

## Chapter 2

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# Ideology and ‘the status of women’ in ancient Greece

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Is a ‘History of Women’ possible? Does Woman exist? The first of these provocative questions was the title of a 1984 collection of essays by French feminists;<sup>1</sup> the second was addressed by the British feminist, Denise Riley.<sup>2</sup> With some exceptions, such challenges to the category of research have not disrupted the smooth surface of the study of women in antiquity, which, as Marilyn Skinner observed in 1986,<sup>3</sup> was incorporated readily into the field of classics and defined according to existing parameters of scholarly investigation.<sup>4</sup>

The dominant research question in the field, centered around the ‘status’ of women in ancient Athens, has, in fact, only recently been redefined fully, but without developing an adequate historiographic basis. That is to say, we now know that the status question is the wrong one, but we have not made clear why this is so, nor do we have a clear understanding of why the study of women in Greek antiquity was originally formulated around this issue. The object of this paper is to provide this missing historiography, to identify the ideological parameters that informed the constitution of the original research question, and to suggest that the new reformulation, centered around women in Greek society, must itself be modified in order to incorporate an analysis of female sexuality in ancient Greece.

I first investigate the constitution of the dominant research question in the field, under the heading of ‘Patriarchy and misogyny’. I trace the origins of this question back to the late eighteenth century, and I take note of the continuing force of this paradigm. Under ‘Women in civil society’ I examine the ideological basis of this hegemonic discourse, arguing that it derives from the eighteenth-century debate over women’s place in civil society, where the example of the women of ancient Athens served a legitimating function within a wider political framework. I conclude with a section discussing ‘Recent

challenges' to the traditional interpretive paradigm for the study of women in ancient Greece and the 'Future directions' of current research in the field.

## PATRIARCHY AND MISOGYNY

The hallmark of the approach I shall examine is its focus on 'woman' as a category and its preoccupation with the question of status. I have classified it under the heading of 'Patriarchy and misogyny' in order to highlight the concern with dominance and subordination which informs it throughout, but which is often hidden from view.

In a famous 1925 polemic the historian A.W.Gomme<sup>5</sup> described the then prevailing orthodoxy as the view that the status of women in ancient Athens in the classical period was an 'ignoble' one by comparison with their position in the Dorian states of the same period, and with that in the earlier, archaic period (89). Most contemporary discussion of the question has taken its start from this essay and from the similar chapter on 'Life and character' in Kitto's *The Greeks*.<sup>6</sup>

A more complete account of the common opinion of the time, however, may be gleaned from the sections on 'Die Frauen' in the second edition of Beloch's 1893 *Griechische Geschichte*.<sup>7</sup> The Ionians, according to Beloch, under the influence of the neighboring peoples of Asia Minor, inaugurated the exclusion of women from the public sphere and their confinement to the home and to the company of female friends. The Athenians adopted the practice from their fellow Ionians, but among non-Ionian Greeks women retained the freedom they had enjoyed in Homeric times. Prostitution—inspired by the example of the Lydians—sprang up among the Ionians as the inevitable corollary to the seclusion of well-born women, and the practice of homosexuality developed along with it (1.1:406–408).

The Ionian practice of seclusion became more widespread in Athens during the fifth century BC, at just the time when democratic ideals of liberty were institutionalized: 'it was as if the women had wanted to devise a counterweight to their husbands' boundless strivings for freedom' (2.1:159). Athenian men now turned to the company of hetairas ('female companions') for the female intellectual stimulation which they had 'sought at home in vain'.<sup>8</sup> These 'emancipated' women flourished especially among the Ionians, their aspirations toward freedom nourished by the Ionian exaltation of learning and instigated by the cloistered lives of ordinary free women (ibid.: 160).

By the fourth century, under the influence of their fathers and husbands, a few women rejected traditional roles and turned to the study of philosophy; the notion of marriage for the sake of children began to yield to an ideal of companionate union for mutual fulfillment. This development was resisted vigorously, and it gave rise to expressions of misogyny, but mostly from 'crybabies [whose] wives were too good for them'. Hetairas continued to play an important role, and functioned as companions for almost all of the important men of this period (3.1:434).

In the Hellenistic period the lives of ordinary women remained restricted, and hetairas retained a prominence in Athens which was later transferred to Alexandria. But the hetaira in her role as symbol of female emancipation was eclipsed by a new type of woman—the Hellenistic queen of the Macedonian and Alexandrian realms (4.1:416–420).<sup>9</sup> The example of her life of complete freedom within the court influenced the Greek world at large, leading to such developments as the extension of citizenship rights (proxeny), the institutionalization of education for women, the possibility of unaccompanied travel abroad, and the refinement of manners in social intercourse between the sexes.

This was, then, the 'orthodoxy' on the status of women in ancient Athens which prevailed in the early twentieth century and which Gomme was concerned to challenge. But how did it come into being, and on the basis of what evidence? In my search for an answer this question, I came across a long essay by a classical scholar who was prominent in his time, but who has been remembered since primarily as the editor of various Hellenistic Greek texts.

This man was Friedrich Jacobs who, in a long essay on 'The History of the Female Sex' published in 1830, challenged, in terms similar to those of Gomme, what he regarded as the prevailing orthodoxy on the matter of women's status among the ancient Greeks.<sup>10</sup> Jacobs remarked that in his own time this question was a debated issue:

Some have regarded women's position in Greece as demeaned, in the manner characteristic of barbarians; others have disputed this interpretation; and a third group thinks that the housewife was little esteemed and loved, but that hetairas by contrast, because of their education, enjoyed love and respect.

Jacobs divides his own treatment of the issue into an introductory section on marriage, followed by a discussion of 'The Greek woman', and concludes with a lengthy section on 'The hetairas'.

