

THE CONDITION OF WOMEN IN ANCIENT GREECE*

Thales said there were three reasons he was grateful to Fortune: "first, that I was born a man and not an animal, second, that I was born a man and not a woman, and third, that I was born a Greek and not a foreigner."

(Diog. Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philos.* I, 33. Loeb)

The overall aim of this paper is to introduce the issue of "the woman's position in Ancient Greece," outlining the material that lends itself to further investigation. Hence, we shall not examine the levels of myth-society-utopia separately, but present those points which seem most interesting for such an introduction.

Chronologically, the paper leads us from the Minoan Age and the years of Prehellenic society to the Hellenistic Age for which a separate paper is being prepared. Including the former seems to be essential firstly because they effected the Mycenaean way of life and, secondly, because it becomes obvious that the woman's position in the Minoan society comes in sharp contrast with that which she held in the Classic Hellenic city.

It is quite difficult to examine the status of women in Ancient Greece because we are in lack of written sources. Due to this reason, most of our sources of information during ancient times (c. 1500 BC) are primarily from archeological findings; for later periods, our information comes chiefly from Greek literature. Generally speaking, the status of women changes from century to century, from group to group (e.g., the Minoan, the Mycenaean, the Dorian, the Aeolian, and the Ionian), and from region to region.¹ For this reason, it is impossible to refer to any consistent data development indicating progress in women's status.

The earliest period in which we find evidence of women's status in

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1. Research into matters concerning the woman's place in Ancient Greece requires reference to the two special issues of *Arethusa*: 1. "Women in antiquity" *Arethusa* 6, No 1; 1973 (extensive bibliography on the issue). 2. "Women in the Ancient World" *Arethusa* 11, No. 1,2(1978). Cf. W. Schadewaldt, *Sappho: Welt und Dichtung, Dasein in der Liebe*. Postdam, 1950. F. Matz, *Kreta, Mycene, Troja*. Stuttgart, 1956. Mary Lefkowitz and Maureen B. Faut, *Women in Greece and Rome*. Toronto & Sarasota, 1977. Merlin Stone, *Ancient Mirrors of Womanhood*. New York City 1979. J. Donaldson, *Woman; Her position and influence in Ancient Greece and Rome, and Among the Early Christians*. New York, Bombay 1907. M.B. Arthur, "Early Greece: The Origins of the Western attitude toward women", *Arethusa* Vol. 6, No 1(1973), pp.7-59.

ancient Greece is the Minoan civilization, particularly in Thera and in Crete. As indicated above, we have gleaned information of this status from archeological findings, especially from frescoes, pottery, jewelry and small statues of goddesses and other female figures.

In the Palace of Minos, at Knossos, there are two important frescoes which portray women as occupying a prominent place in that society. First, on one of the frescoes we see a group of women, called "*The Ladies of Parliament*".² They are apparently involved in a heated discussion, for their expressions and gesticulations, clearly of Mediterranean style, show great excitement. This is a unique portrayal because women have always been presented as silent figures. The prominence of these women is heightened further not only by the fact that they are portrayed as genteel persons in fine array but also by the fact that they are surrounded by a background of small male figures, obviously insignificant in comparison with the female figures. The second fresco portrays the bust of a woman who is undoubtedly a celebrated aristocrat. Her genteel figure, fine coiffure and beautiful face with cosmetics and ornaments suggest person of style and elegance; and it is for this reason she has been called "The Parisian".³

On many pieces of pottery, found throughout Crete, women are portrayed as outstanding acrobats and dancers who participated in the Bull Games in the *Palastrai* (Arena).⁴ Also jewelry and boudoir articles from this period honor motherhood in typical Mother and Child figurines and statuettes.⁵

In Mycenaean times, there are similar archeological findings again suggesting that women of this culture also occupied a place of some prominence. Especially noteworthy are the many figurines of Mother and Child.⁶

After the Minoan and the Mycenaean periods, our information on the status of women in ancient Greece comes from Greek literature, as well as from archeological findings (e.g., architectural reliefs, burial stones, statues, and painted vases). First, in Homeric literature, women are portrayed as having strong character and powerful personality.⁷ In the

2. Cf. Σ. Ἀλεξίου, *Μινωϊκός Πολιτισμός*, Ἡράκλειον 1964, p.49 M. Nilsson, *Minoan-Mycenaean religion*, Lund 1950. A. Persson, *The Religion of Greece in Prehistoric Times*. London, 1942. E. Ermatinger, *Barok und Rococo in der Deutschen Dichtung*. Leipzig 1926. E. Ors, *Du Baroque* (Transl. Fran. by A. Ronart-Valery) Paris 1936.

3. Sir Arthur J. Evans, "The Palace of Knossos", *Annual of the British School at Athens*, VII (1900-01), pp.30-33. *Idem* the *Palace of Minos at Knossos*. London 1930, vol.III, pp.49.

4. Cf. *The Palace of Minos at Knossos*, *Ibidem*.

5. Cf. Sir Arthur J. Evans, *The Earlier Religious of Greece in the Light of Cretan Discoveries*. London 1931. R. Briffault, *The Mothers*. London and New York, 1927, vol. I.

