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## WOMEN IN PUBLIC: GENDER, CITIZENSHIP, AND SOCIAL STATUS IN CLASSICAL ATHENS<sup>1</sup>

I would like to begin by distinguishing a number of questions about the legal status of Athenian women. The first of these is whether women had the legal status of citizenship at Athens. The second is how such status was proved in the event a woman's legal standing was contested and what such disputes tell us about women and their status. The third is what this status meant politically and socially, how it was represented and expressed in Athenian public life.

### I. Citizens

Discussions of Athenian women's legal status have often started from the assumption that citizenship is coterminous with political participation. Because women are excluded from Athenian politics they are also excluded from citizenship and, on the more extreme view, from the polis itself, relegated to the company of slaves and foreigners. Cynthia Patterson has provided an excellent account of the terminology of Athenian citizenship. Her analysis removes much confusion and makes clear "the fact of women's membership in the Athenian polis."<sup>2</sup> As she points out, that membership is defined through a concept of citizenship rather different than ones familiar from contemporary democracies which emphasize equality of political rights. This notion applied to Athens only within the world of war and politics that was the exclusive property of the male citizen body. Women's citizenship defined by birth was, as Patterson points out, an essential element of the structural exclusivity of the Athenian polis vis-à-vis the larger world of slaves, metics, and foreigners, because under Pericles' law it was the foundation of legal marriage and, thus, of the reproduction of the citizen body. She convincingly argues that attempts to argue women out of the Periclean law are flawed and that a full examination of the terminology of citizenship leaves little doubt that women too were members of the Athenian polis.

To say that women were citizens but, obviously, without the same political rights as men leaves open another, larger, question. What we ought to be asking is not "Were women Athenian citizens", for the proper functioning of the entire system

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<sup>1</sup> This paper is the text of a paper delivered at Symposium 2001. It is presented here in the form in which it was delivered.

<sup>2</sup> C. Patterson, "Hai Attika: The Other Athenians," *Helios* 13 (1986) 57.

of marriage and citizenship required that they were. Rather the underlying question is what did female citizenship mean in the social and civic world of Athens? To answer this question we must avoid two presuppositions. The first is that citizenship is a universal, abstract, legal category that denotes equal political rights among the whole population who meet relevant criteria of birth or residency in a given society. The second is that because the Athenian polis completely excluded women from politics this made them rough equals of slaves and foreigners, the very opposite of citizens. I will begin by looking at some cases where the legal status of women as citizens is contested and then turn to an examination of the sphere of public life where women's citizenship defined their right to participate in one of the central institutions of the polis: civic religion.

## II. Contesting Citizenship

How could the citizen status of a woman be proved if challenged and what were the grounds on which such challenges might plausibly be made? Examining these questions will indicate how closely citizen status was linked to social status and social judgment.

The most direct way of questioning a person's citizen status was, of course, by attacking the genealogical claims on which it is based. This may be accomplished either by suggesting that the claimed parent was not in fact the biological parent, or by calling the citizen status of one or both of the parents into question. In the case of women how was this done? *Against Eubulides* (Dem. 57) makes clear how, given the absence of authoritative documentation of the kind found in contemporary industrialized societies, inferences from socio-economic status could be used to challenge claims to citizenship.

It is important to recall that the case represented in *Against Eubulides* arose out of a general purge of the citizen body via the mechanism of scrutinizing the deme registers (2, 7). Euxitheus was rejected by his deme and appealed. The case against Euxitheus' mother, and, hence, against Euxitheus himself was apparently built around her having sold ribbons in the agora and worked as a wetnurse. Euxitheus defends her against the inferences from her economic activity to her civic status by pointing out that the necessity of poverty has forced many Athenian women to take up menial work in the agora and fields. He notes that the law protects them from abuse on this account by establishing penalties for reproaching any male *or female citizen* with working in the agora (30). He asks the judges not to let their prejudices about poverty and citizenship cloud their judgment and repeatedly reminds them that poverty has nothing to do with birth: "For even if a nurse is a lowly thing, I do not avoid the truth. For it is not our being poor that would mark us as wrongdoers, but our not being citizens. And the present trial has not to do with our fortune or money, but with our descent" (45; 35).