In disputing the claim that ancient Greek, and especially Athenian, women were regarded with contempt, secluded, uneducated (with the exception of the hetairas), and unfree and unequal until the advent of Christianity (228), Jacobs cites evidence of 'Christian' sentiments among the pagans, and expressions of misogyny by the Church fathers. Thus, he argues, the disparagement of women was no more characteristic of pagan thinking than was their high regard inherent in Christianity. Jacobs goes on to discuss Homer and Hesiod, characterizing the *Odyssey* as 'a love song to Penelope' (234), and arguing in general that the archaic picture gives us representations of both good and bad women. If the latter predominate in Hesiod, this has to do both with the poet's view of life, in which evil predominates over good, and with 'the nature of things', rather than with 'a contempt for the gender predominating in his time' (241). It is in 'the nature of things', Jacobs argues, that as long as there are two sexes there will be two kinds of women, but praise of the good woman will be remarked less frequently than blame of the bad (229, 242).

Concerning the claim that women in ancient Greece were secluded and uneducated, Jacobs argues that restriction to home life was a matter of custom rather than law (254, 273), and that similar practices have been the rule all over western Europe up to the present time. Furthermore, if seclusion originated in the Orient, it was nonetheless consistent with Christian belief and practice, albeit in a milder form (255). The housebound life of the Athenian matron, and the tradition, attested to in Thucydides, of silence about even her virtues, means that we have little evidence about women's education. But girls' training was in all likelihood entrusted to their mothers who instructed them in the domestic arts and 'womanly wisdom'; and their education was completed by their husbands, as Hesiod and, above all, Xenophon make clear (248ff.).

Overall, Jacobs insists, the Greek woman's intelligence and moral sensibility was sufficiently developed so that she was not an object of her husband's contempt (251), and he cites Xenophon's *Oeconomicus* in defense of his claim that the Athenian wife was regarded with respect (205–206). While recognizing the existence of a misogynistic and antimarriage tradition,<sup>11</sup> he nevertheless concludes that the

ancient Greeks, in Athens and elsewhere, recognized the moral worth of wives and marriage and honored the 'sanctity' of this union (314).

The interpretive framework which guides Jacobs's judgments on ancient Greek women is set forth in his first chapter, 'A general view of marriage', in which he defends the general proposition that marriage is ideally a social institution representing 'a union and interpenetration of the physical and moral strivings of human nature' which finds its fullest and most complete realization in society at large, but whose first elements are represented by the marital union (165–166). To the man belongs the right of rule, derived from the fact of his physical and intellectual superiority, and to the woman, on account of her sense for order and beauty, as well as her capacity for detail, belongs both 'the authority and duty to execute the laws set down by the man' (167–168). And he concludes: 'it is a general rule that it is proper for the woman to obey the man' (187).

If one compares the premises and conclusions of Jacobs's essay with those of Gomme and Kitto, the similarities are striking. All agree that, as Gomme puts it, Athenian society was, in the main, of the normal European type'.<sup>12</sup> Jacobs would not have disputed Gomme's contention that 'there is no reason to suppose that in the matter of the social consequence and freedom of women Athens was different from other Greek cities, or the classical from the Homeric age' (Gomme 1937:114). And Jacobs would have subscribed to Gomme's view that 'Greek theory and practice [did not] differ fundamentally from the average...prevailing in mediaeval and modern Europe' (115). Gomme claims, 'when Theognis said, "I hate a woman who gads about and neglects her home", I think he expressed a sentiment common to most people of all ages' (115). This is similar to Jacobs's comments on a fragment of Menander in which a husband admonishes his gadabout wife that the courtyard door is the customary limit of a free-born woman's realm: 'in Berlin and Vienna, in Paris and London a husband in such a situation would say to his wife: "within the limits of your house your tongue may have free reign; beyond the door your realm ends"'.<sup>13</sup>

Kitto remarks, '[t]he Athenian had his faults, but preeminent among his better qualities were lively intelligence, sociability, humanity, curiosity. To say that he habitually treated one-half of his own race with indifference, even contempt, does not, to my mind, make sense'.<sup>14</sup> Jacobs found the view that ancient Greek women were tolerated only as a necessary evil, and that romantic love was directed only toward the educated hetaira, similarly incredible:

such is the harshness then, with which, it is claimed, the stronger sex exercised its mastery; such is the ignominy that the weaker sex tolerated in a land which we have been accustomed from childhood to revere as the cradle of culture, among a people whom we have learned to regard as the patrons of all that is beautiful, great and masterful.<sup>15</sup>

The so-called ‘orthodoxy’ on the question of women’s status among the ancient Greeks, then, was already dominant in the early nineteenth century when Jacobs argued against it. And there is a striking continuity in both the tone and the terms in which the argument against the orthodoxy of women’s seclusion in ancient Athens was formulated over the course of the century that lies between Jacobs and Gomme. I shall suggest in what follows that this continuum is even longer, stretching across the two hundred years from 1796 to 1971 and beyond. But we must first still attempt to answer the question I posed above: how did the orthodoxy itself come into being, and on the basis of what evidence?

Jacobs in 1830 was concerned, at the most general level, to refute the contention of Christoph Meiners that ‘Homer makes it incontestably clear that women in the earlier period were as little regarded as in the later, and no less secluded [then] than later’, a notion which Meiners explained on the basis of a postulated kinship between Greeks and Slavs.<sup>16</sup> Jacobs regarded as similarly misguided Thöluck’s idea that ‘the female sex, whose status among the pagans was low, was first through Christendom accorded a human dignity similar to that of men’ (224). And he objected as well to de Pauw’s claim ‘that the hetairas, who were accustomed to attend the schools of the philosophers, were infinitely better educated than the women of standing, who perhaps never spoke [their] language correctly’ (246), and to Böttiger’s contention ‘that Athenian men kept their wives secluded; that this was a dominant custom; that Athenian women sighed under “oriental harem-slavery”’ (224).