6. S. Marinatos, *Crete and Mycenae*. London 1960, plates 218, 219.

7. Cf. L. Moulinier, *Le pur et l'impur dans la Pensée des grès, D'Homère à Aristote*. Klincksieck

presence of men, they do not remain in silence; they speak freely, expressing their thoughts and their feelings. During this time, women (like Penelope,⁸ Arete,⁹ and Hecuba)¹⁰ are portrayed in their domestic role as good, honorable, homeloving persons; but women are also shown in a non-domestic role, in which case they are portrayed as elegant, outstanding women of the world (e.g., Calypso, Circe, Helen, *et al.*).¹¹ In special cases, Homer also shows his admiration for women, *viz.*; the beauty of Helen,¹² the fidelity of Penelope, the devotion of Andromache, and the motherhood of Hecuba. In contrast to these encomia on women in Homer, it is difficult to believe that he gives such derogatory accounts of the goddesses. They are wicked in character; they are jealous, envious, wrathful, vengeful, deceitful, cunning, treacherous, unloving, infidel, etc.¹³

Naturally, the Homeric Epic is not representative of a specific society and time; rather, it is the product of a long-lived oral tradition that can be traced through to the Mycenaean Age. It is impossible to discern which elements belong to which time and society, since all of them coexist functionally within the poetic whole. Whether for example, Andromache's mother was exercising her royal duties within her kingdom (i.e., if we have evidence of one form of matriarchical authority in Homer) or whether Penelope had the right to make some important decisions, are problems which cannot be solved on the level of factuality, i.e. when and where these took place. However, they can be solved on an operative level, i.e. on how these elements function in the poem.

In Hesiodic literature the attitude towards women changes decisively. Women are portrayed essentially as the source and origin of evil. In *Works and Days*,¹⁴ Hesiod maintains that Zeus' creation of woman is a punish-

1952. E. Mireaux, *La Vie quotidienne au temps d'Homere*. Paris 1954 (Translated from the French by Iris Sells: *Daily Life in the Time of Homer*. New York 1959) pp.204-227, Charles Rowan Beye, "Male and Female in the Homeric Poems". *RAMUS* 3,2 (1974), pp.87-101.

8. Homer, *Od.* I, 360-380, cf. I, 329 XIX, 53-93. Cf. "Telemachos e Penelope nell' *Odissea*" Univ. di Torino Pubblicazioni della Facoltà di Lettere e filosofia, vol. 14, fasc.3.

9. Homer, *Od.* VII, 54-66 and 141-146.

10. Homer, *Il.* XXII, 430. cf. J. Kakridis, "The role of the woman in the *Iliad*," *Eranos* 54 (1956), pp.21-27.

11. Homer, *Od.* X, 136-150 cf. X 282-445. V,202-246.

12. Homer, *Il.* O. 40. *Od.* r' 58 and Homer, *Il.* Γ' 153-158, Z' 237-526. Cf. W. Schadewaldt, "Hektor und Andromache", *die Antike*, Bd. 11. 1935 (=Ders. *Von Homers Welt und Werk*, 2 Aufl., Stuttgart 1951, p.227). "Hector in der *Ilias*". 69 (1956), pp.5-30. P. Clement, "The recovery of Helen," *Hesperia*, XXVII Los Angeles (1958), p.50. B. Lilly Chali-Kahil, *Les enlèvements et le retour d'Hélène*, Paris 1955, pp.31-32, 39, 43, 325-326 cf., also Aristoph. *Lysistr.* 155-156.

13. Homer, *Il.* IV, 85 cf. 128. III, 54, V, 711, XIV, 153.

14. Hesiod. *Works and Days*, 702-705. See A. Lesky, *Geschichte der Griechischen Literatur*. Bern 1963? pp. L. Preller, *Griechische Mythologie*. Berlin 1923.3 τ. II, n. 1263. Ot. Lendle, *Die "Pandorasage" bei Hesiod. Textkritische und Motivgeschichtliche Untersuchungen*. Warzburg 1957.

ment to men; a consequence of Prometheus' hybriatic act of stealing fire from the gods and giving it to men. Also Hesiod recounts the story of Pandora,¹⁵ who, because of her hybriatic curiosity, opened the secret box letting out into the world all the evils of misfortune, pestilence, and plague. The worst of all pains and troubles is man's marriage to woman. Women are idle, lazy, and gluttonous; men are diligent, industrious, and temperate. Of course, these views are representative of a conservative society dependent on agricultural production.

In the early sixth century, a unique phenomenon occurs, and it is relevant to the development of an "urban" society of merchants on the coast of Asia Minor and the Aegean islands. The environment in this society allows women to take part in the social life. Perhaps for the first time in all literature, surely in the Mediterranean world, women poets appear on the literary scene. At Mytilene, Sappho becomes a celebrated lyricist, establishing her school for the education of women.¹⁶ Also, in central Greece during this period, two other women poets emerge, Corinna and Erinna.¹⁷ It is noteworthy to point out that Corinna, in a competitive art festival, won the first prize over her illustrious challenger, the famous poet Pindar.

Following this period, the lyric poets flourish. These men, like Hesiod before them, castigate women. Simonides,¹⁸ Alcmaeon and others symbolize women as vile animals (the snake, the pig, the ass, the wasp, etc.), stereotyping them as dirty, lazy, gluttonous, dangerous and stupid. Hippodamides¹⁹ has said that for a male his two best days are the day of his marriage (first love-making) and the day of his wife's funeral.*

Also during this period, archeological findings show burial (tomb) stones on which women are portrayed inside their houses with heads bowed in silence. It has been supported that they represent figures of low esteem and humiliation.²⁰ A similar portrayal of the woman was given by

* "Two days are the happiest of a man's wedded life: The day that he marries and the day that he buries his wife."

H. Tüch, *Pandora und Eva*. Weimar 1931. J. Kerschensteiner, "Zu Aufrat und Gedankenführung von Hesiods Erga," *Hermes* 79, (1944) pp. 157, ff.