These passages are extremely interesting from a variety of social historical perspectives, but of importance for present purposes is the way in which reputation

and inferences from everyday behavior can be used to support judgments about one's civic identity. If one, or one's parents, are seen doing such and such then one cannot be a citizen. This is a kind of argument that the speaker clearly expects to have a powerful appeal to the judges and he devotes a substantial part of the oration to trying to counter it. Ultimately in Athens, citizenship is based upon social judgment of one's identity, upon social recognition. This applies to women no less than men in that they depended upon the testimony of friends, neighbors, and kin to "prove" that one was really entitled to the civic status that one claimed.

Euxitheus adduces the well known law which provides that anyone who reproaches an Athenian male or female citizen because they sell in the agora shall be liable for slander (30). The fact that the law explicitly names female as well as male citizens indicates both the extent of such economic activities and the fact that they implied low social status. As we see here, they are so closely associated with low status that they could be the basis of claims that one was not a citizen. Aristotle questions whether in a well organized state those who labor should have full citizen rights (cf. *Pol.* 1337b, 1341a). That his critique of democracy extends to the treatment of women is shown by his comment that democracies are defective because they cannot prevent the wives of the poor from leaving the home to work (*Pol.* 1300a 4-9). Euxitheus, on the other hand, pleads that economic necessity has forced many citizen women to adopt "unworthy" professions, like midwives, wetnurses, weavers, and fieldworkers.

Such accusations become a rhetorical tactic even in cases where the attack on citizenship is not really serious. For example, Demosthenes (18.258-60) attacks Aeschines by a detailed account of his mother's economic activities and Aeschines' own slavish contributions to them. This shows, he argues, that Aeschines cannot be a citizen. Aeschines, of course, returns the compliment elsewhere (4.171-74), and claims that Demosthenes' mother was a foreigner and a prostitute. Such claims were likely to have little plausibility in the case of well known public figures. But how would citizenship or its absence be proved in the case of women like Neaera or her daughter Phano?

Citizen status on both sides is, of course, the prerequisite to a legal marriage for Athenians. This is another legal setting in which it is crucial that the citizen status of the mother, as born of two Athenian citizens, can be established. This citizenship could be based upon birth or upon naturalization. In *Against Neaera* ([Dem.] 59), Pasio and his descendants receive citizen status by a decree of the Assembly. Pasio's son, Apollodorus, may then marry a woman of citizen status (the sister of Theomnestus), which he does. Apollodorus' daughter, in turn, has the requisite citizen status to marry her uncle, Theomnestus. The contrast between these lawful marriages between citizens as opposed to Neaera's machinations to circumvent these laws is one of the central themes of the oration.

Theomnestus and Apollodorus accuse Neaera of being an alien, living with an Athenian citizen as his wife. They rhetorically extend their attack to Stephanus,

charging him also with violations of the laws of citizenship: He cohabits (*sunoikein*) with a foreign woman in violation of the law (*para ton nomon*), he introduces children not his own into his deme and phratry, he gives the daughters of a courtesan in marriage as if they were his own (i.e. of citizen birth), and, thus, he nullifies the right of the Athenian demos to grant citizenship (13).

This is a catalogue of the dangers of laxity about the citizen status of women. A man, and we hear of a number of such cases, who chooses to live with a foreign concubine may naturally at some point incline to regard this relationship as a “marriage” and desire to legitimize it. How might one do this? Ultimately, as we have seen, in Athens legitimacy depends upon what one’s friends, relations, and demesmen are willing to testify to when citizenship is challenged. This is demonstrated well enough by the plight of Ebulides. The most obvious way would be to introduce the children of this union into his deme. In a small deme where most members know quite a lot about one another, one would have to win their assent for making one’s children Athenian citizens. Some demes were alleged to be notorious for their laxity in such matters (cf. Dem. 57.57-61).