Karl August Böttiger, who served as director of the Museum of Antiques in Dresden in the early nineteenth century, was also one of the first classical scholars of the modern period. In one of his earliest contributions to the genre of classical scholarship, ‘Were Athenian Women Spectators at Dramatic Festivals?’,<sup>17</sup> Böttiger took the opportunity to address the question of women’s status in ancient Greece overall, and to do so with reference to what he called ‘das neumodische right of Women [*sic*]’, citing Mary Wollstonecraft. He

argued that the question of women's attendance at dramatic performances should be addressed from within the framework of the Greeks' general practice of secluding their women and confining them 'to oriental harem-slavery'.<sup>18</sup> Böttiger thus became the first classical scholar to articulate the 'negative' view which achieved canonical status in the nineteenth century—namely, that ancient Greek women were in general less well off than their modern counterparts.

Böttiger's views on women in Greece and Rome were subsequently popularized in a historical novel, *Sabina, or Morning Scenes in the Dressing-Room of a Wealthy Roman Lady* (Leipzig 1806), through which he became the founder of the genre of 'antique domestic literature'.<sup>19</sup> His novel was adapted to the Greek situation in 1840 by Wilhelm Adolf Becker, who in *Charicles* recounts the adventures of an Athenian youth of the same name who, in the waning years of the fourth century BC, having been ensnared as an adolescent by a hetaira in Corinth, goes on as a young adult to marry the young and beautiful heiress, Cleobule.

Becker appended to *Charicles* an excursus on 'The Women', in which he acknowledged that

a variety of views have been entertained on the social position of the Greek women, and their estimation in the eyes of the men. The majority of scholars have described them as despicable in the opinion of the other sex, their life as a species of slavery, and the gynaeconitis [women's quarters] as a place of durance little differing from the Oriental harem; while a few writers have stoutly contended for the historic emancipation of the fair sex among the Greeks.

(462)

While arguing overall that 'the truth lies between the contending parties', Becker goes on to defend, on the basis of an extensive consideration of the evidence from the poets, orators, and philosophers, and from vase-paintings as well, the view that the women of the classical period 'were less respected and more restrained [than in the heroic era], and that the marriage relationship was less tender and endearing' (462).

Becker's picture, although tempered in many cases by qualifications, may be summarized as follows: in the classical period

the women were regarded as a lower order of beings, neglected by nature in comparison with man, both in point of intellect and

heart; incapable of taking part in public life, naturally prone to evil, and fitted only for propagating the species and gratifying the sensual appetites of the men.

(463)

The only *arete* [virtue] of which woman was thought capable... differed but little from that of a faithful slave.

(464)

[Women's] education from early childhood corresponded to the rest of their treatment...their whole instruction was left to the mother and the nurses, through whose means they obtained, perhaps, a smattering *en grammasi* [of letters], and were taught to spin and weave, and similar female avocations.... Hence there were no scientific or even learned ladies, with the exception of the hetaerae.

(465)

The gynaeconitis, though not exactly a prison, nor yet an everlocked harem, was still the confined abode allotted, for life, to the female portion of the household.

(465)

Marriage, in reference to the procreation of children, was considered by the Greeks as a necessity enforced by their duties to the gods, to the state, and to their ancestors.... Until a very late period, at least, no higher considerations attached to matrimony, nor was strong attachment a frequent cause of marriage.... Sensuality was the soil from which...passion sprung, and none other than a sensual love was acknowledged between man and wife.

(473)

As to the wife's household duties: 'the province of the wife was the management of the entire household, and the nurture of the children; of the boys until they were placed under a master, of the girls till marriage' (490). At another point, he notes: 'still it is an unquestionable fact that in many cases the wife was in reality the ruling power in the house, whether from her mental superiority, domineering disposition, or amount of dower' (493). Becker concludes with a consideration of the 'double standard': 'the law imposed the duty of continence in a very unequal manner' (494), noting that 'infidelity in the wife was judged most sharply', and that the law required an adulterous wife to be divorced (494).



This is, then, the nineteenth-century orthodoxy on the status of women in ancient Greece, formulated on the basis of an extensive consideration of the evidence. The matter was, of course, far from settled. In the second half of the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth, articles, dissertations, and monographs on the subject of women's status proliferated, and a complete bibliography on the topic for this century would run to more than fifty items.

I shall argue that beneath both the question of women's emancipation in ancient Greece and that of their purported seclusion we can detect the operation of a specific politico-philosophical framework. The lineaments of this ideological perspective, however, particularly in the years after 1850, have most often lain hidden from view. This, I suggest, is because, once the orthodoxy gained widespread currency, its origins in a specific philosophical discourse were ignored, and the scholarly dispute was conducted on the basis of its particulars. Before proceeding to a discussion of this framework, however, I want to turn my attention to some works by the current generation of scholars in the field of women's studies in Greek antiquity.

Pomeroy's 1975 *Goddesses, Whores, Wives and Slaves* was the first full-length study of this generation to take the question of women in antiquity seriously as a scholarly issue. In the decades immediately preceding, in the anglophone world at any rate, the discussion had degenerated into a succession of articles repeating Gomme's arguments of 1925 and upholding his views, always with the same reassurances that 'the attitude toward women among the Athenians was much the same as among ourselves',<sup>20</sup> and sometimes with patronizing references to 'a healthy strain of misogyny and misogamy running through Greek literature' or 'a quite normal measure of husbandly jealousy' on the part of Athenian men, defended as reasonable on the basis of ancient Greek women's supposed sexual licentiousness.<sup>21</sup> Otherwise, research on women had become confined to the dissection of the minutiae of quotidian reality, in a manner reminiscent of Plato's remarks about women's familiarity with 'weaving and watching over rising cakes and boiling pots' (*Republic* 5.455c), or of Böttiger's study on the use of pocket-handkerchiefs by Greek ladies.<sup>22</sup>

Pomeroy divided her treatment of women in ancient Greece into a discussion of the female divinities of the Olympian pantheon, followed by chapters on women in the Homeric period, in the Archaic Age (800–500 BC), and a section on women in ancient Athens,

divided into chapters on women in Greek law, private life, and images of women in literature. As the chapter headings indicate, Pomeroy did not call into question the historiographic validity of the category 'woman', nor did other scholars in the field who took up research on this subject. In the discipline of history, by contrast, Natalie Zemon Davis had suggested already in 1976 that 'we should be interested in the history of both women and men, [and] we should not be working only on the subjected sex any more than a historian of class can focus exclusively on peasants'.<sup>23</sup> But in the field of classics, surveys conceptualized similarly to that of Pomeroy have continued to appear and now exist in the major European languages.<sup>24</sup>

