

## 11 ♦ SPARTAN WOMEN AMONG THE ROMANS: ADAPTING MODELS, FORGING IDENTITIES

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How did the Romans distinguish respectable Greek women from Romans? Why did they consider Spartans different from the others? In this chapter I will discuss the complex and changing relationship between gender and ethnic identity. I selected the Spartans for this investigation because they were the most distinctive and ethnically identifiable of Greek women. “Ethnic identity” refers to inherited cultural traits that are often observable only by comparison with people who do not exhibit these traits. Ethnic identities can be carved out by members of the group being defined, by establishing similarities among them, or may be conferred by outsiders.

For this study I use postcolonial theory as currently applied by ancient historians and feminist theory that has become traditional among historians of women. I first combined these approaches in *Women in Hellenistic Egypt*, looking at the interaction between Greek settlers and Egyptians and their eclectic participation in the mixed culture of Ptolemaic Egypt.<sup>1</sup> In that work I showed that the rate and quality of Hellenization varied according to gender and that conquest did not result in the imperial power overwhelming and eradicating the indigenous contribution to the relationship. In the following chapter I apply this model to Spartan women under Roman domination.

### *Literary Models*

We will look first at the west, then east across the Adriatic, beginning with images of Spartan women in Roman literature. Of course all Romans with any education would be familiar with Helen as she is depicted in epic. The first Spartan woman described in literature was beautiful, wealthy, daring, deceitful, and, as a mature woman, chose her own husband; she was the archetypal “power blonde.” Doubtless Homer’s Helen was the ultimate model for allusions to Spartan women in Latin poetry. Cicero (*Tusc.* 2.36) quotes a verse about Spartan maidens engaging in wrestling and military exercise. Propertius (3.14) describes a Spartan woman wrestling nude with men, boxing, throwing the discus, hunting, riding, girding on a sword, wearing her hair in a simple style, and walking openly with her lover without fear of some husband. The poet wishes his mistress Cynthia would choose to live with him thus. Ovid (*Her.* 16.151–52) depicts Helen wrestling nude. Vergil (*Georg.* 2.487–88) refers to the loud voices of Spartan girls celebrating Bacchus in the mountains.

It was in prose, however, that intellectuals in the Roman world considered Spartan women as a group that had evolved in a specific social context. Romans thought that the Spartan political system—with its mixed constitution, checks and balances, and government by the elite—was comparable to their own and far more congenial than the democracy of Athens.<sup>2</sup> If to the Romans

<sup>1</sup> Pomeroy 1984, 121, 124, 130, 135–36, 152–53.

<sup>2</sup> For affinities between Rome and Sparta: Baladié 1980, 293–95.

Greece was “the other,” it was the Greece of Athens. In Greek thought, on the other hand, most of which emanated from Athens, Sparta functioned as “the other.” It follows that both Rome and Sparta were similar to each other in being different from Athens. Discussions of differences between Roman and Greek mores focused on subtle distinctions between the laws of Numa and Romulus, on the one hand, and of Lycurgus on the other. Prose writers variously praised and criticized provisions for women and marriage in archaic Rome and Sparta. Referring to Spartans, Cicero (*Rep.* 4.6) prefers Roman to Greek rules about women, advocating that a censor teach men to govern their wives rather than, as the Greeks do, allow women to be supervised by a *gynaikonomos* (“praefectus,” a magistrate in charge of women), a post that was common in Hellenistic Greek states.<sup>3</sup> Certainly Aristotle’s critique of the Spartan constitution and his condemnation of women not only for licentiousness but also for the failure of the state would have inevitably constituted part of the discussion, as it does explicitly in Plutarch’s *Life of Lycurgus* (14.1), where he states plainly that Aristotle was incorrect. Nevertheless, in his *Comparison of Lycurgus and Numa* (3.5) Plutarch, in agreement with Cicero, praises the demeanor of Roman women as they were said to be in the archaic period, when they were under their husband’s control, and he criticizes the laws of Lycurgus that allowed Spartan women to dominate their husbands.

Plutarch’s views were influenced by Plato and Xenophon, both of whom were also popular among the Romans. Plato’s *Republic* was a utopia that incorporated elements of an idealized Sparta, not a blueprint for any actual society. Yet some Romans considered the *Republic* a “how-to” manual presenting role models for them rather than a work of social criticism. Epictetus reported that at Rome women were carrying copies of Plato’s *Republic* because they supposed that he advocated communities of wives. They were quoting Plato to justify their own licentiousness, he alleged, but they misinterpreted him in supposing that his advice was to enter monogamous marriage and then practice promiscuous intercourse.<sup>4</sup> Xenophon’s picture of Sparta was closer to the truth than the reflection in Plato’s *Republic*,<sup>5</sup> but although Roman authors cite some works of Xenophon specifically, there are no clear references in Latin to his treatise on the *Spartan Constitution*.<sup>6</sup> In any case, if the Romans did not actually read Xenophon’s monograph, they nevertheless will have gotten the information at second hand through Plutarch, an admirer of Xenophon.<sup>7</sup> Xenophon will have been one of his informants about the daily life of Spartan girls, including their excellent nutrition, drinking wine, physical training, and freedom from weaving (which was the usual job of Greek women). Plutarch had been to Rome and Sparta and wrote for both Greek and Roman audiences.<sup>8</sup> He participated to the fullest in the debate on Spartan and Roman women. Though Plutarch’s avowed subject is the women of the remote past, there is no doubt that he is influenced by his contemporaries. Plutarch largely approves of the healthy regimen Lycurgus designed for Spartan girls and, as I have mentioned, asserts that Aristotle was wrong to accuse Spartan women of licentiousness: but his ideas and ideals concerning the appropriate behavior of Greek women, except Spartans, are essentially conservative and traditional in the Greek world, and barely reflect the changes of the Hellenistic period.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>3</sup> Since Cicero mentions drinking, and was discussing Sparta in the previous paragraph, he is probably referring to Spartan women.