The next major hurdle in the life course would be marriage. Stephanus, in order to give the daughters of a hetaera as his own, would have to rely upon having established a citizen identity for her which could withstand the scrutiny which families typically paid to potential marriage partners. If individuals like Stephanus succeed they have effectively “naturalized” such foreign women and their daughters, for the successful marriage of the daughter to an Athenian citizen “proves,” as it were, the citizen status of the mother. The principle at stake, as Apollodorus makes clear, is not that foreigners should never become citizens, but rather that the demos alone should decide to whom to grant it and should reap the financial or political benefits of doing so.

It would only be natural that there might be considerable sympathy among some friends and kin in circumstances where the non-citizen wife had won their acceptance and faced the hardship which strict application of the citizenship laws would entail. Perhaps this might have particularly been the case, given Athenian views on paternity, if it was a question of an Athenian man “marrying” a non-Athenian woman as opposed to a foreign man taking an Athenian wife.<sup>3</sup>

In cases where an inheritance suddenly became at stake or where revenge was sought (as against Stephanus), the vulnerability involved in such cosy but illegal relationships might be exploited. The purges of the citizen rosters, on the other hand, would reflect generalized social and political concerns about such phenomena. At the heart of any such inquiry, whether in individual litigation as in *Against Neaera*,

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<sup>3</sup> In the latter part of the speech Apollodorus argues that such marriages between Athenian men and foreign women were a larger problem (89, 93), as well they must have been, given the intermingling of metics and Athenians and the natural pressures to “convert” metic or alien concubines into Athenian wives.

or as part of a wider scrutiny, the ability to prove a woman's citizenship was essential.

The case against Neaera, and secondarily Stephanus, requires that two allegations be proved: 1. Neaera is an alien (*xene*). 2. She illegally cohabits (*sunoiikei*) with Stephanus (14, 16 *para tous nomous*). In Apollodorus' paraphrase of the law he says that it forbids a foreign woman (*xene*) to cohabit (*sunoikein*) with a citizen (*astos*). How does he "prove" that Neaera is an alien? He alleges her servile origins and says that he will prove that she prostituted herself with anyone who would pay. Note, however, that he gives no genealogy for her. Genealogy is how *citizens* prove their status, but Neaera's origins, he implies, are unknown. She was merely one of seven children purchased by a procuress. Slaves have no family, no parents, no origin (18-20).

Apollodorus attempts to prove that Neaera prostituted herself by recounting her previous visits to Athens in the company of men and her procuress/owner.<sup>4</sup> Because she ate and drank with the men she must be a hetaera and, hence, not a citizen. This is an argument like that used against Euxitheus' mother: because she engaged in certain economic activities she must not be a citizen. Hence, social status might be the basis of inferences about legal/political status. Does, however, being a courtesan necessarily mean that a woman is not Athenian? Apollodorus clearly believes it creates such a presumption, though the presumption may have only been based upon an idealized view of the city. This does not mean, however, that such an idealized view might not be the basis of judgment in such cases. At least Apollodorus encourages it to be.

Some Athenian women were doubtless also courtesans, but was Neaera one of them? Unfortunately we only know the life-story that Apollodorus constructs about her. After recounting her colorful and sordid career he explains how Neaera (having earlier purchased her freedom) obtained Stephanus as her *prostates* and came to Athens with him and her children (37-38). Here her career continues, but with a difference: Allegedly she can now charge higher prices because she gives herself out as a respectable married woman, that is, a female citizen (41). This seems to indicate that citizen prostitutes existed and could command high fees because of their status. Apollodorus' use of this activity also shows how engaging in such activities could itself undermine one's claim to citizenship in a situation where that was contested. The basis of the case against Neaera thus rests upon an account of her activities. There is no direct evidence about her birth. The depositions apparently only supported Apollodorus' claims about the various men she had linked herself with during her career. An important element of this story concerns litigation involving her status as slave or free, which through arbitration established the latter.