Pomeroy did, however, raise a number of important questions about how to conceptualize the study of women, and some of these have continued to dominate discussions of theory and methodology in classics. First, she noted the presence of male bias or of the masculine point of view in many of the sources, both primary and secondary. This indisputable fact about ancient sources—of material authored by women we have only the fragments of a few women poets—has even led to the recommendation that the study of women in antiquity be refocused away from literature to culture more generally, on the grounds that 'the study of women in ancient literature is the study of men's views of women and cannot become anything else'.<sup>25</sup>

The notion that texts authored by men represent a 'male' point of view is widely shared.<sup>26</sup> This idea, however, not only introduces an artificial distinction between text and culture, but also implicitly relegates women to an entirely passive role in patriarchal society—a view which could hardly be substantiated with reference to our own culture, and which is furthermore easily discredited through the comparative study of women in contemporary traditional, patriarchal societies.<sup>27</sup>

Second, Pomeroy took note of the tendency in the scholarly literature to 'treat women as an undifferentiated mass', without introducing distinctions having to do with 'different economic and social classes' and with 'categories of [citizenship]' (that is, full citizens, resident aliens, and slaves).<sup>28</sup> This was often, but by no means always the case. Radermacher, for example, had specifically remarked that his conclusions applied only to citizen women, and that women of the lower classes lived a very different kind of life.<sup>29</sup> And the debate overall, as we have seen, was generally constructed with reference to a status difference between hetairas (non-citizens) and legitimate

wives. In addition, almost no information survives on women of other classes, and it is this that accounts for the absence of studies discussing them in the scholarly literature. But in any case, the historiographical difficulties in writing the history of women are not met simply by accounting for the factor of class or status, as the following discussion will show.

Finally, when addressing herself to the question of 'the dispute over status', Pomeroy argued that 'the wide divergence of scholarly opinion' resulted from 'the genre of the evidence consulted'.<sup>30</sup> The same argument informed an essay by Just published in the same year, who remarked that 'the real basis of the divergence of opinion is, however, an evidential one', and was subsequently taken up by Gould in 1980 who, despite his recognition that 'the explanation ... is largely a matter of methodology', goes on to discuss women in classical Athens under the traditional rubrics, law, and custom/myth.<sup>31</sup>

I argued against this view in 1976, suggesting instead that 'the shifting currents of opinion' should be attributed to the influence of ideology, namely that 'behind the debate on women's status in Athens there can be detected an apologia both for the patriarchal bias of modern society and for the liberal pretensions of the ancient and modern democratic ideal'.<sup>32</sup> As the present study makes clear, I continue to subscribe to that view, believing now, however, that a less simplistic understanding of ideology and its functions must be applied to the question. In addition, it is even clearer now, as I also argued in 1976, that radically different assessments of the same material abound in the literature and indeed continue to proliferate.

To cite just two examples from current literature: Eva Keuls, in *The Reign of the Phallus*, assembles a formidable array of evidence to demonstrate that:

'In the case of a society dominated by men who sequester their wives and daughters, denigrate the female role in reproduction, erect monuments to male genitalia, have sex with the sons of their peers, sponsor public whorehouses, create a mythology of rape, and engage in rampant saber-rattling, it is not inappropriate to refer to a reign of the phallus. Classical Athens was such a society.'<sup>33</sup>

Mary Lefkowitz, by contrast, finds that '[Greek] myth portrays marriage and motherhood, with all the difficulties they involve, as the best conditions most women desire, and in which women can be best respected by society and happiest in themselves', and goes on

to suggest that 'Greek men may not have been so concerned with repressing women as protecting them'.<sup>34</sup>

The question of women's status in ancient Athens, then, as well as the character and interpretation of their 'seclusion', continues to be debated in the scholarly literature,<sup>35</sup> and surveys on women in ancient Greece continue to appear, as noted above. But the question of the historiographic adequacy of the category 'woman' has not been addressed by classicists in the anglophone world. I raised it myself tentatively, in 1982,<sup>36</sup> concluding that 'the problem...is not so much that we are coming up with the wrong answers as that we are asking the wrong questions'.<sup>37</sup>

But it was Pauline Schmitt-Pantel who first posed the question in a trenchant and challenging manner, in her contribution to the 1984 volume edited by Perrot, *Une histoire des femmes est-elle possible?* In her essay, Schmitt-Pantel contended that 'an assessment of the last ten years' great profusion of studies demonstrates, in my view, that any treatment of Greek women as an isolated category leads to a methodological impasse'.<sup>38</sup> I shall return to Schmitt-Pantel's discussion of the *sortie* from this impasse (p. 36). But now I want to turn to the historiographic issue which she raised, and which has only recently been theorized adequately for the field of Greek antiquity.

Josine Blok in 1987<sup>39</sup> and Beate Wagner-Hasel in 1988 and 1989<sup>40</sup> both argued that, in Blok's words, 'the 19th century provided the paradigm that was to define inquiry on women in antiquity until far into the 20th century'.<sup>41</sup> Blok's analysis is important; it deserves further discussion and debate from the perspective of the historiography of woman as a category in history. But her interpretation is insufficiently particularized to the specifics of the history of women in Greek antiquity to make it useful in the present context.