<sup>4</sup> Arr. *Epict. diss.* Fr. 15 = Stobaeus 3.6.58 and see Schenkl 1965, 455–60, 462–75.

<sup>5</sup> See further Münscher 1920, 51, 63, 107, 114 and Pomeroy 2002, 148–49.

<sup>6</sup> Münscher 1920, 63, 106.

<sup>7</sup> On Plutarch and Xenophon, see Pomeroy 1999b, 36, and *passim*.

<sup>8</sup> See most recently Stadter 2002.

<sup>9</sup> See further Pomeroy 1999b and Nevett 2002, esp. 84, 87–88, 95.

*The Influence of Ethnic Identity on Gender Roles*

Like the Spartan women Aristotle had criticized (but unlike other Greek women), Romans were neither silent nor secluded.<sup>10</sup> Both Sparta and Rome were warrior societies ruling alien territories, with the result that long absences of men left women in charge. Aristotle did not approve of women exercising such power in default of men. In both Sparta and Rome some women controlled vast amounts of wealth that had come into their hands through dowry and inheritance. Since the fourth century B.C. Spartan women were conspicuous in their ownership and management of real property and other forms of wealth. In imperial Sparta economic status was still based on landholding, and Romans respected that indication of old wealth. Aristotle (*Pol.* 1269b12–1270a34) had criticized the Spartans for allowing women to own so much property that some men could no longer contribute to their *syssitia* and lost their status as full citizens. The Romans, on the other hand, beginning with the *lex Voconia* (169 B.C.), repeatedly tried to prevent women from obtaining large fortunes, fearing lest men might lose their rank in the higher property classes in the census and thus become exempt from heavy military obligations.<sup>11</sup>

In both Sparta and Rome one of the reasons women acquired wealth was that families were smaller, and women were often the sole survivors. Although there was a general decrease in the population of Greece in the late Hellenistic and early Roman periods,<sup>12</sup> and a particularly lamented decrease among the upper class, both Spartan and Roman women were singled out for blame. Cicero (*Tusc.* 2.36) declared that the Spartans rejected *fertilitas barbara* and that Roman women repeatedly procured abortions was a cliché among Augustan writers.<sup>13</sup> Thus moralists agreed that women, whose conscious goal was not only keeping their bodies unmarred but also maintaining economic and social status by securing large estates for themselves and transmitting them to their offspring, selfishly created *oliganthropia*. One unusual solution to this problem was adopted. A Spartan woman who was already married and had borne children could produce children for another man while remaining married to her original husband. Wife-lending or husband-sharing that had been unique to Spartans (among Greeks) can also be found among the Romans. The younger Cato, paragon of Stoic virtue, divorced his wife Marcia after she had borne three children to him and gave her to his friend Hortensius Hortalus, with whom she produced two more children.<sup>14</sup> After Hortensius died, Cato remarried Marcia (she must have been a Stoic too, unless she was simply docile and devoted to Cato). Plutarch (*Comparison of Lycurgus and Numa* 3.1–2) prefers the serial monogamy of the Romans to the concurrent husbands of the Spartans.

Symbolic similarities were obvious in the respected and powerful position of Roman and Spartan mothers. For Roman moralists, including Valerius Maximus, Aelian, Sextus Empiricus, and others, the famous mothers of Sparta as well as those of their own early and middle republic served as exemplars to “new-style” Roman women, who left the rearing of their children to outsiders or rejected motherhood completely.<sup>15</sup> Furthermore, at least in the ideal past, Spartan and Roman women were actively patriotic, heroic, and expected to uphold civic ideals. Spartan mothers like the mother of

<sup>10</sup> Pomeroy 1975, 181.

<sup>13</sup> References in Riddle 1992, 64–65.

<sup>11</sup> See further Pomeroy 1975, 177–82 and Gardner 1986, 170–78.

<sup>14</sup> *Luc. Phars.* 2.326–71; *Plut. Cat. Min.* 25.4–5.

<sup>12</sup> Polyb. 36.16.5–9; Alcock 1989a, esp. 105–7.

<sup>15</sup> Pomeroy 2002, 156.