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<sup>4</sup> Both of the visits were in connection with religious festivals. Lysias initiated his slave mistress in the Mysteries (21-23), and a Thessalian brought Neaera to Athens for the Great Panathenaea (24-25).

Apollodorus claims, however, that the arbitration also provided that she share herself between the two claimants. Hence, he claims, though she is free she could not be a citizen. The same kind of social prejudice that equated wetnursing with servility and threatened to make the object of scrutiny “not the kind of person we like to think of as female citizen” and hence no citizen at all, is also in operation here.

Apollodorus also argues for Neaera’s status by making a case against her alleged daughter, Phano, claiming that Stephanus and Neaera plotted to have her illegally marry Athenian men. He of course must make this argument because he presumably anticipates that his opponents will use the marriages in their own case: Phano married two Athenian men including one of very high status, hence she and her mother must be Athenian citizens. Their argument will be supported by Phano’s religious activities. They will also argue that she was married with a substantial dowry, though Apollodorus alleges that it was funded by the contribution of Epanetus, one of her former lovers/clients.

This is one of the strangest parts of Apollodorus’ argument: He tells an elaborate story of how Epanetus was trapped by Stephanus and Neaera on a trumped up adultery charge, using Phano as the bait. They extort 30 minae from him. He sues them on the grounds that it was not adultery because the woman was a prostitute and because Phano was not Stephanus’ daughter but Neaera’s, who knew her daughter was having intercourse with him and received money for it. They submit the matter for arbitration and Stephanus withdraws his baseless accusations, but requests a dowry for Phano. Supposedly this man, who was framed by Phano, detained as an adulterer and subjected to extortion, suddenly feels compassion for her and agrees to contribute 1000 drachmae to her dowry.

Of course it is also not clear how the dowry is compatible with her supposedly notorious sexual activities. The presupposition is that a dowry will make her marriageable – which it does, but only if she is believed to be of citizen birth. Given the ease with which her first husband finds out about her “true” past, the lawsuits which resulted (alleging that she was an alien whom Stephanus had married off as his own daughter), the unsuccessful attempt to introduce her children into his phratry and gens, and the litigation, arbitration, and scandal over the treatment of Epanetus, it seems rather implausible that her second husband, Theogenes, a man of good birth, would have married her unless she was really of Athenian parentage, or unless it was not uncommon for Athenian men to marry resident aliens and, over time, whitewash their origins. After all, Apollodorus himself argues that Neaera is a woman “who is known by everybody beyond all question to have plied her trade throughout the whole world” (108). Yet he also maintains that neither of Phano’s husbands suspected anything about her past (81, 83).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Apollodorus also offers a story about how the Areopagus discovered the truth of her origins. Rather implausibly, he recounts that Theogenes persuades them to drop the matter completely by promising that he will divorce her (80-83).

Apollodorus recounts Phano's official duties as wife of the king archon: offering sacrifices for the city, entering into the most sacred precincts, administering the oath to priestesses of Dionysus, serving as the bride of Dionysus himself at the Anthesteria, and so on (73). Apollodorus, naturally, aims to anger the judges with the thought that this foreign whore performed such sacred functions. His opponents on the other hand will argue precisely the opposite: Is it plausible that a woman like Naeaera and Phano could have led such a notorious life openly plying her trade as a hetaera, and no one of the Athenians would have objected when they saw her performing these rites? No one would have accused her or her husband at their respective audits at the completion of their terms of office? In other words, her status as the wife of the king archon and the successful completion of her duties as priestess will be offered as the proof of her citizen status in the same way that men argue that lack of objection at their scrutiny and audit shows that allegations about their status are baseless. The defendants also will presumably, as is usual in cases where birth is at question, offer an alternative genealogy – perhaps that she was Stephanus' daughter by a legitimate marriage with another woman (120), perhaps that Naeaera was really an Athenian (118), we cannot know, though Apollodorus rhetorically imagines that these will be the arguments. The second prong of their argument, as it is with men as well, will concern their service to the city and activities in the public sphere. For women this means public religious life – the sphere where they could assert and perform their status as citizens of Athens, entitled to hold religious offices and play a central role in this vital part of the city's affairs. Alien women could attend many of the festivals and sacrifices (85-86), but only women of citizen status could hold office as priestesses and organize and officiate in the civic cults.