In this respect Wagner-Hasel's recent interventions—based on her 1980 Berlin dissertation<sup>42</sup>—are more compelling, in that they are organized around a specific critique of the nineteenth-century opposition between the public and private spheres and its applicability to the ancient Greek social order. I want to draw attention here in particular to a remark that Wagner-Hasel makes in passing and on which she does not expand: the debate over the status of women in ancient Greece, she says, 'is not only an attempt to reconstruct a bygone way of life, it is also a discourse over woman's place in modern bourgeois society which had its beginnings in the Enlightenment and has continued up until the present time'.<sup>43</sup>

## WOMEN IN CIVIL SOCIETY

In recent years, feminist political scientists like Carole Pateman<sup>44</sup> and Susan Moller Okin<sup>45</sup> have argued that the theory of the liberal democratic state, the study of which has flourished recently in mainstream political science, has remained unaffected by feminist theory. This is not to say that 'women's issues' have not been addressed. But, as Pateman notes, 'the underlying assumption is that questions which have been taken up as "women's issues" can be embraced and incorporated into mainstream theory'.<sup>46</sup> She goes on to argue that feminist theory introduces a new and challenging perspective into this discourse. For 'feminism does not, as is often supposed, merely add something to existing theories and modes of argument'.<sup>47</sup> Rather, feminist theory demonstrates that 'a repressed problem lies at the heart of modern political theory—the problem of patriarchal power<sup>48</sup> or the government of women by men'.<sup>49</sup>

To be more specific, classical social contract theory, on which the contemporary theory of civil society is based, is founded on the Lockian premise of freedom and equality as a birthright. This birthright constitutes men as individuals possessing a natural political right, and 'as "individuals" all men are owners, in that they all own the property in their persons and capacities over which they alone have right of jurisdiction'.<sup>50</sup> These free and equal individuals form a political association through a social contract which establishes obligations and to whose authority its members accede by means of their consent to be governed.

Women, by contrast, are understood to agree to subordinate themselves to their husbands, a subjection which has 'a Foundation in Nature',<sup>51</sup> and though husband and wife 'have but one common Concern; ...it being necessary that the last Determination, *i.e.* the Rule, should be placed somewhere, it naturally falls to the Man's share as the abler and stronger'.<sup>52</sup> As Pateman observes:

the contradiction between the premise of individual freedom and equality, with its corollary of the conventional basis of authority, and the assumption that women (wives) are naturally subject has ...gone unnoticed.... [Yet] if women are naturally subordinate ...then talk of their consent or agreement to this status is redundant.<sup>53</sup>

Locke did not specifically theorize women's subordination, but Rousseau's theory of the social contract, based on the premise that man, in passing from the state of nature to civil society, loses his

natural liberty but gains both civil liberty and moral freedom,<sup>54</sup> did explicitly justify it. Rousseau, who like other Enlightenment thinkers, as Wagner-Hasel says, ‘developed the theoretical foundations for the interrelationship between ancient and modern democracy, and regarded as their models Attic generals like Pericles or Roman Senators of Cicero’s kind’,<sup>55</sup> modeled his ‘people’s assembly’ on the *comitia tributa* (‘tribal’ or popular assembly) of the ancient Romans, drawing certain additional features from the constitution of the Spartans.

Rousseau generally regarded ancient Sparta as ‘the example that we ought to follow’.<sup>56</sup> But in *Emile*, published, along with *The Social Contract*, in 1762, it was classical Athens that provided the paradigm for the incorporation of women into the ideal state. There, Rousseau expanded upon arguments that he had first advanced in the 1758 ‘Letter to M.d’Alembert on the Theatre’, where he remarked that ‘the ancients had, in general, a very great respect for women’.<sup>57</sup> And he explained in more detail:

Among all the ancient civilized peoples [women] led very retired lives; they did not have the best places at the theatre; they did not put themselves on display; they were not even always permitted to go; and it is well known that there was a death penalty for those who dared to show themselves at the Olympic games. In the home, they had a private apartment where the men never entered. When their husbands entertained for dinner, they rarely presented themselves at the table; the decent women went out before the end of the meal, and the others never appeared at the beginning. There was no common place of assembly for the two sexes; they did not pass the day together. This effort not to become sated with one another made their meetings more pleasant. It is certain that domestic peace was, in general, better established and that greater harmony prevailed between man and wife than is the case today.<sup>58</sup>

Among others, Mary Wollstonecraft, in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (1792), argued against Rousseau’s views. There she insisted that the confinement of women’s instruction to such frivolities as Rousseau had envisioned, would produce ‘weak beings...only fit for a seraglio!’<sup>59</sup>

The question of women’s status in ancient Greece, and of the extent and meaning of their ‘seclusion’, then, did not originate in

the nineteenth century, nor was it raised first by scholars of classical antiquity. Rather, as the above citations indicate, it formed part of the intellectual currency of the eighteenth century, and played an important role in the general debate over the form and nature of civil society. (Böttiger, as we saw on p. 26, cited Wollstonecraft less than admiringly when he first turned his attention to the question of women's status in ancient Greece.) Furthermore, some of the specific terms of this discourse were set in the eighteenth century. Rousseau, for example, had remarked in 1758 that women in the ancient world were 'respected' and that this was connected with their having led 'Very retired lives'. What is more, the formulation of the question itself relied on a certain circular logic: Rousseau in 1758 cited the example of women in ancient Athens to substantiate his views on women's nature; Jacobs in 1830 relied on the eighteenth-century view of women's nature to authenticate his interpretation of the ancient evidence.

## RECENT CHALLENGES AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

It is only in the last ten years or so that the 'status' model has been challenged as a research paradigm, and this has been achieved principally by introducing a discontinuity between the ancient conception of the relationship between *polis* (city-state) and *oikos* (household) and the analogous modern distinction between 'public' and 'private'. The landmark 1979 study on the question, Sally Humphreys's '*Oikos and Polis*', treats the opposition in Athenian society and culture overall, showing that such modern distinctions as that between the political and economic spheres are misleading when applied to ancient Athens. Humphreys forgoes discussion of women's status as such, but treats aspects of women's incorporation in and exclusion from the functioning of the sociocultural totality. In addition, she makes the important observation that 'the separation of men and women in social life meant that in a sense the public world of the city reached into the house'.<sup>60</sup>

Others have followed Humphreys's lead. Beate Wagner-Hasel, in an equally important 1982 full-scale study of women in early Greek society, proceeds from the premise that 'the first question of determining the status of the particular members of a society must always be [constituted] first as the question of the character of this society itself—its social, political, and economic structure'.<sup>61</sup> Both Humphreys and Wagner-Hasel emphasize the importance of

applying ethnographic and anthropological models to the study of ancient Greece, and in 1981 and 1982 I used analogies drawn from the anthropology of contemporary traditional Mediterranean societies to redraw the conceptualization of women in ancient Greece under the heading of ‘a divided world’.<sup>62</sup>