Coriolanus reminded their sons of their patriotic duties.<sup>16</sup> They hectored and supported men, including not only their sons but candidates seeking political office. In Sparta and Rome wealthy widows were especially prominent among women engaged in these strategies. Patriotism and Stoicism are themes in the stories told of both, mainly by Plutarch and Livy. Plutarch paints vivid pictures of Spartan women digging trenches as a defense against Pyrrhus and of female relatives and associates of the kings Agis IV and Cleomenes III like the wife of Pantheus in the saga of Cleomenes, who is a valiant heroine on horseback and who could be compared to Cloelia, immortalized by an equestrian statue in Rome.<sup>17</sup> The rest of the Greek world had no stories to rival those of Spartan women.

Stoicism found adherents among both Spartan women and Romans. The Stoicism of Agiatis, wife first of Agis and then of Cleomenes, and of Cratesicleia, Cleomenes' mother, influenced Spartan domestic and foreign policy. Cratesicleia and the wife of Pantheus died dignified Stoic deaths upon the order of Ptolemy IV (Plut. *Cleom.* 37–39). Similarly, several Roman matrons in the early empire chose to die in Stoic fashion as a rebuff to emperors who had sentenced their husbands to death. Just as the wife of Pantheus had encouraged Cratesicleia, so did the Roman women set examples for their husbands. The virtuous Arria chose to die with her husband, valiantly preceding him: handing to Paetus the sword she had drawn from her own breast, she said, "*Paete, non dolet.*"<sup>18</sup>

As part of their identity, people station themselves in a hierarchy of social status that provides an avenue to rights and disabilities. Thus Spartans were taught that they were superior to their helots, and the helots, in turn, were encouraged to feel themselves inferior, by being treated as subhuman and forced to wear primitive clothing. Spartan women were also smugly secure in their feelings of superiority over other Greek women. Plutarch quotes many of them, including an anonymous Spartan woman who was conscious of her ethnic distinctiveness and articulated it: When an Ionian woman was proud of something she had woven, a Spartan showed off her four well-behaved sons and said: "these should be the work of a noble and honorable woman, and she should swell with pride and boast of them" (*Sayings of Spartan Women* 241.9). We observe, in passing, the competitive nature of the Spartan's retort and are reminded of a similar statement attributed to Cornelia, mother of the Gracchi, who, when asked why she did not wear fine pearls, replied that her children were her "jewels."<sup>19</sup>

### *Contemporary Models*

Not only literature but eyewitness reports from influential sources helped to shape Roman ideas about Spartan women. In 40 B.C. during the civil wars Livia and her family, including the infant Tiberius, enjoyed refuge at Sparta. One night she had to race through a forest fire that scorched her dress and hair.<sup>20</sup> This perilous incident shows that Sparta was still forested, as the allusions in Propertius and Vergil to women in the wilderness attest (see above). Sparta and Mantinea were the only Greek cities to back Octavian. In gratitude for their support, later while visiting Greece in 21 B.C., Augustus awarded Cythera to Sparta and honored the Spartans with the right to share Roman

<sup>16</sup> Plutarch, *Sayings of Spartan Women*, 240f2, 241.1–6; Livy *Constant.* 16. 2.40.1–12.

<sup>17</sup> Plut. *Pyrrh.* 27.2–5; *Cleom.* 38.5; and Plin. *HN* 34.29.

<sup>18</sup> Death of Arria: Plin. *Ep.* 3.16.6; Mart. 1.13; for others: Tac. *Ann.* 16.10–11; Plin. *Ep.* 6.24; Stoic behavior: Sen.

*Constant.* 16.

<sup>19</sup> Valerius Maximus 4.4, quoting Pomponius Rufus, and see further Dixon 1988.

<sup>20</sup> Suet. *Tib.* 6.2; Vell. Pat. 2.75.3; and see further Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 98–99, 102.

banquets (Dio 54.7.2). After Livia's death in 29 or deification in 42, annual games were established in her honor at Sparta. All we know about these celebrations is that they included races for women requiring running a double course.<sup>21</sup> Thus although Roman imperial cult was the inspiration for the games, and doubtless a portrait of Livia would have been brought out to observe the events, the focus on competitions for female athletes seems peculiarly Spartan.<sup>22</sup>

Sparta continued to be a destination for Roman tourists. Although the small size of the Spartan population could have led them to assimilate, this attention from outsiders was one of the factors that encouraged them to preserve their ethnic distinctiveness. Women played a part in the show the Spartans put on to attract visitors, perhaps because of their costume. The Spartans were the most visible among the ethnic group of Dorians, and *Doriazein* is defined as "to dress like a Dorian girl, that is in a single garment open at the side," and "to imitate the Dorians in life."<sup>23</sup> Thus the wearing of revealing clothing, as well as the lack of it, for athletic and ritual purposes marked differences between Spartans and other Greek women and contributed to the racy reputation of the former, reflected in both Aristotle's accusation of licentiousness and in Roman literature.