15. Hesiod, *Works and Days* 702, ff.

16. Cf. D.L. Page, *Sappho and Alcaeus. An Introduction to the study of Ancient Lesbian Poetry*. Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1955.

17. Cf. Pal. Anth. VII, 11. K. Latte, 'Erinna.' *Nachr. Ak. Göff. Philol.-histor. Kl.* 1953, p.79.

18. Cf. E. Diehl, *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*. t. II, Lipsiae 1949 p.57. Cf. also D.L. Page, *Poetae Melici Graeci*, Oxford 1962, p.455.

19. Cf. M.L. West, *Iambi et Elegi Graeci* t. II, Oxonii 1972, p.99, frag.7 (=II, p.52, E. Diehl) Cf. also *Anthologia Lyrica Graeca*, ed. E. Diehl, t. III, Leipzig 1952 (=Bergk, II, frag. 29) See W. Marg, *Griech Lyrik in Deutschen Übertragungen*, Stuttgart, 1964, pp.22, ff.

20. H. Diepolder, *Die Attischen Grabreliefs*, Darmstadt, 1965, p.39. N. Himmelmann - W. Wildschütz, *Studien zum Ilissos-Relief*. München 1956, (No 21).

Phidias,²² with his statue Aphrodite. As she stands on a tortoise, she symbolizes the value that a woman's place is in the home, where she must live in silence, i.e. a woman should be quiet, and live inside her own shell. Needless to say, women during this time have little status as human beings. It is more likely, that they have the status of animals and chattel.

In the tragic poets, however, women are represented under a somewhat better light, particularly in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles.²³ The reason for this change in portrayal is that these dramatic poets draw the character traits of women from mythology and the Homeric tradition, both of which represent women as noble, genteel, loving, kind, and with strength of character. But these poets are also influenced by the philosophy of the time and by the customs of their society, an influence which counters the earlier representation. This contemporary view of women maintained that women be restricted to limited roles in society: (1) the wife must stay in the home, fulfilling in silence her domestic responsibilities and bearing legitimate children; (2) the slave women must also stay in the home to assist the wife in domestic duties; (3) the *hetairai*²⁴ must pass their time in social activity with men, serving as their companions, attendants, and lovers. These diverse attitudes are in large part fused in the plays of Aeschylus and Sophocles.²⁵

It is in Aeschylus Trilogy of Oresteia that, for the first time, the issue and subject matter of a play is the disparity of male/female and the transition from the matriarchal (Mutterrecht) to patriarchal law in a way which is unique. Of course, the arguments presented as the only ones acceptable in the classical Hellenic city are those which favor the superiority of the male; nevertheless, the figure of Athena in the play is also quite interesting: a female, a Goddess with all the "positive" female characteristics who has not been given birth by a woman. Furthermore, in the tragedy "*The Seven of Thebes*" one can very clearly detect the view that women are not entitled to a social political/public role - a viewpoint well-known as "Eteakles' misogyny".²⁵

Sophocles is opting for the classical Greek ideal; i.e., women are restricted to their roles, but represented as noble, high-minded, and firm in

22. Plut. *Advice to bride and Groom* 30, p.142C and 32, p.142D.

23. See E. Burck, *Die Frau in der Griechische-Römischen Antike*. München 1969, p.12. J. Leipoldt. *Die Frau in der Antiken Welt und im Urchristentum*. Leipzig 1955. V.E. Paoli, *La Donna Greca nell' Antichità*. Firenze 1955.

24. Cf. Sarah B. Pomeroy, *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and slaves*. New York 1975.

25. Cf. R. Flacelière, *La vie Quotidienne en Grèce au siècle Périclès*. Paris 1959. *L'amour en Grèce*. Paris 1960. P. Roussel, "La famille Athenienne." *Lettres d'humanité*, 9, (1950), pp.5-59.
25a. G.J.M.J. Je Riele, *Les femmes chez Eschyle*. Observations sur quelques panages de ses tragedies où, de facos indirecte, les personnages feminins sont caracterisées comme fels, Groninges 1955. See also P. Young, *The woman of Greek Tragedy*. New York 1953.

purpose. Euripides, on the other hand, represents women in another fashion; they are viewed essentially as creatures of passion, but with intelligence and strong determination. Many commentators understand this portrayal as misogynistic, but our opinion is quite the contrary. It seems to us that although Euripides ostensibly expresses, through his heroes, thoughts against women, he presents women's behavior as irrational since, he is really showing at the same time that they are justified in their passionate acts. They are in a tragic position that calls for extreme measures, i.e., the expression of their passion. For example, Medea's²⁶ actions against Jason, while full of horror, indeed grotesque, are fully justified, because even though she has undergone tremendous sacrifices to be with Jason, he abandons her. Likewise, Phaedra's²⁷ position, leading her to yield to the dictates of her heart and to commit treacherous deceit, represented as an authentic tragic situation requiring justifiably those very actions.

In Euripide's tragedy, the woman's dependency (social, financial, emotional) on the man has been drawn up in such a manner that it has affected the woman's image universally. But it is interesting to note that these women whom Euripides portrays as having "bad character" are not Greek women.