Helene Foley in 1981 drew attention to the inadequacy of interpreting ancient Greek tragedy in accordance with a concept of *oikos* and *polis* as equivalent either to nature and culture or private and public, and proposed a reading overall in which *oikos* and *polis* ‘are mutually defining institutions; order in one sphere is inextricably related to order in the other’.<sup>63</sup> Froma Zeitlin, in an important 1985 study, extended the analysis of Greek drama to embrace the generation of the categories ‘masculine’ and ‘feminine’.<sup>64</sup> And Giulia Sissa has carried out an investigation of the construction of sexual difference in the philosophical works of Plato and Aristotle.<sup>65</sup>

The study of women in antiquity, then, has evolved over the last ten years or so from ‘the history of women’ to the ‘history of gender’, as Schmitt-Pantel has observed, adding that the concepts ‘sexual asymmetry, social relations between the sexes, and gender’ now serve as the ‘basis for further progress’.<sup>66</sup> But there are other dimensions to this history which are not adequately comprehended through the reorientation around the newer categories. I am referring in particular to questions regarding the constitution of the self, or, more specifically, the constitution of the gendered or sexual self.

These questions in the field of classics have been addressed recently by scholars working within two separate subfields, those of ancient Greek medicine and ancient Greek sexuality.<sup>67</sup> Ancient Greek and Roman medical writers discussed the matter of female physiology at great length, and in a series of gynecological treatises developed an extensive discourse on the subject of the female body. Some aspects of their theories—for example, Galen’s notion that the female reproductive structure was equivalent to that of the male turned outside in—survived into the Renaissance and served as the basis for theories of human physiology which remained unchallenged until the late eighteenth century.<sup>68</sup>

The Graeco-Roman medical writers, however, concerned themselves almost exclusively with the reproductive aspects of female physiology. As Ann Hanson observes, even when they acknowledge the existence of female orgasm, the medical writers’ concern is with its relation to the woman’s capacity to conceive: ‘the Hippocratic



gynecologies center attention not on woman's desire or pleasure, but on whether or not she has taken up the seed'.<sup>69</sup>

Recent discussions of ancient Greek sexuality have centered on male sexuality, and in particular on questions having to do with the character of male homosexuality in ancient Greece.<sup>70</sup> This work has given rise to a lively debate on whether there exists a discontinuity between 'the Greeks and us' in the conceptualization of sexuality, and on whether Greek culture, like our own, constructed a distinction between 'homosexuals' and 'heterosexuals'.<sup>71</sup>

The issue is itself a historiographic one, formulated principally around Halperin's contention that the category 'homosexual' was itself a product of the late nineteenth-century discourse on sexual pathology. But the matter of woman's sexual desire and the question of female erotics have, by and large, received little attention, in this or other literature.<sup>72</sup>

What is, in fact, the nature of women's *eros*? And what was the character of female sexuality in Greek antiquity? The answers to these questions remain an unfinished project for the study of women in ancient Greece.<sup>73</sup> To undertake it would require both a historiography of the question and a consideration of ancient Greek laws on adultery and of ancient conceptualizations of such phenomena as prostitution, rape, and pornography. Some important new research in these areas has appeared, for example, Cohen's chapters on adultery,<sup>74</sup> Zeitlin's and Scafuro's essays on rape in Greek myth,<sup>75</sup> and a new volume on pornography edited by Richlin.<sup>76</sup> But a full discussion that takes into account distinctions between our own notions and those of the Greeks awaits formulation.

It has been the overall point of this section to argue that our own understanding of sexuality and of the difference between the sexes has been critically mediated by the nineteenth- and twentieth-century discourses on this same subject. Thus, however much the ancients may appear to resemble or anticipate us, in this as in other areas, such as their notions of 'woman's place', they were also working within a radically different cultural framework which has been illegitimately assimilated to our own. And it is, therefore, no less important to the project of understanding our own values than to that of comprehending theirs that we reconstruct the divide which separates the 'Greeks' *from* 'us'.

Such a project would require also that we reconstruct the point at which the history of the construction of sex and sexuality intersected with that of the construction of race. From the perspective of the

history of women in ancient Greece, that point is marked by Meiners' coinage of the term 'oriental seclusion' to characterize the condition of the women of ancient Greece. Meiners, in his *History of the Female Sex*,<sup>77</sup> published 1788–1800, found that the ancient Greeks, who 'in certain respects so nearly resembled the most spirited and magnanimous nations of our division of the globe', seem more like Slavons or Orientals: 'in other points, and especially in its general conduct to the sex, and its laws concerning women, [the Greeks] appeared much more closely allied to the Orientals and to the Slavonic nations of Europe' (1:260).

The metaphor of the seraglio or harem originated in the seventeenth century, developed a widespread currency in the eighteenth century, and forms part of the general history of what Edward Said has called 'Orientalism'.<sup>78</sup> Thus, when Mary Wollstonecraft, in her discussion in 1792 of women's education, referred to the 'seraglio', she was drawing on an idea that was current in the popular culture of the time. Its application to the condition of the women of ancient Greece continues to be debated,<sup>79</sup> but it is now generally discussed under the heading of 'seclusion'.

The very term 'oriental seclusion', however, should have warned us against attempting to interpret it outside the ideological context in which it arose—a context which cannot be eliminated simply by dropping the adjective and referring to 'seclusion' instead, as we have all been inclined to do, in recognition of the now embarrassing overtones of the phrase. But adjustments in usage, while salutary from a political point of view, also constitute evasions from the historiographic perspective.