#### *Reviving Traditional Identities*

Literary and historical models influenced the Spartans themselves, for they were pedantic students of their own traditions, which they manipulated often without distinguishing between their idealized and historical past. Visitors to Roman Sparta would have seen the unique educational system of boys and girls called the "agoge" and have been told that Lycurgus had created it nearly a thousand years ago. The agoge was terminated in 188 B.C., but a new version was revived under Roman domination in 146 B.C. and survived until the fourth century.<sup>24</sup> The most memorable feature of the final agoge was the whipping contest in honor of Artemis Orthia in which boys were whipped so severely that some of them died. The priestess of Artemis Orthia monitored the relationship between the male adults wielding the whips and the youths, making certain that the adults did not play favorites or accept bribes and that all boys were whipped equally (Paus. 3.16.10, Plut. *Lyc.* 18). This display may have been redesigned in imperial Greece with more gore than in the past to satisfy the taste of the period for bloody spectacle. Accounts of this ordeal mention that fathers and mothers cheered for their offspring in this competition, like the proverbial Spartans, preferring their son to be a dead hero rather than a defeated coward.<sup>25</sup>

The education of Spartan girls was similar to that of boys without its extreme survival tests. Spartan women will have found much that was enjoyable and that they would have been reluctant to relinquish through assimilation. Plutarch (*Inst. Lac.* 35 [239b], *Lyc.* 14.2) corroborates the reports of the Roman poets, stating that the curriculum consisted of running, wrestling, discus throwing, and hurling the javelin. Although the education of girls in Hellenistic Greece was more widespread than it had been in the classical period, and included physical training (Arist. *Pol.* 1337b), athletic prowess, competitiveness, and athletic nudity were still a distinguishing feature and source of Spartan pride. Imperial writers associated Dorians with athletics. For example, Agrippa called the

<sup>21</sup> In *SEG* 11 830 the city commemorates a woman's victory in the *diaulos*. On *ludi* celebrated in honor of both Livia and Augustus: *PIR* 1970, 5.1:77–78 s.v. Livia.

<sup>22</sup> For the imperial cult of Livia in Sparta, see Bartman 1999, esp. 73.

<sup>23</sup> *LSJ* s.v. *Doriazo* II = *dorizo*.

<sup>24</sup> Kennell 1995, 13–14.

<sup>25</sup> Stat. *Theb.* 8436–37; Lucian *Anach.* 38–39; and see further Kennell 1995, appendix 1.

gymnasium he constructed at Rome “Laconian.”<sup>26</sup> The establishment of the women’s race at the Livian games indicates that the Romans were well aware that the Spartan women of their own day were still an essential part of the Spartan ethnic identity.

Pausanias (3.13.7) mentions Dionysiades, girls who participated in races at Sparta organized by magistrates called “bideoi.” The involvement of magistrates shows that in the Roman period the state was concerned with girls’ physical education as it had been even a thousand years earlier. Thus this involvement was part of the recreation of the past; but it can also be seen as part of a calculated campaign to deploy both genders in a small population with a goal of preserving its unique identity. Girls also continued to perform traditional dances at the sanctuary of Artemis at Caryae near the northeast border of Spartan territory.<sup>27</sup> Since these dances were said to have been taught to the girls by Castor and Pollux, the movements must have been quite athletic. Roman writers’ references to nude women engaging in coed contact sports, however, are not impeccable evidence, for their purpose was to titillate. Coed athletics were probably not part of the first two versions of the agoge but may have been a feature in the imperial phase. Exploiting this caricature, in the time of Nero a Spartan woman wrestled at Rome with a Roman senator.<sup>28</sup> Of course there must have been less notorious and more humble Spartan women to be seen at Rome too. For example, an inscription from a columbarium near San Laurentii extra muros commemorates Artemo from Laconia, wife of Sabinus, dead at 14.<sup>29</sup>

Thucydides (1.10) had observed that future generations could not have deduced the power of Sparta from its paltry architectural remains. Sparta, however, was not desolate: the few pre-Roman monuments in the city and at pan-Hellenic sanctuaries were well chosen to remind the viewer that Spartans—women no less than men—were notably brave, pious, and habitually victorious. Pausanias describes some of the material remains of Sparta’s glorious past that survived in his day. Visitors to the temple of Hera at Elis would have seen many bronze statues dedicated by girl runners who had won victories there.<sup>30</sup> Most, if not all of them, were probably Spartans. Trophies at Olympia itself relevant to women’s history included two equestrian monuments erected early in the fourth century B.C. by Cynisca, daughter and sister of Spartan kings, who was the first woman whose horses were victorious at Olympia.<sup>31</sup>

In the city of Sparta Cynisca was also celebrated with a heroön prominently located near the youths’ exercise grounds. The most magnificent structure in the Spartan agora was the Persian stoa. This building, described by Vitruvius and Pausanias, was constructed with spoils of the Persian War and commemorated the city’s greatest victory.<sup>32</sup> It housed statues of the vanquished in barbaric dress. The figure of Artemisia, queen of Halicarnassus, placed within might have brought to mind the dreaded Cleopatra VII, a more recent admiral-queen from the east. Xerxes had admired Artemisia’s maneuvers at Salamis, ramming the ship of a Persian ally in order to confuse the Greeks as to which side she was on, but only a madman would have been pleased with such selfish behavior (Herod. 8.87). Romans might have compared the strategy of Cleopatra at Actium. Her desire to

<sup>26</sup> Plut. *Lyc.* 20.5; Dio Chrys. *Or.* 37.26–27; Cass. Dio 53.27; and see further Spawforth and Walker 1986, esp. 100.

<sup>27</sup> Lucian *Salt.* 10; Paus. 3.10.7; Poll. 4.104; Stat. *Theb.* 4.225; Diom., book 3, p. 486 (H. Keil, *Gramm. Lat.* 1). Clearchus gave Tissaphernes a ring showing the maidens dancing at Caryae (Plut. *Artax.* 18).