In the first period of Attic comedy, women are portrayed in burlesque; they become a laughing stock. Female traits are exaggerated to comic proportions, often reduced to ridicule. Because of this representation, women were not allowed to attend the comic theater. The comic poet, therefore, exaggerated his portrayal of women in order to please the men spectators who were his only audience. For this reason, it is difficult for us today to determine whether these aspeptions and innuendos are meant to be taken seriously or as a mere mockery about women. In Aristophanes' *Ecclesiazusae*, for example, the setting is Utopian; for it could not have ever entered the Greek imagination at that time that a woman could even enter, much less attend, parliament. As they were always restricted to the *gynaikonites*,²⁸ (the interior room for women in the home), they were permitted to leave the house only during the day in order to attend funerals or to visit their parents, and then only accompanied by slaves. Many times in comedy, however, women are shown to have particular rights and to be generous. For examples, in Aristophanes' *Lysistrata*, they have the right to demonstrate against war, and in his other work, the *Ecclesiazusae*, they show their generosity in the free exchange of their possessions without taking oaths or making vows in witness to the fact.³¹

26. See F.A. Wright, *Feminism in Greek Literature from Homer to Aristotle*, New York 1923.

27. Eurip. *Hippol.* 640. *Helen* 1049.

29. Cf. Aristot. *Polit.* VI, 15, 1299a.

31. Cf. Aristoph. *Ecc.* 214-228.

In the historical writings, we do not find a general attitude toward women expressed. Each historian reports on specific attitudes derived from different regional mentalities. Herodotus, for example, when visiting Egypt, was shocked to find that women went out into the world while men remained at home to attend to domestic duties.³² Again, when he was in Athens, he found it incredible that one of the *archons* had permitted his three daughters to choose their husbands rather than to enter into marriage by contract.³³ Thucydides, speaking like an Athenian, says that honorable women are those women about whom nothing is known and nothing is said.³⁴

Further, he maintains that the Dorian custom in Sparta,³⁵ permitting women to dress in short pants in order to exercise and to fight alongside men, was a scandal and that it dissipated the Athenian custom which required Ionian women to wear full length dresses covering the entire body. To insure the retention of this custom for the protection of their women and to secure women's place in the home, the Athenians appointed an "*archon*" to have jurisdiction over these matters.³⁶

According to Plutarch, unmarried women in Sparta were without respect; they had no social life, and were never allowed to attend symposia. These women were also punished by law, because the law of Sparta, regulating family life according to eugenics, required that all men and women marry to produce healthy children. From Xenophon, we receive a more detailed account of the status of women in Athens during his time.³⁷ In his work *Oeconomicos* for example, he reports from Ischomachus that women must be completely inexperienced before marriage: that it is the responsibility of the husband to teach his wife about everything.³⁸ For this reason, women must, in order to assure this ignorance, marry very young. In the house, which is like a beehive, the wife plays the part of a queen. She rules over the servants, teaching them how to carry out domestic chores and how to solve economic problems. This is the cardinal virtue of the wife; viz., that she attend to and keep in order (*Eutaxia*) all things of the household. There are also other virtues that she must have: sobriety (*Sophrosyne*), modesty, prudence, obedience to her husband, and cooperation with her husband in facing the difficulties of life.

32. Herod. II, 35. Cf. E. Burck, *Die Frau in der Griechisch-Römische Antike*, München 1969, p.12.

33. Herod. II, 35.

34. Thucyd. II, 45.

35. Plut. *Numa and Lyc.* 3, 4-5, p.40D. Cf. Xenoph. *Laced. Rep.* 1,4. Theocrit. *Eid.* XVIII. Plut. *Apopheg. Lacon. Charil.* 2, p.232C.

36. Cf. Aristot. *Polit.* H¹, H², 16, 1335D 25. J. Leipoldt, *Die Frau in der Antiken Welt und im Urchristentum*. Leipzig 1955. P. Russel, *Sparta*. (E. de Roccarrd) 1939.

37. Xenoph. *Oecon.* III, 14. Cf. Aristoph. *Eccles.* 214-228.

38. Xenoph. *Oecon.* III, 15.

In order to secure the wife's position, the law provided for joint ownership (husband and wife) of all properties.

There are, in *Oeconomicos*, many other details concerning the status of women in respect to social and economic life, particularly about their rights regarding property. These same or similar details are also reported in the *Oeconomica* (three books),³⁹ a work attributed to Aristotle.

Later, details like these on the status of women in Greece and Rome are found in Plutarch's extensive Corpus. Citing many different sources, Plutarch writes of the various customs about women (both of the ancient past and of his own time in Dorian and Ionian towns, pointing out that these customs reflect an exchange of Greek and Roman influence.⁴⁰ He also gives a catalogue of various celebrated women, including a brief account of their lives, virtues, and works.

Valuable documentary concerning the woman's place in the Athenian society is provided by the speeches of the Athenian orators as well. The present paper does not allow a detailed examination of this attestation; however, generally, we observe that it becomes evident from the material investigated that women are excluded from the life of the Hellenic city. The city is defined as a man's "estate". In the continuum amidst the free and the non-free, the woman has a place somewhere in between these two extremes which are defined by the male: the free citizen and the slave.

In the philosophical writings of the fifth and fourth centuries, the views on women are somewhat different. For example, we know from Plato and Xenophon that Socrates was, in our contemporary way of phrasing it, a feminist. His regard for women is seen especially in his identifying his own profession with that of his mother, Phaenarete, who was a practicing midwife. Socrates considered his pursuit of philosophy a maieutic art, a kind of midwifery, helping the young men of Athens to conceive and to deliver genuine ideas. Plato,⁴¹ too, perhaps under the influence of the Pythagoreans, expressed feminist ideas. He considered women to be of equal rank with men and so formulated their roles in his *Republic* and *Laws*. Both women and men (male and female, as Plato puts

39. [Aristot] *Oecon.* III, 141, 7-11. Cf. I,4, 1344 a8. Also cf. L. Straus, *Xenophon's Socratic discourse*. Ithaca and London. 1970, p.140. Xenoph. *Oecon.* VII, 5 Hesiod. *Erga et Days* 699-701. Eurip. *Hippol.* 640. *Helen* 1049.