Thus, an adequate historiography of the history of women in ancient Greece would require that we discuss the formulation of the question of women's seclusion in ancient Athens in the light of the history of Orientalism generally, taking note of such issues as its origin in the linguistic theories of the time, and its subsequent evolution, in the late eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, into a generalized theory of racial difference. Such an investigation would also reveal an important further historical point of intersection—between the theories of racial and sexual difference—on the basis of which the theory of sexual pathology was constructed in the late nineteenth century.<sup>80</sup>

Recent challenges to the 'status' model, then, have served to redefine and reorient a research paradigm which, as I have attempted to demonstrate, is now almost two hundred years old. The new

directions in research that have been marked out offer the promise of adding important new dimensions to our understanding of the ancient Greeks' cultural particularity. But much remains to be done in order to integrate this new history with the old, and to redefine and reformulate the character of the continuities and discontinuities which both connect and separate them.

## SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

The burden of this paper has been, first, to show that the question of women's status in ancient Greece has continued to be addressed in contemporary scholarship in much the same terms as it was formulated in the nineteenth century. Scholars generally, even when they have acknowledged this history in long and ponderous footnotes, have generally stopped at this point, availing themselves of what I shall call the 'European seclusion theory'—the notion that their nineteenth-century predecessors developed the foundations of classical scholarship alone in their studies with their books. (One need only think here of the frontispieces frequently prefacing biographies, depicting the scholar poring over his voluminous tomes in solitary concentration.) In the second section, I have attempted to demonstrate that the formulation of the question of women's status in ancient Greece has a far more complex history, and that its terms were intimately bound up with the eighteenth-century discourse on freedom, the individual, and civil society.

This history is well known, but within the field of classics it is generally relegated to the subdiscipline known as the history of the classical tradition or the classical heritage.<sup>81</sup> Within this framework, not only are the ideological specifics of the tradition widely overlooked,<sup>82</sup> as Martin Bernal has made clear,<sup>83</sup> but the discussion of women and their history is largely left out of account, except where it touches on themes having to do with Greek mythology and religion.

What I have tried to show, with reference to the study of women in antiquity, is that its history and historiography are in fact constituted through a complex intersection between classical scholarship and the classical tradition, and that this interpenetration was itself significantly conditioned by the contemporary discussions on language, nationalism, and race. To evaluate this history properly, we must take into account, therefore, not only Rousseau's reading of antiquity, but such further considerations as his contribution to the

formation of political theory, and the contemporary rereading and critique of his influence.<sup>84</sup> Furthermore, the exemption of women from civil society in political theory should be understood, not only in terms of the perseverance of patriarchy and a motivated nostalgia for the ancient Greek past, but within the context of eighteenth-century medical inquiry, its rereading of the ancient theory of biology, and its eventual intersection in the nineteenth century with the discourse on language, race, and nationality.

It should be clear that what has interested me here is not the history of ideas, although I do regard it as important to know that a certain continuity can be found among the ideas of, for example, Rousseau, Jacobs, and A.W.Gomme, and that this continuity is based on a shared notion, inherited from the eighteenth century, of women's proper sphere and its correlation with their 'nature'. Rather, I have been concerned to make clear how the terms of the discussion themselves came into being, and to identify their ideological valences.

Thus, from the historiographic point of view, there is not a 'history of women' as such. But there is a history of women in society, as Wagner-Hasel and others have shown, and there is also a history of the gendered individual, as recent studies on sexuality in ancient Greece have demonstrated. In this paper, I have concentrated on the history of the history of women, which, as I have argued, still awaits reconstruction in its fullest particulars. This can only be achieved, not by dismissing as outdated what has gone before, but by exposing the ideological foundations of a hegemonic discourse that has dominated the discussion of ancient women and that continues to make its powerful influence felt in the discussion of women generally as part of civil society at the present moment in history.

## NOTES

1 Perrot 1984.

2 Riley 1988.

3 Skinner 1987.

4 I have not attempted to be comprehensive in this paper: some books or articles are discussed in detail; many other important items are omitted altogether. My discussion is restricted to works that I consider representative of the principal analytic approaches and that are useful for demonstrating the theoretical and ideological premises of the various interpretive methods.

5 Gomme, 1925, here cited from the 1937 reprint.

6 Kitto 1951.

7 Beloch 1912–1925, 2nd edn, here cited from the 2nd edn as follows: 1.1,

- Strasbourg 1912; 2.1, Strasbourg 1914; 3.1, Berlin 1922; 4.1 Berlin 1925.
- 8 The term is the feminine of *hetairos* meaning 'companion'; the Greek plural is *hetairai*, sometimes Latinized to *hetaerae*. Gomme 1937:105 suggests the translation '*demi-mondaine*'; and Beloch renders *hetairai* as 'Damen der Halbwelt' (3.1:434).
- 9 For the most recent discussion of these women, see Pomeroy 1984.
- 10 Jacobs 1830.
- 11 See especially his discussion of Meiners, 1830:206–210.
- 12 Gomme 1937:99, n. 2.
- 13 Jacobs 1830:264. Compare Gomme's statements about this same fragment, 1937:99.
- 14 Kitto 1951:222.
- 15 Jacobs 1830:243–244.
- 16 *ibid.*: 224. I discuss briefly the 'racial' aspects of Meiners's formulations on p. 38.
- 17 Originally published in 1796, reprinted 1837.
- 18 *ibid.*: 295. On the concept of 'oriental harem-slavery,' see p. 38.
- 19 According to Frederick Metcalfe, in the 'Translator's preface' to Becker 1866: vii. All subsequent citations of *Charicles* are from this translation.
- 20 Hadas 1936: citation p. 100; cf. Shero 1932; Seltman 1955; Richter 1971.
- 21 Richter, 1971:5, 7. Cf. Richter's view that 'the young wives [of ancient Athens] were as undisciplined a bevy of nymphs as Hellas ever reared', *ibid.*: 7.
- 22 An exception to this general rule was the study of women's status in ancient law, which the nature of the subdiscipline obliged scholars to discuss in a wider sociocultural context.
- 23 Davis 1976: citation p. 90.
- 24 Mossé 1983; Cantarella 1987; Schuller 1985; Clark 1989; Just 1989 (1991).
- 25 Culham 1986: citation p. 15.
- 26 For example, Just 1975: esp. 154, and 1989 (1991): 4; Gould 1980: esp. 38.
- 27 Cf. Nicole-Claude Matthieu's critique of the anthropologist Edwin Ardener's notion of women as a 'muted group' (Ardener 1975a (1972)), and of the biological essentialism implied by the concept: 'there is no "autonomous female way of seeing"; there is no woman's way of seeing on the one hand and man's way of seeing on the other; there is only that of the society as a whole': Matthieu 1973: citation p. 112. Both Just and Gould draw freely on Ardener in constructing their own analytic paradigms.
- 28 Pomeroy 1975:60.
- 29 Radermacher 1928:16.
- 30 Pomeroy 1975:60.
- 31 Just 1975:154, cf. 157; Gould 1980: citation p. 39.
- 32 Arthur (=M.A.Katz) 1976: citation p. 383.
- 33 Keuls 1985:1.
- 34 Mary Lefkowitz, 'Epilogue', in Lefkowitz 1986: citations pp. 133, 134. Cf. also Lefkowitz 1981 *passim*.
- 35 For example, D.Cohen 1989; see also D.Cohen 1991c.