<sup>28</sup> Schol. *Juv.* 4.53; *LAG*, 168, for the Neronian date.

<sup>29</sup> *LGPN* s.v. Artemo (4) second/third century A.D.

<sup>30</sup> See further Pomeroy 2002, x–xi, 24–25.

<sup>31</sup> Paus. 6.1.6 = *Anth. Pal.* 13.16 = *IG* v.1 1564a = *I. Olympia*, no. 160 = *LAG*, no. 17, and *I. Olympia*, nos. 373, 381. On the commemorative monuments, see Frazer 1913, vols. 3, 4, ad loc.

<sup>32</sup> Paus. 3.11.3; Vitruv. 1.1.6; and see further Plommer 1979, esp. 100.

save herself and her ships above all tilted an equivocal situation in favor of Octavian (Plut. *Ant.* 63.5, 66.3). The Spartans supported Roman campaigns in the east because they equated the Parthians with the Persians, whom they had defeated in the fifth century B.C. (Herodian 4.8.3, 4.9.4). Inscriptions in the Persian Stoa attest to the cult of Elagabalus there, and later additions include a statue of his wife, the Vestal Julia Aquilia Severa.<sup>33</sup> Elagabalus considered himself a descendant of Caracalla and heir to the earlier emperor's eastern campaigns. Julia Domna was another Severan honored by a huge monument.<sup>34</sup>

### *Greek Identity: Adapting Models*

Spartan women were Spartans first and foremost among the Greeks, but they were also Greeks in the Roman Empire. If the Spartans had not identified their interests with those of the rest of the Greeks, their small numbers could have led them to be ignored. Pausanias (3.22.1) points out that just off the Peloponnese is the place where Helen and Paris first had intercourse, and he describes several shrines where Helen was worshiped as divine. Nevertheless, while Spartan women were reenacting and reviving the unique practices of their past, they simultaneously conformed to pan-Hellenic mores, rejecting Helen as a role model for married women and adopting Penelope. Pan-Hellenism was a reaction against Roman domination and stressed similarities among Greek women, according to the traditional paradigm known best in Athens and preferred by Plutarch.<sup>35</sup> Thus, in conformity with the rest of the Greek world, Spartans emphasized women's modesty and chastity. Even in the imperial period, however, Spartans drew attention to their distinctive dialect in their inscriptions, using a long alpha where other Greeks used an eta: accordingly the women are praised for virtue, *areta*, rather than *arête*. The shrine of Aidos ("Modesty"), where Penelope's father Icarius in sadness had dedicated an image of Aidos after his daughter resolutely put on her veil and left him to marry Odysseus, was a public declaration of their assimilation (Paus. 3.20.10–11). The statue probably depicted a veiled woman since Spartan women covered their hair when they became wives.<sup>36</sup> Aidos was a psychological abstraction that lent support to Spartan brides and their fathers, who were separated upon marriage.<sup>37</sup> Pausanias mentions that mothers of brides sacrificed to an ancient wooden image of Aphrodite Hera, an unusual hybrid apparently confirming an exclusive link between love and marriage.<sup>38</sup> He also explains a seated figure of Aphrodite Morpho, wearing a veil with chains on her feet, stating that Tyndareus, the father of Helen and Clytemnestra, dedicated it to demonstrate that wives were faithful to their husbands (Paus. 3.15.10). Probably he was tacitly defending his own daughters' virtue. This *aition* seems to have been invented as yet another defense against the charge that Spartan women were promiscuous. Plutarch (*Lyc.* 4.4), perhaps also defensively, states unequivocally that despite their nudity the girls were virtuous.

As I have mentioned, there were *gynaikonomoi* ("magistrates in charge of women") at Sparta. This magistracy was said to be *kata ta archaia ethe kai tous nomous* ("in accordance with ancient custom and laws").<sup>39</sup> Cicero alludes to it, but *gynaikonomoi* are first attested at Sparta in an early

<sup>33</sup> Pikoula 2001, esp. 428–29.

<sup>37</sup> Richer 1999, esp. 93–100.

<sup>34</sup> Spawforth 1986.

<sup>38</sup> Paus. 3.13.9, and see further Pirenne-Delforge 1994, 197–98.

<sup>35</sup> See further Pomeroy 1999b, esp. 40–42.

<sup>39</sup> Woodward 1923–25, 165, no. B1= *SEG* 11 (1950), no. 626.

<sup>36</sup> Pomeroy 2002, 42.

first-century A.D. inscription.<sup>40</sup> They must have had a full agenda since each official was assisted by five subordinates called *syngynaikonomoi*. *Gynaikonomoi* not only supervised women but also enforced sumptuary legislation. In religion, elite women enjoyed an approved avenue for conspicuous consumption. The obligation to pay for the annual feast in honor of Demeter and Core at the Eleusinion was assigned as a liturgy to female officials known as the *thoinarmostria* and *polos*, who also supervised and participated in the rituals. Some inscriptions praise women for their lavish expenditures on this banquet, which was served to all the women of the city.<sup>41</sup>

In Roman Sparta there is no indication of a restoration of even a pretense of the old austerity. Excavators have found large and comfortable houses typical of those in imperial Greece.<sup>42</sup> In Sparta, as elsewhere, the differentiation between wealthy and poor was highly visible. The population of the Roman city of Sparta was no more than 12,000,<sup>43</sup> and the elite, of course, comprised a very small proportion of this total. Though few in number, this elite was highly visible. Under Roman domination their activities increased, for adults and children now were responsible for sacerdotal duties previously performed by the kings.<sup>44</sup> The wealth and aspirations of this group produced a relative abundance of dedications to and by women.