40. Cf. S. Balsdon, *Roman Woman*. London 1962. P. Grimal, *L'amour à Rome*. Paris 1963. M. Kaser, *Das Rom privatrecht*. München 1955. J. Carcopino, *Daily life in Ancient Rome*. (Transl. by E.O. Lorimer) Chicago 1945, pp. 90-95 and 164-166.

40a. P. Vidal-Naquet, "Slavery and the Rule of Women in traditions, Myths and Utopia" In *Myth, Religions and Society* ed. by R. L. Gordon. Cambridge 1981.

41. Plato, *Repub.* V, 455c-457B. *Laws*, VI 783E-784D. XI, 930 B-E. XI, 932 C.

it) work together and play together, and so hand-in-hand contribute equally to the good of their government. Even in the war they take up arms in a joint effort to protect, to defend the state. Having the same rights entails having the same responsibilities.

But we shall quote from Plato (*Laws*) translated by M. Lefkowitz, referring to the equal rights of women:

»ATHENIAN: Let me stress that this law of mine will apply just as much to girls as to boys. The girls must be trained in precisely the same way, and I'd like to make this proposal without any reservations whatever about horse-riding or athletics being suitable activities for males but not for females. You see, although I was already convinced by some ancient stories I have heard, I now know for sure that there are pretty well countless numbers of women, generally called Sarmatians, round the Black Sea, who not only ride horses but use the bow and other weapons. There, men and women have an equal duty to cultivate these skills, so cultivate them equally they do. And while we're on the subject, here's another thought for you. I maintain that if these results can be achieved, the state of affairs in our corner of Greece, where men and women do *not* have a common purpose and do *not* throw all their energies into the same activities, is absolutely stupid. Almost every state, under present conditions, is only half a state, and develops only half its potentialities, whereas with the same cost and effort, it could double its achievement. Yet what a staggering blunder for a legislator to make!

»CLEINIAS: I dare say. But a lot of these proposals, sir, are incompatible with the average state's social structure. However, you were quite right when you said we should give the argument its head, and only make up our minds when it had run its course. You've made me reproach myself for having spoken. So carry on, and say what you like.

»ATHENIAN: The point I'd like to make, Cleinias, is the same one as I made a moment ago, that there might have been something to be said against our proposal, if it had not been proved by the facts to be workable. But as things are, an opponent of this law must try other tactics. We are not going to withdraw our recommendation that so far as possible, in education and everything else, the female sex should be on the same footing as the male. Consequently, we should approach the problem rather like this. Look: if women are *not* to follow absolutely the same way of life as men, then surely we shall have to work out some other program for them?

»CLEINIAS: Inevitably.

»ATHENIAN: Well, then, if we deny women this position of equality we're now demanding for them, which of the systems actually in force today shall we adopt instead? What about the practice of the Thracians and many other peoples, who make their women work on the land and mind sheep and cattle, so that they turn into skivvies indistinguishable

from slaves? Or what about the Athenians and all the other states in that part of the world? Well, here's how we Athenians deal with the problem: we "concentrate our resources", as the expression is, under one roof and let our women take charge of our stores and the spinning and wool-working in general. Or we could adopt the Spartan system, Megillus, which is a compromise. You make your girls take part in athletics and you give them a compulsory education in the arts; when they grow up, though dispensed from working wool, they have to "weave" themselves a pretty hard-working sort of life which is by no means despicable or useless: they have to be tolerably efficient at running the home and managing the house and bringing up children but they *don't* undertake military service. This means that even if some extreme emergency ever led to a battle for their state and the lives of their children, they wouldn't have the expertise to use bows and arrows, like so many Amazons, nor could they join the men in deploying any other missile. They wouldn't be able to take up shield and spear and copy Athena, so as to terrify the enemy (if nothing more) by being seen in some kind of battle-array gallantly resisting the destruction threatening their native land. Living as they do, they'd never be anything like tough enough to imitate the Sarmatian women, who by comparison with such femininity would look like men. Anyone who wants to commend your Spartan legislators for this state of affairs, had better get on with it: I'm not going to change *my* mind. A legislator should go the whole way and not stick at half-measures; he mustn't just regulate the men and allow the women to live as they like and wallow in expensive luxury. That would be to give the state only half the loaf of prosperity instead of the whole of it.»

Of course, Plato's point of view, being very idealistic and utopian, was impossible to apply during his time. Nonetheless, he was forthright in his expression of equal rights for women; and in this he was way ahead of his time. Unlike Plato, Aristotle considered women to be generally inferior to men, to occupy a position of lower rank, both in nature and in society. In his *Politics*, Aristotle claims that men, being superior in nature, govern society as a prince or sovereign; women must be in all social and political matters subordinate to the rule of men. We should refer here to some original extracts, translated by M. Lefkowitz, from Aristotle's *Politics* expressing, in detail, his views:

»First then we may observe in living creatures both a despotical and a constitutional rule; for the soul rules the body with a despotical rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule. And it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. The same holds good of animals as well as of men; for tame animals have a better nature than wild and all tame animals are better off when they are

ruled by man; for then they are preserved. Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind...