In essence, Apollodorus uses an argument of the form Aeschines employs against Timarchus: What do you imagine a man or woman does who subjects him or herself to other men? “Does she not serve all the lusts of those who deal with her? Will you then declare by your vote that such a woman ... who is known by everybody to have plied her trade everywhere in the world, is an Athenian citizen?” (108). That is, because of the lack of formal proof of citizenship the argument boils down to a catalogue of the base activities that this person has engaged in, followed by the question “Do you want such a person to be an Athenian citizen?”

This is essentially what Apollodorus' argument in the last part of the oration amounts to. He says that only through keeping a clear line between alien and Athenian can the status of citizen women be preserved (112-13). Otherwise, he says, a hetaera will be able to become a citizen and the daughters of the poor will see no reason not to follow such pursuits. He appeals to the court to consider the role of women who are citizens. If they let Stephanus and Naeaera get away with what they have done, this will allow aliens to attain that unique status which only citizen women enjoy. He characterizes this citizen status as “to have a share (*metechein*) in the sacred rites and festivals and honors (*kai teletôn kai hierôn kai timôn*) of the

polis” (113, and cf. 114). *Metechain*, of course, is the verb that is typically used to express the political rights and status of a citizen. In contexts like Aristotle’s *Politics* it is usually applied to men because the discussion turns on the organization of the political realm, from which women were excluded. In *Against Eubulides*, Euxitheus states his claim to citizenship by saying: “I think it right to have a share (*metechain*) in the polis” (51).

In the broader sense, as we see here, women were not treated little better than slaves, prostitutes, or foreigners. They too were citizens and as such could play their role in the public life of the city, in the realm of civic religion. As such they too had their rightful share in the polis – not in political decision making, but in the rites, ceremonies, festivals, sacrifices, and honors associated with performing them. It is this right, Apollodorus argues, which Neaera was violating. How, he asks the judges, will you explain it to your wives and daughters that you acquitted this woman who has usurped what is rightfully theirs alone? (110-15).

### III. Citizenship and Civic Religion

It is worth emphasizing the obvious: In classical Athens, as in the ancient world in general, religion was an integral and central part of public life and civic existence. Of course it had its private dimension within the *oikos*, but the modern post-Enlightenment attempt to mark off religion as located within the private rather than the public sphere is fully foreign to the ancient polis. This, as I said, is to emphasize the obvious. But some of what is implied by these obvious facts may well be worth exploring further, particularly as it regards the meaning of women’s citizenship as opposed to its mere formal legal status. The role of women in religion is typically acknowledged as an exception: Women are excluded from the public sphere, excluded from public office, politics, and the courts, and confined to domestic space where their status is little better than their domestic slaves’. However, it is added often almost as an afterthought, they do leave the house to participate in religious festivals. What I would suggest is that we stop thinking of religion as an exception, as a marginal activity, as an unusual deviation from the tedium of women’s lives, and place it in the center of our field of view where it belongs. Religion was perhaps not central to men’s civic existence, but it was to women’s, and it was also one of the central pillars of the public life and identity of the Athenian polis. This is clear enough from the monumental architecture of Athens, and particularly from the Akropolis, and above all from the Parthenon, whose famous frieze shows plainly how closely religious, political, and public identity were connected. This central position of the Akropolis, and of women’s connection to it, is exploited, for example, in Aristophanes’ *Lysistrata* when the women of Athens take it over as part of their plan to bring the Peloponnesian War to an end.

