be found at the Glyptothek in Munich (fig. 8). The female 
figure still wears some signs of her glorious past: rings on her fingers and ears, a cloak made from 
fine fabric; yet her body is emaciated, wrinkly and bony. Cowering on the floor, she clutches a bul-
bous wine bottle, marking her out as an alcoholic.41 
Even though the fluctuation of lovers was part of the social game played in the world of the sym-
posium, promiscuity definitively excluded the hetaera from the circle of citizens. And despite her 
access to education and social life, permanent social integration—the most important factor in en-
suring long-term quality of life in pre-modern societies—remained a goal attained by few. Literary 
evidence documents how hetaerae were viewed by those who admired, envied, or mocked them. Yet 
the only perspective missing from these sources is that of the hetaerae themselves. There are no 
surviving texts on how they saw themselves and their relationships. If such documents did exist, 
they would presumably be ambivalent. Some hetaerae may well have described themselves as ex-
ploited, dependent, and without rights. Others may have taken a certain amount of pride in their life, 
as is articulated in an epigram said to have adorned the tomb of the famous Laïs and reading that 
her beauty had enslaved all of Hellas.42
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37 On the characterization of the Old Drunkard as a hetaera see Zanker 1989, pp. 32–42.
36 Cf. for example Aeschines 1, 75, who cites “very costly hetaerae and flute girls.”
35 On the following see Hartmann 2002, pp. 179–81.
34 Xenophon, Memorabilia III 11, 4 (translation: H. G. Dakyns).
33 On the following see Hartmann 2002, pp. 157–73.
31 On the exceptional beauty of the hetaera Lais see Hypereides in Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai XIII 587 c–d.
30 It was similarly expected of a desired male youth to act coy and to first need to be won over; cf. Plato, Symposium 184
a–b.
29 The art of flattery is highlighted for example by Menander, Epitreptones Fragment 7: “It’s not an equal battle, Pamphilé. An
honest woman matched against a whore: They have the odds all round; they cheat and lie; They have no shame; they flat-
ter and deceive in ways you never dream of; they know more; They know the world, they know men’s weaknesses . . .”
(translation: Gilbert Murray).
27 On the following see Reinsberg 1989. – Schuller 2008, passim.
25 Hartmann 2006a, p. 49.
24 Hartmann 2006a, p. 49.
23 Athenaeus, Deipnosophistai XIII 591 e, and Plutarch, Moralia 849 e.
22 Phryne lived in Athens as a permanently resident foreigner (metoikos). The Metics had an Athenian citizen as an advocate
20 Anacreon, Fragment 358 Poetae Melici Graeci. – On the poem see Latacz 1991, p. 439, see note 6.
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18 See Peschel 1987, p. 70.
14 On the combination of pederasty and sexual relations with women in the context of the symposium see Kurke 1997, p.
13 Anacreon, Poetae Melici Graeci. – On the poem see Latacz 1991, p. 439, see note 6.
11 Stein-Hölkeskamp 2015, p. 90.
8 Reinsberg 1989, p. 90.
4 Schuller 2008, pp. 49–114, in particular p. 71. – On the hetaera Neaera, who is known from a speech in a law court held
in the fourth century BCE, see Hamel 2004.
2 On his Historiae II, pp. 134–35, Herodotus tells of the fabulous wealth that Thracian Rhodopis, who lived around 600 BCE,
had acquired as a hetaera.
1 For a detailed account of this see Hartmann 2002, pp. 142–49.
The two semi-nude underwater beings in Klimt’s 1905/06 work Water Serpents I (The Women Friends) appear to be in a close embrace. Together with Water Serpents II (see p. 27) the scene represents a high point in Klimt’s exploration of the motif of drifting or floating nudes, which finds expression in a series of underwater images. Stemming from ancient or medieval myths, this theme was hugely popular in the symbolistic painting towards the end of the nineteenth century, as the literary inspiration provided material for the ostensible representation of female eroticism without the risk of coming into conflict with censors. In his work Water Serpents I, Klimt conveys the sensual eroticism of the water beings without any mythological props and picks up on a taboo topic of the time: The tender affection of the two semi-nudes implies that this scene is a representation of lesbian love. Even the studies produced in advance of Water Serpents I and II show that at this point in time Klimt was intensely exploring the motif of lesbian love and autoeroticism. These two themes are also reflected in the selection of drawings for the Dialogues of the Courtesans which appeared in 1907.

In a timeless, mythological, fairytale world, Klimt’s Women Friends become pure mood-bearers of a sensual eroticism, which is born of the ornamental inventiveness of the artist. Ludwig Hevesi described the two long-limbed semi-nudes as “of the most exquisite anatomical peculiarity,” which “really uses the human figure merely as raw material for the fantasy played out in forms.”