Approximately thirty inscriptions that were dedicated mostly in the second and third centuries A.D. delineate the professional identities of priestesses at the Spartan Eleusinion alone. The dedication of a statue with accompanying inscription required the construction of a persona through image and text: with a few exceptions, only examples of the latter are extant. The purpose of the inscription is didactic: to identify the dedicatee and dedicator, to honor the dedicatee, and to instruct the viewer about the kinswoman portrayed. The dedicators not only bask in the glory reflected upon them by their honoree, for example describing her as *ton eugenestaton*<sup>45</sup> or her father as *philosophotatou*,<sup>46</sup> but also are commemorated through their indulgence in conspicuous consumption: they had the wealth to pay for the sculptures, including some in bronze.<sup>47</sup> Although the dedicators' goal was individuality and self-expression, the scholar surveying the remains nearly two thousand years later is impressed by the formulaic eulogies and the conformity to contemporary provincial style found elsewhere in the eastern Mediterranean.

The honorary inscriptions assert that in the Roman period Spartans valued the same virtues in women as were traditional elsewhere in the Greek world. (We observe, in passing, that this ideology was not the same as that found among the Spartans' classical predecessors.)<sup>48</sup> We have mentioned the shrine of Aidos and the place where Penelope had left her father. The inscriptions refer to two women as "new Penelopes." Charision, who calls herself "Sparta's leading maiden, the new Penelope," together with her father Spartiaticus dedicated a portrait herm of a certain Hegemoneus (225–50).<sup>49</sup>

<sup>40</sup> *IG* 5.1 209 + *SGDI* 3.2 4440 = Tod and Wace 1906, no. 203. For the date, see *LGPN* 3A s.v. Nikokles (29); *IG* 5.1 209 for the cult of Helen and the Dioscuri at Phoebaeum.

<sup>41</sup> *IG* 5.1 583, 584 + 604 (= *SEG* 11 812a), 594, 595.

<sup>42</sup> Raftopoulou 1998.

<sup>43</sup> Cartledge and Spawforth 1989, 133.

<sup>44</sup> Spawforth 1992, esp. 229.

<sup>45</sup> *IG* 5.1 591, also used to refer to a husband in *IG* 5.1 598.

<sup>46</sup> *IG* 5.1 598.

<sup>47</sup> Bronze: *IG* 5.1 592.

<sup>48</sup> See further Pomeroy 2002, 127–28.

<sup>49</sup> *IG* 5.1 540 = *SEG* 11 797, and see further Spawforth 1984, esp. 276–77. In the third century Aurelia Oppia is mother of Heraclia, "a new Penelope": *IG* 5.1 598.9–10, and *LGPN* 3A s.v. Teisamenos (14).



τὸν κλυτὸν ἡγε-  
 μονῆα Χαρείσιον  
 ἄνθετο κούρα  
 Σπάρτας ἅ πρώτα,  
 5 Πηνελόπεια νέα,  
 [δ]ν μέγα χάρμα πάτρα  
 [Σ]παρτιατικὸς ἡέξη-  
 σεν, κυδάλιμος  
 [γ]ενέτωρ κυδαλίμα[ν]  
 10 θύγατρα.

Δημητρίου τοῦ (Δημητρίου) γλυφή.

Charision adopts a combination of incongruous attributes to describe herself. Perhaps the new Penelope meant to allude to the mythical wife's *sophrosyne*, though she herself is a *koura* who has not yet left her father. She may well have written the elegiac couplets herself, showing off her skill at *synchysis* and *homoioteleuton*. She may also be responsible for the decision to dedicate a portrait herm, a new style at Sparta, rather than (as was traditional) dedicating a freestanding statue of the honoree.<sup>50</sup> Without subtlety Charision exploits the occasion for honoring another person by using the inscription as a platform for her own glorification. The age minimum for the marriage of girls with Roman citizenship was twelve. Charision was probably a Roman citizen,<sup>51</sup> but even if she was not, she was doubtless influenced by the marriage practices of her elite peers who were citizens.<sup>52</sup> Thus she was probably in her early teens at the time of the dedication. Certainly in Charision's inscription it is possible to see an adolescent's view of the world where she may still choose among a cornucopia of possible identities: the self-assertion and awkward individualism of her own self-portrait stand out in comparison with the clichéd descriptions of the mature women whose virtues are lauded by their kin. A typical example is the Augustan Alcibia who was honored for her domestic virtue, the euergetism of her ancestors who were famed prophets, and the blameless life she had led for sixty years as a wife.<sup>53</sup>

Merely possessing *philandria*<sup>54</sup> and *sophrosyne*<sup>55</sup> or being *semnotes*<sup>56</sup> and *kosmiotes*<sup>57</sup> often are not deemed sufficient. Superlatives (even where the quality praised would not seem to allow degrees of comparison) are reminiscent of the traditional competitiveness of Spartan women. Julia Etearchis was Hestia Poleos and the city's most chaste and most decorous (*kosmiotaten*) daughter.<sup>58</sup> Claudia Polla was *axiologo[ta]te* and *sophronestate*.<sup>59</sup> Several women are singled out for their *pases arêtes en*

<sup>50</sup> Spawforth 1984, 277.