*Lysistrata* is portrayed as an unusual Athenian woman. Like so many other female characters from Athenian drama, she is eloquent, intelligent, daring, and confident, leading the Athenian and Spartan women effectively in both word and



deed. It is also widely accepted that she is based, obviously with literary license, on a contemporary woman, Lysimache. In 411, when *Lysistrata* was produced, Lysimache was the priestess of Athena Polias. The holder of this position served for the duration of her life and came from an aristocratic family. Because of the importance of the cult of Athena Polias and of her temple, the Parthenon, this office was one of the most important, if not the most important religious position in Athens. The priestess administered the cult and its other female priestesses, as well as the Parthenon and its treasure. She was required by law to stamp the temple register with her seal. Her duties also included visiting every newly married Athenian woman.

Like other Athenian priests and priestesses in civic cults, Lysimache was a public official. As such, she was required to submit her activities to the annual audit required of public officeholders. (Aeschines 3.18: “The law directs that priests and priestesses be subject to audit, all collectively, and each severally and individually.”) Lysimache exercised her office for 64 years. She was a well known figure in Athens and was honored by the Athenians with a statue on the Akropolis, from which the inscription has been preserved. It is perhaps no coincidence that she is the first priestess of Athena Polias whose name we know. Aristophanes in *Lysistrata* refers to her through a wordplay on her name. Whether she was also one of the critics of the Peloponnesian War we have no way of knowing, but she was clearly a prominent public figure.

Was Lysimache an exception? In some ways yes, but in others not at all. We know little about the lives of the men and women who were priests and priestesses during this period, but Lysimache was one of many women who held such public religious offices. A 5<sup>th</sup> century decree proclaims the creation of the office of priestess of Athena Nike (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 35, 36*). Expressing the democratic principles that reshaped 5<sup>th</sup> century Athens, the priestess was chosen by lot from the body of Athenian women. This also shows the importance of citizen status for women as opposed to the kind of family identity on which Lysimache’s office was based. An inscription from the 4<sup>th</sup> century provides that the priestess of Athena Nike shall perform a sacrifice for the wellbeing of all Athenians.

The Mysteries represent one of the most important and most famous cults celebrated in Athens. One of the two most important officials of the cult was the priestess of Demeter, the high-priestess of the Mysteries. According to an inscription of the mid- fifth century (*IG I<sup>3</sup> 6*), she was to receive a small amount of money from every initiate. Testifying to the importance of her office, the law also provided that she should administer an annual budget of 1600 drachmas, a not inconsiderable sum. The importance of her role also appears from two cases mentioned in *Against Neaera*, which involved delineating the authority of the priestess of Demeter in relation to the other most important official of the Mysteries, the hierophant (116). Apparently the hierophant was convicted of impiety because he performed a sacrifice at the Haloa which was the right of the priestess of Demeter.

Here we have three examples of Athenian women exercising important and highly visible public offices in the religious sphere. They were all responsible for administering and managing funds of their respective cults. Like all Athenian officials they were subject to audit and could be called to account for the way they conducted their office. They were well known figures in civic life and were honored by inscriptions and monuments. They were not, of course, the only Athenian priestesses. There were such offices of priestess in at least forty of the main Athenian cults. In many of these cults, as in the case of the Mysteries or Athena Polias, there were also subordinate priestesses and women who performed other activities. These are of course the civic cults that involve the whole polis. Every deme had its own local cults with their own local festivals. We have the sacrificial calendars from six of these cults, and they show that women also held office as priestesses at the deme level. There were also other priestesses, like the mother of Aeschines, who served in unofficial cults like that of the Adonia, where the women of Athens celebrated ecstatically on the roofs of their houses (Dem. 19.281).

As the example of the priestess of Demeter shows, priestesses' activities could involve them in serious litigation. Like other officials, their duties might subject them to the dangers that a public role in an agonistic political culture involved. Dinarchus, for example, refers to a prosecution of the priestess of Artemis Brauronia (2.11-13). The plaintiff was condemned to a fine of the huge sum of five talents because his accusations were baseless. That such office brought a public reputation with it is also indicated by a reference in *Against Conon* (Dem. 54). Whereas women are often referred to merely in relation to a man and his role, e.g., the wife of x, in this case the opposite is true. As a way of referring to a case that had been brought before the Areopagus, Demosthenes refers to the defendant as "the father of the priestess at Brauron" (54.25).