Bowl of Apollodorus
Attic, red-figure, 525–475 BCE
National Archaeological Museum of Tarquinia, inv. 87778
GUSTAV KLIMT

Water Serpents I (The Women Friends), 1905/06 with final reworking in 1907
Belvedere, Vienna

The two semi-nude underwater beings in Klimt's 1905/06 work Water Serpents I (The Women Friends) appear to be in a close embrace. Together with Water Serpents II (see p. 27) the scene represents a high point in Klimt's exploration of the motif of drifting or floating nudes, which finds expression in a series of underwater images. Stemming from ancient or medieval myths, this theme was hugely popular in the symbolistic painting towards the end of the nineteenth century, as the literary inspiration provided material for the ostensible representation of female eroticism without the risk of coming into conflict with censors. In his work Water Serpents I, Klimt conveys the sensual eroticism of the water beings without any mythological props and picks up on a taboo topic of the time: The tender affection of the two semi-nudes implies that this scene is a representation of lesbian love. Even the studies produced in advance of Water Serpents I and II show that at this point in time Klimt was intensely exploring the motif of lesbian love and autoeroticism. These two themes are also reflected in the selection of drawings for the Dialogues of the Courtesans which appeared in 1907.

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SA

Bowl of Apollodorus
Attic, red-figure, 525–475 BCE
National Archaeological Museum of Tarquinia, inv. 87778
ein kleines Mädchen
seine Mutter

Nun weißt du es also und hast es gespürt, Corinna, daß es gar nicht so schrecklich ist wie du es dachtest, wenn man seine Jungfrauschaft verliert. Du warst mit einem jungen Mann zusammen, und hast als erstes Geschenk von ihm hundert Drachmen bekommen; dafür will ich dir gleich ein Halsband kaufen.

Ach ja, Mamachen! Und so eines mit glänzenden Steinen wie der Philainis ihres.

Ganz genau das gleiche. Aber jetzt hör zu, ich will dir sagen, was du tun mußt und wie du es mit den Männern anstellst. Wir haben nichts sonst als das, wovon wir leben, mein Kind; die zwei Jahre, da dein Vater tot ist, weißt du nicht, wie wir uns durchgebracht haben. Wie er noch am Leben war, da hat es uns an nichts gefehlt, denn er war ein tüchtiger gesuchter Schmied unten im Pyraeus; das kannst du hören, wen du nur darum fragst, daß es wie Philinos keinen zweiten gab. Wie er tot war, verkaufte ich also seine Zangen, seinen Ambos und seinen Hammer für zweihundert Drachmen und davon haben wir gelebt. Dazu noch so was ich für Weben und Nähnen bekam, gerade daß wir uns durchschlagen konnten. Und ich habe dich zuerst, mein Kind, als meine einzige Hoffnung.

Du meinst doch nicht die hundert Drachmen?

Nein. Aber ich dachte mir, daß du nun wohl schon in dem Alter wärest, für dich zu sorgen und dir dabei selber ganz leicht zu verdienen, was du brauchst, um dich zu schmücken, schöne Kleider und Sklaven zu haben, überhaupt um reich zu sein.

Wie denn das, Mutter? Und warum sagst du mir das?

Was? Nun inden du mit den jungen Leuten ziehst, mit ihnen trinkst und schlafst und dafür Geld bekommst.

entwirfst: Was? Wie der Daphnis ihre Tochter, die Lyra?

Ja, wie die.

Aber, das ist doch eine Hetäre!
Dialogue I: When Corinna loses her virginity, she is comforted by her mother. Attracting suitors is her only hope of avoiding poverty after the death of her father. The girl allows herself to be convinced of the prospect of wealth and learns what makes a successful hetaera from the example of a celebrated courtesan. Her mother advises her that in professional matters she should not pursue beauty and youth: “Make sure you attach yourself to men who pay best [...].”
In a frenzy, in ecstasy—quite literally "beside themselves"—young women dance on the outside of the vase, which was made by Hieron and painted by Makron. They are maenads (meaning “raving ones” in Greek) who, like their male counterparts the satyrs, were the followers of the god of wine, Dionysus. Some wildly swing the thyrsus, a staff wrapped in ivy and vine leaves. Others play musical instruments, krotala, clappers, and an aulos, the ancient double flute. The frieze-like roundel of the dancers begins with two figures moving in opposite directions. One balances a roe deer on her outstretched arm, whilst the other struggles with an oversized skyphos, an ancient drinking vessel, which nevertheless does not prevent her from dancing. Her hair streams out like the other maenads, with the exception of the flute player, whose hair is largely hidden under a bonnet. All the maenads wear the so-called ionic chiton, a garment made of a thin, flowing material with an over-garment that Makron paints as reaching almost to the knees and under which the outline of the body shows through. The garments swirl around the figures rather than form them, thus creating an independent rhythm that beats around the bowl and that only comes to a halt in the lavish, but "static" clothing of the cult image. The idol is the target of the two-part procession and at the same time denotes the place of the action, a holy quarter of Dionysus. The god himself is presented in the inner image, which is revealed to the revealer as he drains the bowl. Opposite Dionysus stands a satyr, who also plays an aulos; he is small and squat with a horse’s tail and typical physiognomic characteristics: baldness, a flat face, a button nose and tapering ears.