»Of household management we have seen that there are three parts - one is the rule of a master over slaves, which has been discussed already, another of a father, and the third of a husband. A husband and father rules over wife and children, both free, but the rule differs, the rule over his children being a royal, over his wife a constitutional rule. For although there may be exceptions to the order of nature, the male is by nature fitter for command than the female, just as the older and fullgrown is superior to the younger and more immature. But in most constitutional states the citizens rule and are ruled by turns, for the idea of a constitutional state implies that the natures of the citizens are equal and the other is ruled we endeavor to create a difference of outward forms and names and titles of respect... The relation of the male to the female is of this kind, but there the inequality is permanent. The rule of a father over his children is royal, for he receives both love and the respect due to age, exercising a kind of royal power. And therefore Homer has appropriately called Zeus 'father of god and men,' because he is the king of them all. For a king is the natural superior of his subjects, but he should be of the same kin or kind with them, and such is the relation of elder and younger, of father and son...

»The freeman rules over the slave after another manner from that in which the male rules over the female, or the man over the child; although the parts of the soul are present in all of them, they are present in different degrees. For the slave has no deliberative faculty at all; the woman has, but it is without authority, and the child has, but it is immature. So it must necessarily be with the moral virtues also; all may be supposed to partake of them, but only in such manner and degree as is required by each for the fulfilment of his duty. Hence the ruler ought to have moral virtue in perfection, for his duty is entirely that of a master artificer, and the master artificer is reason; the subjects, on the other hand, require only that measure of virtue which is proper to each of them. Clearly, then, moral virtue belongs to all of them; but the temperance of a man and of a woman, or the courage and justice of a man and of a woman, are not, as Socrates maintained, the same; the courage of a man is shown in commanding, of a woman in obeying... All classes must be deemed to have their special attributes; All classes must be deemed to have their special attributes; as the poet says of women, "Silence is a woman's glory," but this is not equally the glory of man. The child is imperfect, and therefore obviously his virtue is not relative to himself alone, but to the perfect man and to his teacher, and in like manner the virtue of the slave is relative to a master...

»Nor is there any way of preventing brothers and children and

fathers and mothers from sometimes recognizing one another; for children are born like their parents, and they will necessarily be finding indications of their relationship to one another. Geographers declare such to be the fact; they say that in Upper Libya, where the women are common, nevertheless the children who are born are assigned to their respective fathers on the ground of their likeness. And some women, like the females of other animals - for example mares and cows - have a strong tendency to produce offspring resembling their parents, as was the case with the Pharsalian mare called Dicaea [the Just]...

»The license of the Lacedaemonian women defeats the intention of the Spartan constitution, and is adverse to the good order of the state. For a husband and a wife, being each a part of every family, the state may be considered as about equally divided into men and women: and therefore in those states in which the condition of the woman is bad, half the city may be regarded as having no laws. And this is what has actually happened at Sparta; the legislator wanted to make the whole state hardy and temperate, and he has carried out his intention in the case of the men, but he has neglected the women, who live in every sort of intemperance and luxury. The consequence is that in such a state wealth is too highly valued, especially if the citizens fall under the dominion of their wives, after the manner of all warlike races, except the Celts and a few others who openly approve of male loves. The old mythologer would seem to have been right in uniting Ares and Aphrodite, for all warlike races are prone to the love either of men or of women. This was exemplified among the Spartans in the days of their greatness; many things were managed by their women. But what difference does it make whether women rule, or the rulers are ruled by women? The result is the same. Even in regard to courage, which is of no use in daily life, and is needed only in war, the influence of the Lacedaemonian women has been most mischievous. The evil showed itself in the Theban invasion [369 B.C.], when, unlike the women in other cities, they were utterly useless and caused more confusion than the enemy. This license of the Lacedaemonian women existed from the earliest times, and was only what might be expected. For, during the wars of the Lacedaemonians, first against the Argives, and afterwards against the Arcadians and Messenians, the men were long away from home, and, on the return of peace, they gave themselves into the Legislator's hand, already prepared by the discipline of a soldier's life (in which there are many elements of virtue), to receive his enactments. But, when Lycurgus, as tradition says, wanted to bring the women under his laws, they resisted, and he gave up the attempt. They, and not he, are to blame for what then happened, and this defect in the constitution is clearly to be attributed to them. We are not, however, considering what is or is not to be excused, but what is right or wrong, and the disorder of the women, as I have already said, not only of itself

gives an air of indecorum to the state, but tends in a measure to foster avarice."

Moreover, he maintains that the virtues of men and women are different: In all moral matters (*Ethice*), each (men and women) has one's own individual ethics, they are thus considered to function with *sophrosune*. For example, Aristotle, quoting from Sophocles' *Ajax*, says that silence is a virtue for women, but not for men.⁴² In his *Nicomachean Ethics*, he asserts that there are different types of work for men and women. The idea that they should be different is taken for granted, i.e... it is accepted as a natural fact of life, deemed so by nature.⁴³ But he also notes that there are other types which are common; these are useful and delightful types of work, such as those performed in "*Philia*" (a word he uses in this case for marriage). And these common and individual virtues will make the relationship between men and women a happy one. In the *Oeconomica*, the writer says that the law protects women from injustice committed by men against women.⁴⁵ This is particularly true in the instance of the suppliant. When women go before the altar in a temple, a holy place of refuge, to supplicate the gods, their person is sacted; men's hands are not to be laid upon them. This same protection is provided for women in their own homes, as they stand, so to speak, before their own hearths "*Hestia*". Also, men are not to commit, against women, the injustice of carrying out extramarital relations; are to be faithful to their wives.