<sup>54</sup> IG 5.1 581, 600–601, 605.

<sup>51</sup> Spawforth (1984, 277) suggests that the Spartiatikus who is Charision's father is P. Memmius Spartiatikus (IV), but in Spawforth (1985, 194, 211) he does not include her in the stemma or discussion. *LGPN* 3A, s.v. Spartiatikos (8) identifies him as father of Charision and perhaps the same as (9) a Memmius.

<sup>55</sup> IG 5.1 581, 586–87, 596–97, 600–601, 605.

<sup>56</sup> IG 5.1 586–87.

<sup>57</sup> IG 5.1 600.

<sup>52</sup> The age of marriage of upper-class girls was early to mid-teens: Shaw 1987, esp. 43–44.

<sup>58</sup> IG 5.1 593 (1258 is not the same person): Spawforth 1985, 225, 243.

<sup>53</sup> IG 5.1 578.

<sup>59</sup> IG 5.1 602; *sophronestate* also IG 5.1 590, 608; and see further Spawforth 1985, 225, 239, 242.

*tais gynaizin beneken* (“virtue among women”).<sup>60</sup> Confining their zealous ambition to the women’s arena was characteristic of good women.

Despite women’s protestations of modesty, the sightseer in Sparta could look at their portrayals in inscriptions and statues and witness rituals like the whipping ceremony, where the priestess held the ancient wooden image of Artemis that was said to have been brought back from Taurus by Iphigenia and Orestes.<sup>61</sup> Like the rituals themselves, the archaic images of Artemis Orthia and Aphrodite Hera connected the women in the Roman period directly with their remote ancestors. In some families the self-important naming patterns of women recall the glorious past. Thus among the attested descendants of Ageta whose name is reminiscent of Agido and Agesistrata, for instance, appear another Ageta, as well as women named Damostheneia, Tyrannis, Philocratia, Callicrateia, and Callistonice.

As a result of the small population, the economic and social pyramid, and the small number of families responsible for maintaining hereditary priesthods, many women held multiple priesthods, often simultaneously and for life. For example, Pompeia Polla and Memmia Xenocratia<sup>62</sup> presided over the Hyacinthia for life as *archeis* and *theoros*<sup>63</sup> and priestess of the Dioscureia.<sup>64</sup> Claudia Damostheneia held hereditary priesthods of Carneius Boecetas, Carneius Dromaeus, Poseidon Domateitas, Heracles Genarchas, and Core and Temenius in Helos. Dedications by and in honor of Spartan women follow the general pattern in the Greek world: they are either connected with female divinities or with cults in which other family members are involved.<sup>65</sup> The succession to priesthods could be matrilineal,<sup>66</sup> and women even served as priestesses for male divinities.<sup>67</sup> The duties devolving upon those filling offices connected with cults often involved spending personal funds. Some are praised in their inscriptions for their “generous souls” and for fulfilling their obligations “magnificently.”<sup>68</sup> The Hyacinthia, the festival of Artemis Orthia, and the Gymnopaediae (the festival of naked youth) were three of the most prestigious of Spartan festivals and were well attended by visitors from the rest of Greece and Rome. Women played principal roles at these festivals: as girls, for example, some rode in elaborately decorated wicker carts, and others raced in chariots at the Hyacinthia.<sup>69</sup> As women they presided as priestesses over events in which not only girls and women but boys and men as well participated. The priestess of Artemis Orthia in fact is the only Spartan sacerdotal official to appear in a literary text.<sup>70</sup>

A new title emerged in the Roman period: “Hestia Poleos.”<sup>71</sup> This exalted woman was in charge of the common hearth and at times even permitted to attend meetings of the Boule. Grants of honorific titles such as Hestia of the City incorporated women into the civic family. Claudia Tyrannis was titled “daughter of the city,” and Claudia Damostheneia “Mother of Piety, of the Demos, and

<sup>60</sup> *IG* 5.1 586, 587, 590, 597.

<sup>65</sup> See further Kron 1996, esp. 158, and Turner 1983, 391.

<sup>61</sup> Paus. 3.16.7, 9, and see above on Aphrodite Hera.

<sup>66</sup> Spawforth (1985, 203–4) cites the descendants of Memmia Eurybanassa.

<sup>62</sup> She was also Hestia Poleos, Mother of Piety, of the Demos and of the Boule: *IG* 5.1 589, second/third century, and see below. See further Alcock 1989b, 30–31.

<sup>67</sup> For Damostheneia, see further Spawforth 1985, 235.

<sup>63</sup> Spawforth 1985, 244.

<sup>68</sup> See n. 41 above.