In the way the cascades of folds are drawn, Klimt’s *Corinna* (see pages 139, 142) astonishingly have much in common with the dancing maenads in the *Drinking Bowl* by Macron (detail on p. 141)—although Klimt presumably never saw the ancient vase.
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Eye-cup
Attic, bilingual, c. 520 BCE
Antikenmuseum Basel und Sammlung Ludwig, inv. Kä 401

To drink from this bowl, a reveler must hold it at an angle in front of his face. As he does so, his fellow drinkers reclining opposite him will get the impression that his face has been transformed into a demonic mask. This impression is created primarily by the pair of wide-open eyes on the outside, whereby the handles of the drinking bowl are reminiscent of oversized ears and the base is like an open mouth. The figures between the abovementioned eyes no doubt help to create a cheerful mood in the banqueting room. On one side an otherwise naked hetaera puts her shoes on, whilst on the reverse a second, similarly unclothed hetaera accompanies her dance with clappers. Our bowl is also evidence of an important shift in Athenian ceramic art. Around 520 BCE, when this bowl was produced, a transition was taking place from the so-called black-figure to red-figure painting. Whilst the young man on the inside is still painted with the clay slurry that appears black after firing and his contours are etched into the surface, on the outside the hetaera has been left “blank” and the details of the figure applied directly using the slurry.


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Eye-cup, Attic, bilingual, c. 520 BCE

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*Column-krater by the Tarquinia Painter*

Attic, red-figure, mid-fifth century BCE

Kunsthistorisches Museum Wien, Vienna, Collection of Greek and Roman Antiquities, inv. IV 2166

The main image of the large krater—a vessel used for mixing wine and water—shows young women performing personal hygiene rituals. At the center is a large washbasin, and to the left of it a slender column denotes an indoor scene. The concept of the space is also revealed in the use of the decorative bars as both walls and ceiling, broken up only by the overlapping of the raised hand of the figure on the right.

The young woman with loose hair in the middle is washing herself, whilst the woman opposite her holds a fleshing knife (strigilis) in her hand. This sort of strigilis—another hangs on the column alongside a salt vessel—was used after physical exercise to scrape the oil and perhaps also sand from the skin. Washing took place with water and a mixture of chalk and wood ash.

Whilst the young woman on the right enters with a gesture of greeting, the movement of the person on the far left next to the column has been interpreted as self-massage.

Alongside the depiction of the figures using just a few lines, another impressive technique used by the painter is the play on spatial depth, as expressed by the staggering of the figures in relation to the column and the basin.


GP
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GUSTAV KLIMT

Three standing nude girls for "Die Freundinnen," 1916-7

Kunsthaus Zug, Stiftung Sammlung Kamm
GUSTAV KLIMT

Standing female nude, 1916-7

Leopold Museum, Vienna,
Stella Rollig, Tobias G. Natter

Klimt and Antiquity
Erotic Encounters

Gebundenes Buch, Pappband, 256 Seiten, 23,5 x 29,7 cm
163 farbige Abbildungen, 33 s/w Abbildungen
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Prestel

Erscheinungstermin: Juni 2017

Gustav Klimt’s 1907 publication of his illustrated edition of Lucian’s ancient work Dialogues of the Courtesans was the first time he exhibited his erotic art to the public, and it led to his denouncement by censors disturbed by the work’s graphic content. This volume revives Klimt’s masterful book, which pairs his erotic drawings with Wiener Werkstätte design, and which arguably resulted in the Art Nouveau era’s most beautiful book. Klimt and Antiquity also compares the red- and blackfigure Attic vases dating from the 5th century with Klimt’s art. It presents Klimt’s antiquity-inspired art as a dialogue between contemporary and ancient art, between genders, and between women’s roles in times of antiquity and modernity. Essays explore Klimt’s interest in ancient art; the ancient role of the courtesan; and the phenomenon of the Greek symposium as fertile ground for Greek art.