- 36 Arthur (=M.A.Katz) 1982b.  
37 *ibid.*: 535.  
38 Schmitt-Pantel 1984:105.  
39 Blok 1987, first published in Dutch in 1984.  
40 Wagner-Hasel 1988, 1989.  
41 Blok 1987: citation p. 2.  
42 Published in a revised and expanded form as Wagner-Hasel 1982.  
43 Wagner-Hasel 1989:19.  
44 Pateman 1989. For a recent discussion of Pateman's work overall in the context of political theory, see Phillips 1992.  
45 Moller Okin 1979b.  
46 Pateman 1989:2.  
47 *ibid.*: 14.  
48 I shall not embark here upon a definition of the term 'patriarchy', an understanding of which, despite its widespread popular currency, requires a thoroughgoing historiographic and political analysis. For some preliminary remarks on a contrast between 'paternal' and 'fraternal' patriarchy, see Pateman 1989:35–36.  
49 *ibid.*: 2.  
50 *ibid.*: 10.  
51 Locke 1967:191–192 (I.47–48).  
52 *ibid.*: 339 (2.82).  
53 Pateman 1989:213. Cf. also her chapters, 'Women and consent' and 'Feminism and democracy', 71–89, 210–225. For a theoretical critique of John Stuart Mill's theory of sexual egalitarianism, see Moller Okin 1979a: 197–223.  
54 Rousseau 1978:64–65 (book 1, ch. 8).  
55 Wagner-Hasel 1988:26.  
56 Rousseau, 'Letter to M. d'Alembert on the Theatre', in *Politics and the Arts*, trans. Allan Bloom, Glencoe, Ill. 1960:133.  
57 *ibid.*: 48.  
58 *ibid.*: 88–89.  
59 Wollstonecraft 1988 (1792): 10; cf. 29. On the metaphor of the seraglio or harem, see p. 38.  
60 Humphreys 1983: citation p. 16. See also Humphreys 1991.  
61 Wagner-Hasel 1982:5. See also her extensive discussion of public and private spheres, their relationship to the social and economic structure of the *polis* overall, and women's roles, in *ibid.*: section b, 67–272.  
62 In a talk presented on 3 April 1981 at Wesleyan University to the Department of History Faculty Seminar, 'Marx and History', under the title, 'Ideology and the "Status" of Women in Ancient Greece', one section of which was published as Arthur, 'Women and the Family' (1982b). For a fuller discussion, see D.Cohen 1991c: esp. 14–69.  
63 Foley, 1981b: citation p. 156.  
64 Zeitlin 1985. On the opposition between masculine and feminine in Greek culture, see also Schmitt-Pantel 1984:101 and *passim*.  
65 Sissa 1992.  
66 Schmitt-Pantel 1992b: 464, 466.  
67 For a review of recent work in these subfields, see Katz 1989.

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- 68 For discussion, see Laqueur 1986 and 1990.
- 69 Hanson 1990: citation p. 315. For further discussion of this topic, see also Lloyd 1983b; and King 1989b.
- 70 On which see especially, in addition to the essays in, Halperin, Winkler, and Zeitlin 1990; Halperin 1992; and Winkler 1990b.
- 71 For some recent contributions to this debate, see D.Cohen 1991b and 1991d; Thorp 1992; Boswell 1990.
- 72 For some exceptions to this general pattern, see Carson 1990; Sissa 1990; and Rousselle 1988.
- 73 It is worth noting in this connection that, as my student Audrey Prins Patt pointed out to me recently, Scarborough 1992 omits the term clitoris (which is Greek, and which is discussed by the ancient medical writers and lexicographers) from his discussion of 'Sexual Anatomy: The "Parts" (female)'.  
74 D.Cohen 1991a and e.  
75 Zeitlin 1986; Scafuro 1990.  
76 Richlin 1992.  
77 Meiners 1788–1800; hereafter cited in the English translation by F. Shoberl, London, 1808, by volume and page number.  
78 Said 1978, whose study is limited to 'the Anglo-French-American experience of the Arabs and Islam, which for almost a thousand years together stood for the Orient' (17).  
79 For example, D.Cohen 1989.  
80 For some preliminary discussion of these issues, see my remarks in the longer version of the present essay, Katz 1992:86–92, and the references cited therein.  
81 For example, Turner 1981.  
82 Or relegated to footnotes: see, for example, the remarks on the part played by 'contemporary racial thinking' in Matthew Arnold's work, in Turner 1981:20–21 n. 4.  
83 Bernal 1987. I shall not comment on the extensive dispute to which this book has given rise, other than to say that I regard the general burden of the historiographic account as largely correct, notwithstanding the fact that Bernal has sometimes been careless with the evidence.  
84 See, for example, the recent discussion by Koppelman 1992, which contrasts Susan Okin's and Allan Bloom's views on the implications of Rousseau's theory of the family to contemporary feminist debate on the place of women in the social order.