During this same period, we find in Greek culture, generally, an expression of public opinion that compliments women: it ascribes elegance and grace to the Elite of Athenian daughters. Statues representing women with beautiful figures dressed in elegant style and with graceful bearing appear everywhere.⁴⁶ They are idealistic portrayals of the flowering maidens of Athenian aristocracy. Indeed, all the figures of women in the frieze of the Parthenon are representations of these young aristocratic women.⁴⁹ In one portrayal, there are two women walking with a man; their charm and grace are incredibly sculpted, and the folds (plaits) of their dress accentuate the beauty of their bodies. They are bearing the *peplos* of Athena, which they had woven and embroidered, in order to present them to Athena. Their movements, free and flowing, are indeed comparable to those of a goddess. Phidias' sculpture is reflective, of the perfection of Greek womanhood as seen in the young Athenian women of this time.

42. Aristot. *Polit.* I, 13, 1260 a30 (cf. Soph. *Ajax* 293).

43. Aristot. *Nicom. Eth.* Θ' 14, 1162 a 22.

49. Cf. M. Collignon, *Le Parthenon, L'histoire l'Architecture et la sculpture*. Paris 1914, pp. 182f. Ch. M. Ricard, *D'Archéologie Grecque*, t.II, "La sculpture." Paris, 1939, p.468.

At this point, we should make some observations from the Orphic tradition and its texts and from Thracian culture. Orpheus himself was known to be a terrible misogynist. He refused to initiate women into the mysteries and denied their attendance at cult meetings to study his philosophy. This hostility toward women enrage the women of Thrace who, according to tradition, clubbed and stoned Orpheus to death. From the early fifth century to the Christian Era, the Orpheus death-scene appears in paintings on Amphora, lekythos, and other pottery.⁵² According to tradition, Thracian women were free from patriarchal customs; they were not restrained or inhibited by "male chauvinism," as we would say, today. They were allowed to freely engage in premarital sex. Also, there were no customs that restricted their public or private lives; they could conduct their activities with impunity. Their dress and adornment were their own affair. In fact, they wore luxurious clothes with lavish jewelry and other accessories. And many women had tattoos on their arms and on other parts of their bodies as ornaments of beauty.⁵³ Needless to say, such freedom for women has been little known since!

The liberal status of women in Thrace, and, similarly, also the passing on of the symbolic form of these matriarchal societies is typified in the figure of the Mother Goddess.⁵⁴ This archetypal image reflects in telescopic fashion all of the virtues of woman and represents them as powerful forces in the universe. In Greece, this remnant of a faded matriarchy appears in the goddess of the mystery cults: Demeter, Ceres, and Cybele. The myths centering round the passion of these goddesses depict nature as female, i.e., nature represented as the fertility principle. This ancient world view, typically agrarian and earthborne, is indeed a feminist view and contrasts decisively with the later patriarchal scheme which is typically astral, heavenly, and chauvinistic.

For final consideration in our review of the status of women in ancient Greece, we turn to the most significant phenomenon of ancient times, viz., the Pythagorean Societies; for it is among these organizations that we find a decisive shift in point of view regarding the value of women.⁵⁵ In these societies women play a leading role in the world of education; they engage in research, in writing treatises, and in teaching the disciplines of philosophy, music, literature, and domestic relations.

52. Cf. W.K.C. Guthrie, *Orpheus and Greek Religion*, London 1934, pp.49 ff. O. Kern, fragm. 234 also *Testim.* 39 and 115.

53. Herod. V, 3-8.

54. Cf. E. Newman, *The Great Mother*, (transl. by Ralph Manheim). Princeton, University Press, 1974.

55. Cf. Stavroula Lambropoulou, *Women in the Pythagorean Societies*. Athens 1976. H. Thesleff, *The Pythagorean texts of the Hellenistic Period*. Abo Akademi 1965. M. Meunier, *Femmes Pythagoriciennes. Fragments et Lettres*. Paris 1932.

But also here the most important duty of the woman is the management of the house which was considered a significant responsibility. Nevertheless, they also paid attention to the virtue of the woman. A 3rd century B.C. treatise, attributed to Perictione, characterizing the Pythagorean beliefs runs as follows:

»In general a woman must be good and orderly - and this no one can become without virtue... A woman's greatest virtue is chastity. Because of this quality she is able to honor and to cherish her own particular husband.

Now some people think that it is not appropriate for a woman to be a philosopher, just as a woman should not be a cavalry officer or a politician... I agree that *men* should be generals and city officials and politicians, and *women* should keep house and stay inside and receive and take care of their husbands. But I believe that courage, justice, and intelligence are qualities that men and women have in common... Courage and intelligence are more appropriately male qualities because of the strength of men's bodies and the power of their minds. Chastity is more appropriately female.

»Accordingly a woman must learn about chastity and realize what she must do quantitatively and qualitatively to be able to obtain this womanly virtue. I believe that there are five qualifications (1) the sanctity of her marriage bed (2) the cleanliness of her body (3) the manner in which she chooses to leave her house (4) her refusal to participate in secret cults or Cybeline rituals (5) her readiness and moderation in sacrificing to the gods.

»Of these the most important quality for chastity is to be pure in respect to her marriage bed, and for her not to have affairs with men from other households. If she breaks the law in this way she wrongs the gods of her family and provides her family and home not with its own offspring but with bastards. She wrongs the gods of her own being, the gods to whom she swore by her own male ancestors and by her relatives to join in the sharing of life and the begetting of children according to law. She wrongs her own fatherland, because she does not abide by its established rules... She should also consider the following: that there is no means of atoning for this sin; no way she can approach the shrines or the altars of the gods as a pure woman, beloved of god... The greatest glory a free-born woman can have - her foremost honor - is the witness her own children will give to her chastity towards her husband, the stamp of likeness they bear to the father whose seed produced them...