The scope and degree of activity that participation in religious life involved for women may be seen by considering the Athenian religious calendar. Although we do not have a complete calendar of the Athenian festivals, a recent estimate is that there were at least 120 festival days per year, and perhaps as many as 144. (This figure does not count unofficial festivals.) Men and women participated together in most of the festivals. Of particular significance is that of the forty major festivals there were apparently five from which men were excluded, only one or two in which women could not participate. It is worth considering the implications of these five festivals for women only. This means that women were solely responsible for the organization, administration, and performance of these complex events. This would have involved months of planning and organization to make preparations that could accommodate the participation of thousands of women and ensure the proper performance of sacrifices and rites.

The best and best known example of these festivals is the Thesmophoria. This women's festival was organized under the auspices of the priestess of Demeter and two other female officials, the *archousai*. They appointed additional women for the

festival's ritual activities. The festival, which began with a procession of women through the city, lasted three days and nights. During this time the women of Athens lived in a tent-city on the hill of the Pnyx. It is not coincidental that this is the site of the Assembly, which, together with the courts, typically suspended its activities for the duration of the festival. The organization of such a three day festival included the feeding and housing of thousands of participants, preparation and provision for the sacrifices and other rites, and the preparation of the dancing and singing which accompanied the celebration. The administration of such a festival and its substantial expenses was a serious and time consuming activity which would have involved the ongoing and coordinated activity of many networks of women under the supervision of the three responsible officials.

My point here is that such activity should not be conceptualized as an exception under the rubric "women were excluded from the public sphere and confined in their homes, except that they could leave to attend religious festivals." Women did not "leave their houses" to occasionally attend a festival. Remember again the forty main festivals, the number of festival days, the time involved in organization and preparation, and the words "occasionally" or "exceptionally" seem rather inappropriate. Women organized or, in the case of the many mixed sex festivals, co-organized, administered, and *made* these festivals through *their* planning and participation. They were not relegated to be mere passive onlookers and this was not an occasional outing, but, as the calendar makes plain, an ongoing, central, and persistent feature of public life and civic culture at Athens and one in which they were fully involved. It was also an important structuring element of the life course of girls, young women, and adults.<sup>6</sup>

As I noted above, that civic religion life cannot be separated out from public life and was one of the constitutive pillars of Athenian political identity is plain enough from the importance of festivals like the Panathenaia. Women like Lysimache and the priestess of Demeter were leading figures in this sphere, but they were only the most prominent of the many women whose citizen status entitled them to participate and administer such activities. Anyone who thinks that such activity does not fundamentally and irrevocably demarcate citizen women from the slaves, foreigners, and children with whom they are so often grouped is simply not taking Athenian civic religion seriously enough as a central sphere in public life. Athenian women were active and important participants in civic life. That they were strictly excluded from the political and many (though not all) of the economic dimensions of public life is a tragedy not just of Athens but of every pre-modern society until the 20<sup>th</sup> century. To understand the importance of the citizen status of women is to make the problem of understanding the structural misogyny of Athenian society more complicated. But unless we place the woman citizen and her role in civic religion in

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<sup>6</sup> See *Lysistrata* 640-47.

the center of Athenian public life where it belongs we cannot properly conceptualize such problems.