<sup>64</sup> *Archeis*: *IG* 5.1 602, and see Robert (1974), who compares this office to the prestigious priesthood of Demeter Chamyne at Olympia, and Spawforth 1984, 286 n. 128.

<sup>69</sup> Athen. 1.317, and see further Pomeroy 2002, 20.

<sup>70</sup> Paus. 3.16.10–11, noted by Spawforth 1992, 232.

<sup>71</sup> *IG* 5.1 584, 586, 604.

of the Boule.<sup>72</sup> Such titles imply that the Assembly and Council had adopted these women.<sup>73</sup> These honors may also be viewed in terms of grants of citizenship and other civic honors to Greek women in the Hellenistic period, which admitted them into the political world of men. It is also relevant to compare the Spartan titles with the familial terminology employed in honors awarded to Julia Domna, Julia Maesa, and other imperial women, including the titles of *Mater Augustorum*, *Mater Castrorum*, *Mater Patriae*, and *Mater Senatus*.

### *Roman Civic Identity*

The final ethnic identity assumed by some elite women was juridical.<sup>74</sup> As their names indicate, some Spartan women were granted the status of Roman citizens. Greek marriage patterns were endogamous, mirroring the privacy of the city-state, but Roman law forbade marriage between close relatives: marrying out was a reflection of the expanding empire. In *Roman Questions* (108) Plutarch decides that the Roman way is preferable for women, for if their husbands abuse them, their kinsmen will defend them, while among the Greeks the husband is a kinsman. Among the Spartan elite with Roman citizenship it is still possible to find some marriages between cousins.<sup>75</sup> Other families abided by the letter of the law (if not the spirit) with multiple marriage ties with the same family, such as the Claudii with the Memmii.<sup>76</sup> Enforced exogamy sometimes made it necessary to claim descent from Spartan heroes or from revered prophets through the mother alone.<sup>77</sup> This desire to assert descent is responsible in part for the relative abundance of women's names in inscriptions. Through the *ius trium liberorum* Augustus promoted fertility with rewards and punishments. Some Spartans enjoyed the privileges bestowed on mothers of three children, including the right to make a will and to manage property without a male guardian.<sup>78</sup> Memmia Ageta, the divorced wife of Brasidas, a Spartan of praetorian status, bequeathed a trust to her sons, to be distributed only after their father's death because they were not emancipated and she did not believe her ex-husband would do so.<sup>79</sup> The case is discussed in the *Digest* (36.1.23): for Brasidas did emancipate them and Ageta's intention, rather than the letter of the law, prevailed.<sup>80</sup>

Though in earlier times Spartan women had managed property themselves, what their legal status had become by the first century B.C. is unclear.<sup>81</sup> In the Hellenistic period the legal capacity of women throughout the Greek world increased, and it is unlikely that it decreased in Sparta. For

<sup>72</sup> IG 5.1 608, and see further Spawforth 1985, 206–8, 233–35.

<sup>73</sup> See further Robert 1969, 316–22. For the state as a fictitious brotherhood, see Pomeroy 1997, 18, 38, 77–78, 80–81, et passim.

<sup>74</sup> Spawforth (1985, 218) suggests that if the women were married, they were probably granted citizenship as individuals along with their husbands. For general considerations about the effects of Roman law, see Foxhall 1999, esp. 144–45.

<sup>75</sup> E.g., Eudamus and Claudia Damostheneia (IG 5.1 589); Spawforth 1985, 234, 238.

<sup>76</sup> Spawforth 1985, 238.

<sup>77</sup> IG 5.1 599, and see further Spawforth 1992, 234.

<sup>78</sup> IG 5.1 168 + 603 (anonymous [fragmentary]), IG 5.1 586, 589, 596, 608. Hupfloher (2000, 39) notes that three of the known *thoinomostriai* held the *ius liberorum*.

<sup>79</sup> IG 5.1 581; Spawforth 1985, 215, 220–21.

<sup>80</sup> LGPN 3A s.v. Brasidas (5) lists four sons (Antipater, Pratolaus, Spartiaticus, and Brasidas), but Spawforth (1985, 228–30) argues that only the first two were children by Memmia Ageta.

<sup>81</sup> Foxhall 1999, 144–45, 150.

the imperial period, however, it may be useful to compare the legal status of Jewish women in Ptolemaic Egypt. Seeking upward social mobility, they used the Greek legal system: thus they began to employ a guardian for business transactions, though they would have been able to use Jewish law according to which they would not need the assistance of a *kyrios*.<sup>82</sup>

### *Shifting Identities*

It is clear that ethnic identities are contingent and change over time. Furthermore, Spartan history itself was a dialogue between the present and the past that under Roman domination became a conversation with the rest of Greece and with Rome. Spartan, Greek, and Roman simultaneously, or exploiting one facet of ethnicity to suit the context, Spartan women were a microcosm of the mosaic that constituted the Roman Empire. In the final chapter, however, the image of Helen prevailed. Gibbon writes that with the Gothic invasion: “the female captives submitted to the laws of war; the enjoyment of beauty was the reward of valour.”<sup>83</sup>

<sup>82</sup> Pomeroy 1984, 121.

<sup>83</sup> Gibbon 1776–88 [1974], 3:257.

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