»As far as cleanliness of the body is concerned, the same arguments apply. She should be dressed in white, natural, plain. Her clothes should not be transparent or ornate. She should not put on silken material, but moderate, white-colored clothes. In this way she will avoid being overly dressed or luxurious or made-up, and not give other women cause

to be uncomfortably envious. She should not wear gold or emeralds at all - materialism and extravagance are characteristic of prostitutes. She should not apply imported or artificial coloring to her face - with her own natural coloring, by washing only with water, she can ornament herself with modesty.

»Women of importance leave the house to sacrifice to the leading divinity of the community on behalf of themselves and their husbands and their households. They do not leave home at night nor in the evening, and they make their departures from the market-place openly, to attend a religious festival or to make some purchase, accompanied by a single female servant or at most leading two servants by the hand.

»They offer prayers at sacrifice to the gods also, to the best of their abilities. They keep away from secret cults and Cybeline orgies in their homes. For public law prevents women from participating in these rites, particularly because these rites encourage drunkenness and ecstasy. The mistress of the house and head of the household should be chaste and untouched in all respects.

»First then we may observe in living creatures both a despotical and a constitutional rule; for the soul rules the body with a despotical rule, whereas the intellect rules the appetites with a constitutional and royal rule. And it is clear that the rule of the soul over the body, and of the mind and the rational element over the passionate is natural and expedient; whereas the equality of the two or the rule of the inferior is always hurtful. The same holds good of animals as well as of men; for tame animals have a better nature than wild and all tame animals are better off when they are ruled by man; for then they are preserved. Again, the male is by nature superior, and the female inferior; and the one rules, and the other is ruled; this principle, of necessity, extends to all mankind..."

With this, we conclude our review of the status of women in ancient Greece. It is clear, we think, that, in general, women's place in this part of the world in ancient times remained essentially *ambiguous*. This holds true, at least, until the mighty influx from the Near East of the Judeo-Christian concept of "divine patriarchy," which settled once for all, until the present day, man's superiority over woman. From this "divine view" and from Greek judgement generally, our struggle is against hybriistic designations. But even so, we must continue to overcome these odds, hoping that reason and science will do away with ignorance and superstition.

ΠΕΡΙΛΗΨΗ

Σταυρούλα Λαμπροπούλου, *Ἡ θέση τῆς γυναίκας στὴν Ἀρχαία Ἑλλάδα*

Οἱ ἱστορίες τοῦ ἀρχαίου κόσμου γράφονται, κατὰ παράδοση, χωρὶς νὰ ἀναφέρουν τὶς γυναῖκες. Οἱ πόλεμοι καὶ ἡ πολιτικὴ συγκεντρώνουν τὴν προσοχὴ τῶν πρὸ μορφωμένων ἀντρῶν. Σήμερα ὅμως ἐνθαρρύνεται ἡ ἐπανεξέταση τοῦ παρελθόντος καὶ οἱ σπουδὲς τῶν ἄλλων εἰδῶν τῆς παιδείας ὑπόσχονται νέα προσέγγιση σ' ὅ,τι εἶχε τυπικὰ ὑποτιμηθεῖ ἢ ἀγνοηθεῖ.

Ἡ ποικιλία τῶν ἐλληνικῶν φύλων ἀλλὰ καὶ ἡ διάσπαση τοῦ Ἑλλαδικοῦ χώρου, συνετέλεσαν στὴν διαφοροποίησι τῆς θέσης καὶ τοῦ ρόλου τῆς γυναίκας ἀπὸ τόπο σὲ τόπο καὶ ἀπὸ ἐποχὴ σὲ ἐποχὴ. Τὸ ἀποτέλεσμα τὸ βλέπουμε στὴν ἐλληνικὴ γραμματεία. Λίγο ὑποκειμενικὰ τὰ ἔργα ποιητῶν ἢ φιλοσόφων, ρητόρων ἢ ἱστορικῶν περιγράφουν τὴν κατώτερη φύση καὶ μαρτυροῦν τὴν ὑπόληψη ποὺ εἶχαν γιὰ τὸ θηλυκὸ γένος.

Στὴν ἀρχαία Ρώμη ἡ κατάσταση ἦταν ἴδια καὶ χειρότερη καὶ ὁ Ρωμαῖος *Pater familias* εἶχε δικαίωμα ζωῆς καὶ θανάτου ἐπὶ τῆς οἰκογενείας του.

Στὶς ἀρχαῖες ἀνδροκρατούμενες κοινωνίες ἡ γυναῖκα, ὅταν ἐμφανίζεται, εἶναι πιστὴ ἢ ἱέρεια, σὲ θρησκευτικὴ τελετὴ, μοιρολογήστρα σὲ κηδεία, πόρνη, ἑταῖρα, βασίλισσα καὶ πολὺ σπάνια σύζυγος κάποιου. Ἀνεπιθύμητο καὶ καταραμένο «πράγμα» ἡ ἀνύπαντρη ἢ χωρὶς παιδιὰ γυναῖκα.

Δούλη τοῦ θεοῦ ἢ δούλη τοῦ ἀντρός ἡ γυναῖκα, χρησιμοποιεῖται μόνο γιὰ τὴν ἀπόκτηση «γνησίων» τέκνων καὶ τὴν διατήρησι τοῦ «οἴκου», καὶ κανεὶς δὲν νοιάζεται γιὰ τὴν ζωὴ της καὶ τὴν μόρφωσίν της. Οἱ ἀντιλήψεις γιὰ τὰ δικαιώματά της, λησμονημένα ἢ συνειδητὰ καταπατημένα, ἐπιβιώνουν ὥς τις ἡμέρες μας.