Of course one may try to marginalize activities like the Thesmophoria as another exception. Walter Burkert, for example, says that the Thesmophoria represents the “one opportunity for women to leave family and home, not only all day, but all night.”<sup>7</sup> In other passages, however, Burkert himself recounts other festivals involving women’s nocturnal celebrations. For example, he describes the Haloa as follows: “Dann treffen sich die Frauen in Eleusis fuer ein geheimes und wahrscheinlich die ganze Nacht andauerndes Fest. Sie bringen Phalloi mit und unterhalten sich auf obszoene Weise.” Obscene interchange was not, by the way, limited to female only festivals, but was practiced between the sexes at the Anthesteria, Lenaia, Dionysia, and the Eleusinian procession. The impulse to overlook the obvious, which is presumably responsible for Burkert’s inconsistency, arises from two presuppositions: that the public sphere was essentially the agora, the assembly, and the courts, and that women were not entitled to participate in the public sphere because they were regarded as little better than slaves and locked away in their homes. Politics and its institutions are at the heart of the public sphere and women were disenfranchised from participation. This is obvious. That politics did not exhaust the public sphere, however, is also clear, as is the fact that women’s citizen status entitled them to participate fully, as leaders and as followers, in the sphere of civic life thought appropriate to them: religion. Taken collectively, this they did, not on exceptional occasions, but in principle on one day out of three, leaving aside the time they spent planning, organizing, and rehearsing.

Athenian festivals took an extraordinary variety of forms, from orgiastic celebrations where men and women danced and sang all night to the eight-day long Eleusinian Mysteries, which drew men and women from the whole Greek world, to the dramatic festivals where Athenian drama was performed before audiences of men and women. The ceremonial procession was a central part of many festivals, and such processions, as in the Panathenaia, typically included (or were led by) women and girls. Their participation in such rituals symbolically marked the participation of women in the public life of the polis, and their essential role in this sphere of civic activity. Participation in a procession was, both for male and female participants, a moment of public honor and recognition.<sup>8</sup> For women in particular it was a moment of civic visibility and an important affirmation of civic identity. Such festivals must have represented for women a combination of celebration, religious sentiment, publicity, and the possibility for honorific display of oneself and one’s family. This is most obviously the case for the girls and women of various age groups (according to the particular festival) chosen to lead or play an important role

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<sup>7</sup> W. Burkert, *Greek Religion* (Cambridge, Mass., 1985) 242.

<sup>8</sup> See J. Neils, *Goddess and Polis. The Panathenaic Procession in Ancient Athens* (Princeton 1996).

in a procession (e.g., the *kanephoroi*), as well as for the priestesses, whose role has already been discussed.

I would like to close by referring to a passage in *Against Meidias* (Dem. 21) where a number of these themes find expression. Demosthenes criticizes Meidias because he drives his wife to the Mysteries in a chariot (158). Demosthenes criticizes this behavior because of the ostentatious display of wealth designed to affirm his status. Such display on the occasion of the Mysteries was no exception. Measures were taken to regulate it, including narrowing a bridge on the way to Eleusis so as to prevent chariots from driving over it. This indicates the way in which men and women could use religious festivals to advance their claims to honor and pre-eminence. That display is the point, and that in this display his wife is a co-agent and not merely an object (at least in Demosthenes' eyes), are indicated by the disparaging comment that apart from the Mysteries Meidias also drives her around wherever else she wishes to go (158).

Such behavior must be seen in regard to two very different strategies. On the one hand, men and women displayed their social and economic status (including their differentiation from slaves) by not engaging in economic activity for monetary gain. Women with certain claims to status do not leave the house to work. On the other hand, women must, like men, albeit in a very different fashion, express their social pretensions in public behavior as well. Otherwise how could they distinguish themselves in the eyes of other women? Legitimate visibility is obviously necessary to do so. Being driven around in a chariot in one's finery is one way to do so. Showing oneself in public, accompanied by slave attendants, and having them protect one with a parasol to emphasize the whiteness of one's skin, is another found in our sources. Occupying high religious offices and playing a prominent role (oneself or through one's daughters) in religious rites and processions is another, and one which was possible on an ongoing and regular basis for women whom economic need did not prevent from participating.

In most pre-modern societies legislation against luxury is centrally directed against women, for they are the ones who typically display a family's wealth. Every procession, every festival was an opportunity for fathers and sons, mothers and daughters to represent themselves in a public sphere of activity that was constructed around spectatorship and mutual observation. To understand this public religious sphere of display, representation, observation, celebration, and the social and political dynamic through which it contributed to the construction of Athenian civic identity, we must understand the way in which it was an important part shaped by the participation of the female citizens of Athens.

